

To View a Plastic Flower Artists Talk Transcription

Saturday, April 25, 2020

--the artists for making this happen, for being great sports, and again pivoting, because the show, for the majority of the show's duration, has been closed, unfortunately. So this is one way we could connect and discuss the amazing work virtually that has been produced for the show. It's a depressing time for many of us, but especially a depressing time for all of us who have worked on this show.

I do want to thank the staff at the Municipal Art Gallery, including Jamie who put this together, DCA in general [as the] the Department of Cultural Affairs, as we struggle through these COVID times. There is the specter of cuts for much of the arts. Not the specter. It's happening right now. So I do want to thank those of you who are working in the arts and those who work for arts institutions, including all the artists. And last thing-- I want to thank the foundation board for supporting what we do here, including some of our programming.

So the show, *To View A Plastic Flower*. I have-- by the way, I'm Steve Wong. I'm one of the curators at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. And I had been working on this show with the artists for many, many months, going back to 2019.

And what I was thinking, and what the artists are exploring, are the optics of conflict and interconnectivity and perspectivism through media. And so the artists that are present today, that many of you who know, are Abigail Collins. And she presented four channels of her *Out of Play* series. I do hope to see it installed in the future with more videos.

We have Samira Yamin, her series in the gallery. And she'll be talking about *Refractions*, *Passing Obliquely from One Medium to the Other*, but mainly discussing her series *Refractions*. And then Tran Trang, with her video installation *Movements, Battles and Solidarity*.

I think it's important to discuss these things. And one reason that I brought these artists together was to really question how we see and what we see, and how we acquire knowledge and how that knowledge is transmitted. And I think what's really important, especially now, during our COVID crisis-- but even before is looking at the interconnectivity of all of these things, of how we are interconnected, how the media oftentimes frames the way we look at these things. But also weaves that thread that connects all of us to certain world events.

And the title of the show, which I've mentioned before, which I just really want to reference, was inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh, and really thinking about how nothing can exist in isolation and how everything has to be inter-being with everything else. And I thought this was really relevant at the beginning of 2020, when the United States had launched missiles into Iraq, assassinating an Iranian military official, and how everything that happens that seems a world away really affects everyone here in the United States, and how we question, then, how are we implicated in these decisions that our military are making and doing all around the world. But I think what is important to discuss now, in the context of COVID is that interconnectivity. How someone in another state could be protesting in public without any social distancing, how that could impact all of our lives today.

So that's just the general framing, and a newer framing, I think, that is important and relevant to some of this discussion today. So I don't want to take too much time. You are here to hear from our artists.

And why don't I pass the baton-- and I think each of the artists will take, I think, seven to 10 minutes that discuss their works in their show. But we'll start off with Trang. So Trang, are you ready?

I'm here. Yeah, I'm ready. Thank you, Steve.

And thanks to all my staff and everyone at the gallery. And thank you all for joining us. So let me just share screen here. Hopefully, you can see that just fine.

So I hope you'll be able to check out the videos from the piece. It's a simulated three-screen video shared on the LA Municipal Art Galleries website, if you haven't already. It, obviously, would be better in person. But at least you'll have a simulated view of the little bit less than seven-minute project.

So today, I'm going to talk about the piece in the show. And I consider it to be having two conversations with history-- one sociopolitical and the other filmic. And it all started with this book that I read in 2016. And it's a book about a fashion show that paired five American designers with five French ones in order to raise money for the restoration of the palace at Versailles. And it took place November 28th in 1973.

So this was a very revolutionary moment in American fashion, because before that, American designers were typically copying French styles. And after this, they really put themselves on the map. And this came about through ready-to-wear, which interestingly enough, as an economic model, really saved haute couture. Because before then, it was on its deathbed, if you will.

So with ready-to-wear and race-conscious models of diverse race and ethnicity, this was the civil rights movement moment in America as well. So that was reflected in the show. And also disco providing sort of the energy, the vibe for the show itself. And by all accounts, the American won this battle of Versailles against the French.

So the first screen dealt with-- so there are three screens in the project. The first dealt with this fashion show. And each of the screens have handmade elements on them as well.

So this first one has hand-embroidered the full life size figure-- she is 5 feet 10 of Billie Blair, and by all accounts was the star of this show. So the first screen has this life-sized embroidery on it. And she takes on this character that would conjure up subsequent models that would come to life on the runway. And it took three women a duration of six weeks of work in Vietnam to hand-embroider this work.

So the images that you see here, or the first one, they're working on a previous project by the Propeller Group. The second image is another past work of theirs. And just to show you the flying details of the threading that they could do, so it really looks more like a painting than an embroidery. And then the last two images are [sort of a] image for the Billie Blair embroidery for the work.

And then going from that to the height of being clothed to the depth and beyond being naked, and thinking about the iconic image that you see here of the, quote unquote, "napalm girl." So this was an event that was captured by photojournalist Nick Ut. And it was the American dropping of a napalm bomb on the small village in Vietnam on June 8, 1972. And thinking about a year apart, halfway around the world, the difference, but also potentially the similarity, in the movements of these bodies-- of the nine-year-old girl, as well as the models on the catwalk.

And [then] this particular book was influential in my thinking about war capitalism. And the book addresses that term in talking specifically about how Britain used war as a mechanism in order to corner the global cotton trade in the 19th century. And not directly, but I'm also curious and wondering and asking whether or not the Vietnam War could be a modern instance of war capitalism that had some residual or side effects benefiting fast fashion. And so the handmade element on this particular screen is that I drew an outline of the iconic image, and then used the hot knife to cut through the fabric to reflect the singed skins of the children.

And then I also wanted to counterbalance that with experiences of other females during the war. And so you'll have, in the audio, voices from Hanoi Hannah, the CBC Band which was known as the Vietnamese Beatles, who did a lot of Western rock covers, but also their

own original scores and songs as well. And then also footage and songs from female Viet Cong soldiers during the war.

And then the third screen, I was thinking, then, well, who enabled American fashion? So looking at garment workers who were, and are, predominantly women. And in particular, during the years of 1972 and 1974, before that were three Wildcat garment worker strikes that I focused on-- one in El Paso, Texas against the Farah pants manufacturing company by mostly Chicanas. And then the African-American workers-- again, predominately women in Andrews, South Carolina, at the Oneita Knitting Mills, and then lastly, the Chinese-American workers in San Francisco against the Jun Sai company, which was a subsidiary of Esprit De Corps factory. And so again, trying to see the similarities in the movements of the striking workers, the girl running down the street, as well as the models on the catwalk/runway.

Interspersed throughout these three screens, I have images of Edward Maybridge female models. And Maybridge was famous for his motion studies. And I'm also wanting to have a conversation with that motion study. So that's my second conversation with filmic history about what are the similarities and differences in their physical movements, but also political, cultural, and economic movements as well.

So that is my project. And I'm going to stop sharing now so that we can move on to Abigail. Sorry, or is it Samira? Sorry--

[We're going to] go to Samira, and then-- yeah.

I think I'm going next. So if you just give me a moment, I will--

[SIDE CONVERSATION]

Thank you. Thanks, all, for organizing this. And Steve especially for organizing the show and curating it, and giving us the opportunity to see all these works alongside one another, because I think there is a lot of overlaps. And I think all of the projects expand on one another. And so it gives us new things to see, and it's given me new things to see in my own work. And so I really appreciate that.

And so the installation that I'll be talking about, which was my work, is on the left here from Tran's work. But just briefly, I wanted to point to my past work of about 10 years, which was hand-cut pages from Time Magazine. And these are pages that are taken directly from the magazine. So the scale is this 8 by 10 of the magazine. And I hand-cut the patterns directly into the pages in a way to think about and reveal the structure and the structure of representation, and how the representation of the Middle East-- a nebulous Middle East, is

constructed as a place of perpetual war, and to see how those images and the texts combine and things like that.

But this project is the Refraction series. And what I was thinking about in this for this body of work was, after eight or nine years of working on the geometry series, and thinking about the construction of this narrative and the degree to which photography is a construction, and the ways that construction operates, I started to wonder, if we know this, then what do we do? If we take for granted the construction, then do we not look at photographs? Because the photographs still exist.

And I don't think not looking is the answer. So I started to think instead, how does one look? And so this body of work is a series that I draw from the pages from a collection that I gathered of all of the photographs of Syria in Time Magazine.

This is my binder of images. I've been collecting every single photograph of Syria in Time Magazine since 2011, March of 2011 being the beginning of what was then deemed the Arab uprisings, and then eventually civil war and proxy wars. So from those images, for this particular series, I pulled ones that-- somebody's audio was on and making noise. Sorry.

So I pulled the images that used light in an interesting way. So here being a very dark nighttime, and then with a flash or ambient light hitting the faces. And the way that I'm thinking about this project is that, if we are to look at these images, then, again, how would be the ethical way to do so. And I started to think that, then, the onus would have to be on the viewer, and that actually the intervention would not-- in this case, as in the previous works, where the intervention was directly into the pages, here I'm keeping the pages fully intact and using this space between the page and the viewer as the place for intervention.

And so here, the pages are actually mounted to the back of carved glass. And the carvings make it so that one would have to move their body and occupy the physical space, and construct one's own choreography of viewership that's different than the typical viewer experience when we're going forward and backward. Or in the case of the magazine, where we're turning the page.

And so in this case, I'm asking the viewer to do a dance. And that's not necessarily choreographed by me, but whatever is inherent to the practice of viewership of each individual. And so here, one could move back and forth to see an image.

And so I just wanted to speak briefly as well about the way that the carvings are-- where the lines are decided, because they're not arbitrary. So I'm drawing on a principle of organizing two-dimensional space that is used in architecture and in painting, actually. And

we don't study it very much anymore. But I think that it's informed the way we construct images. So I think it's useful, and it's almost become known without having a name.

And so this particular mode of construction is actually called dynamic symmetry. So if you think about typical symmetry as the horizontal and vertical lines, where the vertical line here is represented by where the magazine is folded and stapled, which I leave visible. But dynamic symmetry is one that's actually based on the diagonal. And by creating, we maintain our right angles that we would find in the vertical and horizontal lines typically. But in this case, it's tilted so that it's the diagonal and then the line that intersects-- I'm going to use my cursor here, at another angle as an opposite angle, and then going down to 90 degrees.

And so these lines, there's multiples. So every diagonal has two reciprocals is what they're called. And then there's two diagonals, and these have their own receptacles. And by choosing and making strategic decisions of which ones to pull, we can actually begin to see the way images are constructed. And there are levels of importance in our experience that the magazine is actually trying to construct.

And so here, we have-- again, I'm going to use my cursor, is where the lines intersect. Here, I'm pulling all of the four reciprocals and eliminating the diagonals. Where they all intersect is the central figure here, a girl who is named a young survivor. But her name is never actually given, whereas the name of the photographer is. And so I'm thinking about things like this, and how the magazine is constructing these narratives by actually formally constructing the space so that it's quickly recognizable.

So here, we have the primary subject, where everything is blurred. The lines are intersecting. These areas that are individual lines, I think of that as the context for the subject-- in this case, being the back of a van, when we begin to see certain details, like the windows and the backs of the seats, etc.

And then here, where we have these edges, I think of those as peripheral information that is used-- and typically, you'll find that they tend to be contentless swaths or mostly just completely black in a lot of instances. And this is, I imagine, intended literally to draw the viewer to the center here. And so what is happening, by overlaying the glass on top of it, is that it's actually reversing the way the magazine wants the images to be read, which is the places of rest and the simplest places to view are actually somewhat contentless. And the place where the subject is is the most distorted, and is asking the most of the viewer for access and connection. And the hope here is that that connection might actually be deepened, or actually even opened up, through this choreography that a viewer might have to construct on their own.

And then lastly, I just want to point to this particular diptych that I began after a while to be able to bring in-- instead of looking at single pages or two-page photographs, to actually expand it into the rest of the article as well. And to see if we could carry some of these thoughts that here, you have, again, a reciprocal and a diagonal. And simply between these two lines, one can see the entirety of the so-called content of the image falling between this and the line of this boat actually corresponding perfectly with the diagonal. And these are not my decisions, but overlaying dynamic symmetry onto this is revealing things that are happening, constructions that are being deployed, to choreograph, actually, the active viewership in the eye and the cognitive experience. So to carry some of those ideas into the following pages of the same article, and expand the philosophy and the instruction beyond just the two-page spread into the full-page image or the full article.

So in this case, the diagonal going across four pages actually bringing together two different photographs. And so we can begin to actually think about the way that the content is meeting the viewer. And we can bring together the construction this way of the magazine and this intervention in the active viewership.

And that actually, that collision might actually lend a new type of viewing experience, and therefore, a connection to the subject's connection to the information and connection to the larger story. And so I will end, there and pass the buck, then, to Abigail. And we'll come back and talk about all these, I believe.

Thank you. I'm going to also share the screen. Let's see. OK, how does that look?

So I'm going to take off a little bit from where Samira was speaking about this sense of the choreography of the viewer. I think that's something that all three of us have been thinking about in terms of these installation elements, and really a show that really, really asked for a live participation and for people to move through space. But that said, I'm really happy that you all joined on this strange two-dimensional platform to talk about this with us. And I also wanted to thank the incredible staff who hauled around these giant walls with me, and gave conceptual advice interchanged with extraordinary physical strength at all times. And also to thank Samira and Trang for being such great interlocutors, and Steve for being such a thoughtful curator throughout the entirety of this.

So I'm going to lead us through a little bit of what it might have been like in that physical choreography. So this entire project is called Out of Play. And it's something I've been working on for four years. And there are currently four videos. Each of them are about 10 to 15 minutes. There is going to eventually be seven.

And each of these videos focuses on someone who is at the intersection of the US military and the film and television industry. So someone who is caught at the intersection there,

and each video then tries to dismantle or poke holes in some of the ways that those two industries have some seamless connections. So trying to reveal some of those seams. In a related way to Samira revealing the seam of the pages, I really want to make space for a viewer to see how those relationships can be pulled apart, and we can have a more active viewership.

So the first thing that you would encounter in this installation is this. So we have these set walls. And each of these set walls have a video inside of them. So let's see. How do I do this?

So this first one, this one we have on the right here, if you enter this space from either side, you would encounter this first video. And so this video focuses on a role player-- an Iraqi-American role player who chooses to be anonymous. And we talk for a while about his experience being in this environment at Fort Irwin, which is a US military base in California near Barstow. And he played the role of the police chief. So he was the police chief for eight years.

And we talk about the relationship between role-playing and acting. And we talk about the relationship between his memories of his childhood and war in childhood, and reenacting them in a way as a role player for this US military base, preparing soldiers to go to war in Iraq at the time. So this sense of a childhood reenactment, a childhood PTSD, is one part of the video in relationship to this role-playing.

And then we also start to see ways in which these towns are constructed. So this is one of the walls. And I also visit the set fabrication shop that creates these structures, and also creates sets for film and television. So the video has both of these locations interspersed with interview with this role player.

And I also-- Trang mentioned this, but our videos are up on the municipal gallery website in full. So I really hope that people take a look at those in full. They'll be up through the end of May.

So here's another shot from this that fabrication workshop warehouse. So as you leave that space and come around the corner, you encounter this one, which has got these 12 foot gigantic walls. And in that space is the second video. They don't have an order necessarily, but there are four. And this is how you might guide yourself through space.

So this video focuses primarily on my father, who also begins a video by talking about his experience as a child in London in World War II, and talking a little bit about his experience of PTSD. And he then goes on to talk with me about being a method actor and my experience growing up with someone who had different accents at different times, and who I believed for a while to be actually in the military, because he played a lot of military

roles. And so he was in a TV show called JAG. That really features throughout this whole project as a touchpoint for me to think about ways that the media and military overlap, specifically in relation to my dad.

So he talks about his experience living in character, his experience on these TV shows. And then I asked him to take a court martial transcript that I've been given and-- [that's Petra] I don't know if you all can hear that. And perform it as if it's a script. So there's my mom in the corner.

[DOG BARKING]

OK, she'll just-- she's interrupting. So the performance of this court martial transcript as a script that he's performing then gets followed up in the next video, which is in this room. So in this room, I introduce two new people who are at the intersection of the US military and film and television. And one of them is a scriptwriter for JAG, who talks about what was allowed and not allowed to be written about in this TV show.

And one of those things is PTSD. It was the main thing that they were not allowed to write about. And there's this-- I don't want to say subtle. But in watching-- and I have watched now all of the entirety of JAG, you wouldn't necessarily notice that.

So there are these omissions, these gaps in information, that are very powerful. It's very powerful to not have people be able to think about PTSD when they're thinking about the military in this benign TV show. These gaps become very potent. And so that's one person that I speak to.

And the other person I speak to is the head of redactions for the US Army, who provides me with court martial transcripts that are then used for film and television. So in this one, we have maybe a little bit more of an experimental approach with each of these. I call them experimental documentary shorts that investigate the ways that these redacted parts of the US military's actions get filmed [in] by film and television, to form these seamless narratives. And again, I'm trying to pull them apart to give us some space to see those constructions.

And then in the last one-- so here's some of that redacted court martial transcript. And then I'm asking my dad to deal with the redactions. So in the other one, he had no redactions. And now I'm asking him, what do you do as an actor and how do you react to these gaps?

And the last one is this video that transitions from film and television more into news. And so I'm talking here with a former combat videographer named Oscar, who then became a

camera person for news. But as a combat videographer in Desert Storm, he didn't necessarily know what he was shooting for, but documenting a lot of Desert Storm and then handing off his tapes.

So I went through a process of finding these tapes and uncovering this long trail of research around the relationship between these combat videographers and the news. So in relationship to this idea of looking back at the longer history of how media has been militarized, the US military had a huge backlash after the US war in Vietnam around the freedom of journalists to really influence the US approval of wars. And so they started to train their own combat videographers and started to create this thing called, which you can see there, the US pool tape. So they would have combat videographers put their footage into this pool, along with journalists, and the US military would say what's approved and what's not approved to be used in the news.

And so we talk about these things. We're pulling them apart. And to be totally honest, this is maybe one where I'm like, there's more for me to work with here. There's more that unfolded.

So this leads me to the next three that I haven't finished yet. But this is going to be worked on a little bit more as well, because this research just keeps unfolding. And I'm cutting myself off at seven episodes, but it is a cutoff, because the many ways in which these two industries are connected is really like a network, rather than a linear direction.

This research really is like an overlapping network. And that is part of the reason that it was important to me to have these physical installations, so that you could go in and walk around and see them in any order, and make these connections yourself-- have some agency in terms of putting these parts together and seeing this network in an embodied way. And so this conversation, I think, is really especially exciting to me in that understanding of a network of ideas, to be in conversation with Trang and with Samira, about the ways that we're all doing this work of maybe making more space for a viewer to have some agency in relation to these images or video of war. And yeah, I'm really excited to have this dialogue with some Q&A, and with the other artists. I thank you.

Great. Thank you, Abigail, Samira, and Trang. So we're going to open it up to a Q&A section. So if anyone has any questions they would like to ask [the artists]. If you could just please use the chat section, and I'll read off the questions.

And if no one has any immediate questions, I do have a few questions for the artists. So maybe I'll start there, and then as people are entering in their questions-- again, please use the chat section to address those questions. And I will read them out as I see them. So my question for Trang, Abigail, and Samira, you all each talk to some degree about how each

of your works and installations in the show lean heavily on 3D presence. So I'm wondering if you can each speak to what it's been like as we shifted more to 2D or flat screens during this era of COVID-19 and social distancing.

[Trang do you want] to take this one?

Yes, sorry. I had to [press] unmute myself. So I think speaking about my work in particular, the advantage is, of course, it's more accessible to all of you, and the opportunity for people far away to be able to see the work, even though it's a simulated three-video scenario. I mean, I think what's lost is clearly you can't see the physical screens themselves and move through the space.

This installation has six channels of audio. So as your body moves across the three screens and across the space, the audio shifts with you, not in an interactive way. But you'll be able to hear something louder if you're in a particular spot in the installation, as opposed to another spot. So that's also lost.

And so the sound was designed by a talented [Maile Colbert] and expertly mixed by Aaron Drake. And that is just not available. I mean, you can hear all of the six channels smushed together in a two-channel situation on Vimeo. But that's also lost. At the same time, I'm happy that it's out to a wider world. So that's what's gain or loss for me.

I think I spoke a little bit about the relationship to having a physical, embodied sense of agency with these kinds of images. And so for me, that's a little bit lost. But again, I also totally agree with of this idea that so many more people get to see it in this format.

And that, for me, is really important as I'm thinking about this idea of-- I call each of these episodes, and thinking about the movement of this work in living rooms. I think a lot about how we consume media in our home spaces. And so this is really a heightening that, making that a constant. That's the only way we're consuming media right now. So for me, there is a push and pull where there is some interest for me in this becoming much more of a 2D experience.

But I also had a really very interesting discussion with a student at Cal Arts, who is creating a work that was about both the mundane experience of being in the home all the time and this screen as a portal to all of the violence outside, and thinking about the screen as its own thickness. So I've been trying to anchor myself in thinking that this isn't just this magical window into another world, because there's an intensity-- well that's a different topic. But just to think about the thickness of the screen, to think about this as also another physical medium, that we are encountering a physical surface that is, even if it's a quarter

inch thick, it's not nothing. And that's been helpful for me in thinking about this new way that we're interacting with these works.

Great. Thank you.

[I have] some of those same ideas. And there is a particular irony for me, where I'm trying to actually create a dynamic experience of a flattened image, where photography is itself an act of flattening and suspending a dynamic world into a frame, into a moment, that we choose to access, but that we can call up any time we want in some way, shape, or form. And I'm trying to intervene on that flatness and expand it back, and bring dynamism and criticality back into the experience of viewership, and into the frame itself, and to have that foreclosed on is definitely a challenge.

But that's why I relish these conversations. And I've always thought that conversation around the work is fundamental to the work itself-- the work and the practice of critical viewership. And the real work for me is realized and exists in the moment where another person is at the dentist's office and opens the Time Magazine, and the image or the magazine itself kind of pings for the reader and the viewer.

And then that's where the work lives, is in that kind of the actual dynamic experience, where the magazine or the image then would surprise the viewer. And they would have to reconcile it with this new knowledge. And it doesn't happen for everyone. I just put it into the world and trust that you know some will take it and work with it. So I'll just say that much. But I feel like there's some questions coming up, so maybe we'll [give that] some time.

Yeah, thank you. I'm not sure if Steve-- he might have stepped away. But there is a question for him, so we'll skip over that for right now. So I'll just read the questions as they came through. So skipping Steve's question, there's a question for you, Samira, about how you feel this pandemic situation has affected the aura of your work.

Yeah, hi, Ariana. Thank you for the question. Yeah, I think that's what I was speaking to at that moment.

One would sacrifice the aura-- the singular object that one would confront. But the interesting thing for me about the printed magazine and digital images as well-- but I'm interested in the materiality in this particular case, is a multiple itself. And so we're dealing with a single experience or event that's then photographed and made static, but then printed in tens or hundreds of thousands and distributed, and lands on the doorsteps of thousands of people every Friday and sits in newsstands.

And so already, the aura of the single thing is already complicated and made more complex by the nature of the magazine distribution, and then taking it and adding aura back in with the handmade object. And the idea here is always for me to put the lived experience of aura back into the image that we don't expect it from. And that's why all the work is handmade and the glass is cut. And that's really important, because that knowledge actually affects the reading.

And so I do try to depend on that. I have not figured out how to do it in representation, again. And I think it's a really interesting challenge to add another layer of flattening.

And I think that Abigail and Trang have a similar kind of spatial problem of taking flat images, making them dimensional, making them that one would actually have to move their body in relation to it, and kind of making those critical decisions based on their experience, and then to have that foreclosed on [again] or truncated in some way is an interesting challenge. Because it is fundamentally what we are dealing with, and the subject of the work in addition to the formal qualities is this flattening. And so the flattening of information, the flattening of access, the flattening of content, the flattening of emotional commitment and investment, the flattening of aura, the flattening of the light, these things are really fundamental to the material that we're culling from. And so to have this moment impose itself on our assumptions as practitioners and the things we've taken for granted as makers is really an interesting experience and it's a challenge.

And it is absolutely not resolved, and it has never been resolved for me and I highly doubt for any of us. And I think if one feels that it is resolved, you're probably not working hard enough. So I'll pass it to anyone else that wants to speak to that.

I don't have any specific thoughts on aura. Trang?

I keep forgetting I'm on mute. No, not particularly on aura. But I did think about how the content addressed this motion study. So it would have been really lovely to sort enact that in the physical space itself-- like, encouraging and guiding the viewers' bodies to move through space as to mimic the content that they're viewing as well. And I think for Abigail [and me] [I see] sort of the loss of the walls as a framing structure.

Of course, you can see the videos online. But there is something much more that's gained within the framed walls themselves that you understand and put your physical body in a particular space that is also addressed in the content. So I think form and content is, again, deftly at play here. But half of that is missing with an online video.

Yeah, I do I do agree with that. And there's a sense-- as Samira was talking about that, I was wondering if because we're engaging with time, with another element of time, that

you're not engaging with in the same way, Samira, that there is a sense that some of it I'm not sure. I have to think through this for longer. I won't be able to articulate it right now. But some of this relationship between cohabitating in a temporal existence with the videos gives some of that aura-- like, makes some of that or a possible.

But then as you're saying, Trang, these walls were really important to me, partially because they're huge. I wasn't working with these enormous walls for fun necessarily. The enormity of their presence was really important to me to deal with the enormity of a lived impact that these seemingly benign TV shows or films that are for entertainment really do have this enormous lived monolithic impact. And so something that's really lost is the scale.

But also, they came straight from the set fabrication. They're walls that were given back. They're walls that were going to be thrown away.

They're walls that were maybe used at Fort Irwin, maybe used in film and television. And the dirt was still on them. Whether they had been hit by something, all of those traces of having this other sense of temporality that's not in the [in the sense the videos'] temporality [but] a different line and having presence with those experiences that the walls have endured, that is definitely lost. On an optimistic note.

Great. Thank you. Also, there are a couple more questions for you.

I have a question. What is video burn?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

No, I heard that term used a long time ago in stuff. And the way that I interpret it is just basically how people re-interpret know different forms of mass media. You have to basically draw alternative kinds of meaning out of them and what have you.

So I think that one of the things that really intrigued me, besides the scale of each of your settings, was in the way that different forms of media-- whether or not it's the reclaimed television footage, moving footage, [bigger] industrial material, or even the way in which printed matter is reinterpreted by you, I think that it's an alternate way of looking at how we regard the way that we-- and I'm talking in terms of either people of color or other folks that are seen in different forms of media and stuff. I don't know if that's a particularly accurate or articulate way of looking at it. But I don't know. Maybe it's because it's, like, a '90s term or what have you, and it's fallen out of our intellectual lexicon, or what have you. But I think that was one aspect of each of your works I was really struck with while viewing each of them at the gallery.

Yeah, if I could just jump in and respond to that. I mean, I think maybe not the specific use of the term media burn, but definitely a critical view and usage of the media that we're reclaiming, if you will, or appropriating. And I think definitely in my project, I was with an eye to media sources that would have not been widely seen at, like whether it's archival footage.

And I think this also touched on something that the three of us have also discussed previously, in terms of gaps in information. And I think in particular for me, the footage of the striking workers in South Carolina-- could not find any moving image of that at all for the life of me. And so then, I had to resort to animating the still images that I was able to find.

So I think right in tandem with the critical perspective of looking at the media, there's also this desire to fill in gaps of information as well. And I know, Abigail, you've thought a lot about this. So do you want to jump in too?

Yeah, I think it's been really exciting for me to think about your relationship to dealing with gaps in information, which has felt very different from my way of dealing with it. And it's been really productive for me to think about that way that you've taken this playful agency in creating animation, or creating ways for us to look at information that just wasn't there. And I think that my relationship to gaps in information has always-- not always, but it's been a very long pull, like a real magnetism to dealing with how to present absences and how to make space for gaps in information without filling them in.

And so that has been a huge part of this project. How to look at all of these different redacted documents. All of the ways in which a lot of US military actions are not accessible to us. We don't know how they happened. And that information gets filled in so quickly.

And I want to pause in between those. Like, I want to say an example was Zero Dark 30 with the film that was about the killing of Osama bin Laden. All of that information about how Osama bin Laden was killed is totally classified. We have no idea. But a Hollywood film came in, and Kathryn Bigelow collaborated with the CIA to create this film.

A Hollywood film came in and gave us this narrative that I can't take out of my brain. I can't feel that I don't already have an image that was filled in, that gap was filled in so fast. So I want to pull those things apart a little and give myself some space to be with not knowing-- to be with the gap. To make space for the lack of information that I have.

And I think it's interesting to think about Samira's relationship in this work specifically to also slowing us down, and not letting these images supplant a cultural imagination, without asking us to pause, and ask what we don't know. What we don't know about how the image

was constructed. What we don't know about all of the other factors that went into creating this cultural imagination that we just mainline. It just happens so fast. So actually, it's been really great to think about that those gaps in information in new ways with each of your work.

[I feel] likewise. Yeah, I want to leave time for other questions, because I could definitely echo some of the thoughts. I don't know if, Jamie, you want to--

Yeah, I think that Steve addressed the question about which specific readings he was inspired by from the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, which he said were Being Peace, and also Peace Is Every Step. So I don't know if you three have any other readings that you were inspired by, or if those were more or less the same readings that you took into account for making or creating the work for this show.

I'll speak to this. I do think that the Thich Nhat Hanh text, actually, has made a very big and welcome impression on me. And I've even brought it into teaching as well, because I found it to be a relevant text to semiotics in general-- this idea of bringing the past into the present in many ways.

So to speak to the notion of inter-being just as a brief overview of how it works is, or what the philosophy is pointing to [is] the idea that the flower-- in this case, we're calling it the plastic flower. But Thich Nhat Hanh is talking about an actual natural flower, and the idea that to touch this flower would be to touch all of the things that go into making it-- the sun, the water, the earth, the entirety of the history of the universe that manifests itself into this one thing that springs from the earth. And without any one of these things, the flower would not exist. And so to touch the thing is to actually touch the universe, and to touch the entire history of the universe, in many ways.

And here, this idea that viewership and the plastic flower, then-- the thing that is made, that is constructed, as opposed to the thing that is springing forth from the earth. And in this case, I've been thinking about-- for me, the thing that really resonated was this notion that if we hold the notion of intervening in our hearts and our bodies and our minds in the world on a daily basis in our lived experiences, whether it be viewership or any other aspect of our lives, I think that the teaching compels us to also see not just being as interconnected, but action as well. And that interaction becomes paramount here, so that one could think that if you were to pluck one atom from the universe, that maybe the flower might not exist or would not exist. And to think that a small gesture, like that of intervening in the act of viewership-- for example, making the flat thing spatial, making the thing the fixed light dynamic, again, something like that on a very simple level, the making of it, the viewing of it, would itself be interconnected action onto the world. And then that it will then be contained in everything that comes after.

And so what we're compelled to do is to be very thoughtful and very critical about the way that we're engaging and acting in the world, beyond just the practice of making art or anything-- that actually, from love and kindness, to anger to war, to touching, to feeling, to looking, all of these parts of the lived experience would actually be because it's interconnected. We are actually imposing our actions onto the universe in many ways. And that should be done thoughtfully. And so I'm holding this teaching very, very close to my heart and in life and in the studio.

Yeah, thanks for that, Samira. And I think what Steven said at the intro, too, speaks to our time. It seems a commonplace realization through this pandemic that we're all interconnected.

And not just across humans, but as you were [saying] Samira about the animal kingdom and the plant life as well. And now the virus, and it seems to know us better than we know it or ourselves. Yeah, it's just really an amazing time, even in our isolation, even as we're atomized, to feel how much we're interdependent across space and time and being.

If I could bounce back off with that just for a minute, one of the things that was troubling to me for transitioning to teaching, for example, in this way made me have to think very deeply about this. And also just in general, moving through space, or not being able to actually move through space, because that was an ethical decision [and] you know that the choosing to not participate would actually be an ethical choice. And in this case, the thing that's troubling to me and is very dangerous is this notion that touch and being with one another would be seen as negative in some way, and actually part of the transmission, actually, of a virus, an insidious thing that could actually kill the body or be disruptive to it or dangerous in some way.

And I'm afraid for the notion of touch and connection to actually be infected, to use the moment's own language, via transmission. And it's really important to me to make sure that being and touching and acting and connecting maintains its actual power and its presence through the teaching of Thich Nhat Hanh, who reminds us that this is not a point of transmission of a viral danger. But actually, no matter what it is, it's a connection to the universe and to the history of the universe, and the future as well.

Before I move on, can I just jump back to the gaps in information discussion that Abigail was having? And I think just to throw out credit to artists like Walid Raad and the Atlas Group for having done similar works in speculative non-fiction, if you will. So I just want to make sure that that got in there.

Yeah, and I was thinking of a relationship between the ideas of inter-being and gaps in information. I'm not sure I'm going to be able to articulate this at the moment. But we

talked a little bit, Samira and Trang and I, about this sense of an intimacy with people we've never met in a new way. That our actions of choosing not to go outside benefit someone.

We had this idea of a grandpa in San Diego that we haven't met. There's a sense of inter-being with people that we don't know. And there's a sense that I don't know that person, but there's still a real presence to them. And I do think that inter-being make space for people that we really don't know, things that we don't fully understand to have as much gravity as the things that we do fully understand. And our interconnection with strangers is just as important or just as weighty as our interconnection with the closest people in our lives.

And one relation that I wanted to make, which is this is the part [where I don't have] all the dots connected is in relation to what you just said, Trang, about talking about Walid Raad, or the ways we're interfacing right now-- even though I absolutely agree, Samira, it's terrifying to think of touch having this notion of infection, rather than interconnection. There is also a lot of value in the ways that we're not touching right now, and that we are exchanging information and all of the ripples that are going to happen from this. And it made me think of another person that I wanted to mention, Solmaz Sharif, who is a poet, and wrote a really incredible essay around redactions and erasure. And those things that we haven't met in person resonate through time and space, and there is a sense that my work couldn't exist without that person's work, couldn't exist without this conversation, couldn't exist.

And then on the other side of it, that sense of absence and gaps, is that I keep having the overwhelming-- I don't know have a word for it yet. But we're going to close these screens in, like, 20 minutes, and all of you people that we are just sharing space with are going to be gone. I'm not going to get to see you walk out the door. There's just this sense that you weren't ever here, and that is just such an intensity that I'm really missing with this notion that Samira is talking about touch-- about this the incredible importance of the physicality of inter-being.

So just while you were talking, another resource came to my mind. And that's Laura Marks The Skin of the Film book. And I think, again, it's how film visually and convey a sense of touch, but the book also addresses a number of groups that are without a particular film history. And so they have to fabricate that history, construct that history, in and of itself, which also relates back to AIDS. Questions about, like, well, what do we do with the media sources that we do have.

And so we can absolutely play with it. But there is also so many other groups in the world without that kind of media resource. And so what do they do about it? So just, again, a

combination of touch and media and gaps in information, I think those three are coming together.

And I think there's a question specifically for you. Trang, about a very like tactical notion of collaboration and participation. I don't know if you saw that.

Yes, I saw that about the embroidery and the women in Vietnam. I think, for me, it was very key to have the screens take physical shape and physical importance as well. And I think it made a lot of sense to do some kind of needlecraft work. And to me, embroidery is signifier for decorations for the fancy stuff. And so it made a lot of sense to do that for the screen for Versailles.

In terms of the women in Vietnam-- I mean, really, frankly, they were the only ones who were, first of all, capable and willing to make this life-size embroidery. I shopped all around Los Angeles in the garment district, some Hollywood shops. And none of them, none of them, would do it. They thought I was crazy, or that it would take a lifetime of labor in order to do something like this.

And so I ran into a former student who said, well, yes, my studio in Vietnam works with these women, this team, who can hand-embroider all of this for you. So let me connect you with that. And they did it. They did it at a phenomenal result, and for, dare I say it, a third of the price of anybody else who would have quoted me to do anything like this.

Great. Thank you. Those are all the questions that we had, unless anyone else has any other questions. No? Thank you so much to Samira, Abigail, and Trang for being with us here today, although I certainly wish we could have done this at the gallery with your work. But this is really, really amazing.

And thank you to everyone, too, who joined us today. It's great seeing so many familiar faces and new faces. And again, if you haven't had the opportunity to see Abigail and Trang's video works, those are up on the LAMAG website through the end of May.

We do also have some documentation via the other install shots that are some of the background of our Zoom that you can check out. And then there's also digital copies of the gallery guide, with an essay by Steve Wong, and a lot of really other great resources. So please check out our website and stay tuned for all sorts of other really great virtual happenings that we're going to be [planning] on.

And as a reminder, we did record this talk. So our hope is to get it up on the LAMAG website within the next couple of weeks. And all of your comments were so thoughtful, and just really great.

So I hope you all don't mind, I did save the chat, so we can share that as well. And just thank you all so much. Stay healthy, stay safe, and we look forward to seeing you again soon in person.

[It's really] nice to share, if even just a virtual space with everyone, there is a benefit to not depending on physicality and the institutional structures and that of a specific location and physicality. So this is the pseudo-democratization of access in [that] way. So it's not entirely a negative thing. And I really appreciate being able to see your faces at this time, and connect with people across wherever in the worlds you are. And that's a really lovely experience.

Thanks, everyone.

Thank you.

[Thanks you] guys. Take care.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]