

COLA 20 Salon Conversation #1

Moderated By: Karen Atkinson and Heidi Duckler

With Lynne Berman, Anna Boyiazis, Nancy Buchanan, Paolo Davanzo, Ernesto de la Loza, Elizabeth Leister, and Phil Ranelin

00:00:05

KAREN ATKINSON: Okay. Thank you everybody for showing up today. So this panel conversation is really about art outside of the traditional spaces of art whether it be a theater, a gallery, etc. So we're gonna also talk about maybe a little bit of historical precedence. Some about your own work. So, the first thing I want to do is to make sure that all of you introduce yourself and maybe say anything about the topic. Maybe you could introduce your work or say what your relationship is to the topic we're gonna talk about today. So why don't you get started.

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PAOLO DAVANZO: Certainly. I'm, my name is Paolo Davanzo with the Echo Park Film Center. First of all, I just wanna say I'm humbled to be around such good friends and activists and artists and so it's an honor to be here. I'm excited to be here today. I'd rather kind of hear what you guys have to say but I guess briefly, we've been around 16 years. We're a non-profit media arts center. We do free film classes. We're a cinema. We're artists in residency for many things. How it pertains to today is we try to take films outside into the community. We have an itinerant school bus. We do a lot of outdoor events. We do things on set, public sidewalks and so we try to take art outside of the, the white gallery with the things hanging on walls and bring it to the people so maybe that'll be relevant today but thank you.

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NANCY BUCHANAN: I'm Nancy Buchanan and I guess that I'm partly known as a member of the performance art group that arose in the 1970's. And when I was a student, I realized that conceptual art really opened up everything so that it's not necessarily an object that is the art that one experiences but the actual event itself. Whatever it is. Whether it is just looking or whether it's something unfolding in front of you. So I think that performance in a sense is really integral to all the arts including the visual arts and also, it allows art to move into the, a public space and interact in a way that can activate the audience.

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NANCY BUCHANAN: I was also very influenced by the San Francisco Mime Troupe as a young artist and did guerrilla theater. So that's my introduction.

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ELIZABETH LEISTER: Thank you. Hi. My name is Elizabeth Leister and I'm a, a visual artist but I also do work in performance and over the last several years, I've been working, collaborating with dancers. And the work has a lot to do with memory and landscape and feminist issues are very important to the work and, and to my process. And so, it's amazing to be sitting next to Nancy Buchanan today. And as far as how the work relates to the topic, my work has been shown in galleries and museums but I also very much enjoy being outside of those spaces which allow for a different kind of openness and experimentation within the work. So.

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LYNNE BERMAN: And I'm Lynne Berman and I think of myself primarily as a studio artist. But for someone reason, I keep going out of the studio and doing performance work and funnily enough, the Kola Award got me back into performance after I'd given it up for a

while. And I have been going out into public spaces like library courtyards and I was just at the LA County Fair doing Complaints Centers, collaborating with poet, Eve Luckring. And it's a really different kind of experience being out in the public, not really addressing an art audience but addressing a public audience and trying to see how to create a communication that centers around art and aesthetics and the ideas of art with people who aren't, don't have the framework that a gallery audience would have.

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KAREN ATKINSON: [LAUGHS] I'm Karen Atkinson. And I guess it, that probably about 80% of my work is done outside of traditional spaces. I've done really, I'd started actually in about 1986 in the mid-80's doing work both as a curator as, and as a, as an artist. I've also run businesses and non-profit organizations as an art practice. [MAKES SOUND] I've done things like make parking meters talk in public places. Done a whole lot of work of artists working in slide form in the '80s coz it was cheap for artists and then projecting them on g..., on [MAKES SOUND] screens in non-traditional spaces and I did that all around the country, in Johannesburg and Canada and various other places.

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KAREN ATKINSON: So I am definitely a DAYI, a DYI artist and most of the projects that I've done have been self-driven and self-produced. So instead of waiting for someone to tell me it was okay to do something. I generally kind of went ahead and did it myself. So that's my intro.

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HEIDI DUCKLER: That's great. I'm, I'm Heidi Duckler. And well, originally my company was called Collage Dance Theater and now my company is called Heidi Duckler Dance Theater. And it's a, 32 years old and it is, it's a site specific dance company. So all of my work is created on site. None of it is created in a studio and then transposed. So it's

always a response to the environment, to the community, to [MAKES SOUND] the, the location. All the content is directly inspired and planned and, and directly connected to the place.

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HEIDI DUCKLER: And it started, it started in, well, well, the early '80s and when I was at UCLA getting my Master's pretty much. And my, one of my first pieces was in a laundromat and I did a lot of non-heroic pieces in laundromats and gas stations and garages and elevators and all those kinds of places and then I did a, pieces in more historic and some historic sites and architectural sites and I performed, we've done pieces all over the world and some of them vary in scale to being small and larger pieces primarily with dancers but also with all kinds of artists, composers and visual artists and they're very interdisciplinary and so yeah. That's how we got going and I'm sure they'll be a lot to talk about.

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HEIDI DUCKLER: But there's a very deep connection I've been hearing this so far about the, with the audience in those kinds of pieces and, and I'd like to talk about that a little bit further down the road.

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ANNA BOYIAZIS: My name is Anna Boyiazis and I wanna say first up, my career started as a graphic designer and I designed a lot of art and architecture publications for art and architecture institutions. But there was always a nagging inside of me even before grad. school that I wanted to be a photo journalist and a documentary photographer. So in, around 20, no... 2006, I started making that transition, received the Kola Award in 2011 and was pretty, still very fresh in my career. But that work that I was working on for Kola

has evolved into a 10-year body of work that I'm now making into my first monograph so I'll be designing that.

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ANNA BOYIAZIS: And it's interesting how the whole process who, has come around from design to photography and now to design again and I thank Kola for that. My work happens on the other side of the world usually in sub-Saharan Africa and East Africa and not in Los Angeles except for the editing and the writing and that's it.

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ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: [CLEARS THROAT] I'm Er..., Ernesto De La Loza. Native born Angelino of the 2005 Kola grant recipient. And I've been painting on this corridor on the streets for almost 50 years. 25 years on Sunset Boulevard. Another 15 on Caesar Javis. Then Brooklyn. So I, I kind of tried to emulate the, this fashion of being part of the inner city. And, and I'm from the '60s so I'm part of the underground cult, you know. We're the hippies from the '60s actually. [MAKES SOUND] When people today say, Well, we're hippies? [LAUGHS] I'd go, Well, you have a lot of catching up to do. [LAUGHS]

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ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: But I, I like to, the, the environment has so much impact on the, on, on the artists' way and the way he sees the world so I kind of tried to capture this, this moment I consider this a historical corridor. And this is a destination around the world LA, southern California. This the farthest west man can go and we're here to meet and to try to guide humanity into the future. Thank you.

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PHIL RANELIN: Thank you, Ernesto. De La Rosa?

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ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: Loza.

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PHIL RANELIN: Oh. Yeah.

ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: [INAUDIBLE] [LAUGHS]

00:10:14

PHIL RANELIN: Yeah. [LAUGHS] Yeah. My name is Phil Ranelin and I, I'm a trombonist. I receive the Kola in 2007 to perform, compose and perform music dedicated to the, the famous female trombonist Melba Liston. So prior to that, of course, I go back way back you know like in terms of being involved in, in the arts and music in particular. So I'm a firm believer in Art, influencing Art and impacting positivity into the world so I got caught up into that belief years ago. So somewhat a junkie I guess. And [MAKES SOUND] in terms of not giving up on it and believing it in and looking forward to the next day even when they're no gigs in sight. Anyway, looking forward to the rest of the afternoon.

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KAREN ATKINSON: Okay. So one of the things that, questions that's come up which I'd like all of you to chime in with and maybe you guys can share that mic and you guys can share that mic is about the historical precedence of the kind of the, the work that we make. And I think actually a lot of people here established that historical precedence which I find really interesting. When I was, when I founded a non-profit organization, Side Street Projects and we were the first gallery to move downtown, I got really interested in finding out the historical aspects of artists working in downtown Los Angeles. Sorry. Curated a show called Downtown and went and looked up all these artists who had made this amazing work mostly in the streets in the '60s and the '70s primarily.

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KAREN ATKINSON: And it was a really amazing show. But most of those artists that I contacted had been doing things outside of the gallery. Either they weren't making the kind of work that a gallery wanted to show and they weren't very many galleries in LA back in the '60s and '70s and the wealth of work that was done in the streets and downtown was really amazing. So I'm wondering if people have different comments they'd like to make about either things that influenced them or ways that they see that historical precedence in Los Angeles.

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ELIZABETH LEISTER: I immediately when I saw the, the prompt for this panel, thought about Woman House and the woman's, women's building and the work that was coming out of there in the, in the '60s and '70s and you know, all different types of performance in all different types of spaces and I think that, that has... Well, it's been influential on my work but I think on LA in, in general and I'm sure Nancy can speak to that, you know, in, in more depth but for me, that stands out very, very strongly.

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NANCY BUCHANAN: Yeah. Well, I was thinking about some of the events that I, I find really profound that, that happened in the past. One of these was a, a public performance organized by Suzanne Lacey and Leslie Labowitz, called, In Mourning And In Rage. And the event was in response to the Hillside Strangler murders that had happened in Los Angeles. But not just a response in anger in terms of these terrible murders but specifically targeting the way that the press represented the events with logos that featured a silhouette of a woman and discussions that made it seem that women should just stay inside and lock their doors rather than really addressing things that were wrong.

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NANCY BUCHANAN: And so they did this funeral procession that led to City Hall and they had a press conference and all the press indeed came out. And in response, one of the amazing things that happened was that the telephone company which had refused to list rape hotline crisis numbers in the phone book immediately said they were gonna do that. And LA Council people came out. It was really, it was, it was really an amazing result and, and it was something organized by artists. I was also thinking of laundromats and another feminist group who called themselves Mother Art, and they came out of the women's building.

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NANCY BUCHANAN: They got a tiny, a teeny tiny little California arts, arts council grant. And so they developed a series of pieces that they called Laundry Works. And these were public performances in laundromats unannounced. They showed up with flyers in English and in Spanish. They had pillow cases with words on them that they invited the public to put in order and make a poem. Their performances were as long as a wash cycle. It was one of the most generous things I have ever seen artists do and you know, the money that Ronald Reagan complained about, this little group of artists getting was so, so well spent. So.

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HEIDI DUCKLER: That's wonderful. Thank you. That's really great. That's a wonderful story. I, I wanted to you know, add to the, the laundromat experience. And one of the things that, it was one of my first pieces in the '80s. And one of the things that I learned in doing that piece was that we were rehearsing, you know, in the laundromat and you know, in the washers and the dryers and, and you know, as we rehearsed onsite and, and the, you know, weekly, and we found that people who do their wash on a weekly basis, right? So we would have this sort of built-in audience watching us rehearse. And, and,

and so unbeknownst, I mean, I didn't even think about this would happen but they would be watching the process of the work being built and that was really interesting to me.

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HEIDI DUCKLER: And these were people, of course that didn't, you know, they didn't traditionally go to the theater or to see dance, or you know, it wasn't that kind of a crowd. So, and they were, but they were understanding how the, a dance was being built and created and choreographed and they were intrigued and every, every week, they would come back and they would see, you know, see something new and, and, and this was so unusual to me and I, I just loved this new audience that, that we were gaining. And, and I just was wondering if anyone wanted to speak to, to this sort of new audience that this work kind of generates and, and makes. Does anyone want to talk about the, the audience?

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LYNNE BERMAN: Well, I mean, have been having these experiences over of the past year doing public performances and it's a little awkward sometimes because what we're offering, we're not sure how the public might be perceiving or understanding it. So for instance, someone will submit a complaint and the poet will respond and I'll make the drawing and sometimes the poems are quite abstract and sometimes the drawings are peculiar or not. Maybe a style that people might think they'd want to hang on their wall. But I found people were very curious and they were open and receptive and there seemed to be a really interesting experience within the exchange like we all seemed to have some level of transformation through it. And so it was a very different than just maybe presenting the work on the wall and watching people observe. I had to keep responding to how people were responding.

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KAREN ATKINSON: I first did some, curated some projects actually when I was working in a space in San Diego and [CLEARS THROAT] it was also the mid-'80s and we'd written a grant and managed to get a tiny, tiny, tiny [LAUGHS] little bit of money. And so what we did is we actually chose three neighborhoods in San Diego that did not have any arts things going on practically and we commissioned people to create performances that happened on the street in some way. And that was really interesting 'cause we went into communities that weren't being represented by the city and things like that and we did these amazing performances which at that time, nobody was doing that work very obviously especially in a city like San Diego, which has fabulous weather but is a little bit conservative. [MAKES SOUND]

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KAREN ATKINSON: So we had, [LAUGHS] we had a, [CLEARS THROAT] we actually had a full on choir performing in front of a Taco Bell in southeast San Diego which was the euphemism for African-American community. And we actually went to La Hoya which had a museum but nothing else was going on and did a whole performance there and then did something in Ocean Beach which was a, the kind of hippie part of town of San Diego. And all of them have really amazing stories about how the audience responded. So for instance, the California Arts Council decided to visit us when we did a performance in Ocean Beach and there was a guy who was doing a performance and he made himself up to look like a homeless person and he walked onto the, the set more or less and people started trying to get him to go away because like this was art, right?

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KAREN ATKINSON: And so, people were giving him cigarettes and giving him money and then he said, Wow. That's a really amazing thing. And then, he went over and he started performing and all of a sudden, the whole audience realized this was not a homeless

person. This was an artist who was doing a performance and shocked the heck out of a lot of different people but it was, it was quite spectacular. So there's really, really great stories from the beginning and I think that the audiences have changed drastically which is another interesting topic we'll get to. But you had something to say?

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PHIL RANELIN: I was gonna say, you know, creating your own audience, that's what we have to do I guess as artists. So interestingly enough, myself and my promoter a few years ago had this idea about presenting music in the train stops, you know. You know, like, just like in the laundromat or whatever and in front of [LAUGHS] Taco Bell. I mean, wherever, you know. Wherever there's people. So yeah. So important to make sure that the continuum, I mean, art is, is, is everyday life so as artists we have to figure out ways how to present it so that's all I had to say about that. But it's some very novel ideas about how to keep it alive, you know. Yeah.

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HEIDI DUCKLER: Yeah. You know, that's, that's really wonderful. We, we did a piece at the, we did a piece in Miami first and then another piece in Los Angeles both at hotels. And turning the hotel inside out where the audience went to sort of, thinking about the hotel as a backstage where you know, you would see the maids, the housekeepers and bringing them all outside of the hotel into the lobby and you know, sort of flipping the whole thing. And it was a really, a great piece and, and looking at you know, what you don't really see when you go into a hotel. You know, you don't see that, that's sort of other side and, and I think it's really interesting how site work and, and, and work outside the box can be very political and, and very, talk about a lot of social justice.

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HEIDI DUCKLER: And so when we did the piece in Los Angeles, and, and Los Angeles, it was just right after we were rehearsing and they were very, you know, they were, they were very much about the rules. And oh, don't touch that and you know, and in the lobby. And oh, don't slide down that bannister. And oh, you know, they were, you know, the security guards, they were, don't know that was their job to say, No, to this and No, to that and you know, and, and they were very, making it very difficult for us to, to do our job which was to, of course, ex..., explore the, the lobby and, and you know, dance all over the furniture, which is what we do. So, but anyway, 9-11 happened and, and, and the hotel was empty and nobody was staying there. It was, it was a, a horrible place and so, but we arrived for work the next day.

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HEIDI DUCKLER: And, and so, the security guard said, You're here? And we said, Yeah. We're here. We have rehearsal. And he, he just started crying and he, he just hugged us and he said, I'm so happy to see you. And so, we, we started sliding down the bannisters and [LAUGHS] he just let us do whatever we wanted. And, and we just somehow managed to bring some joy into the space. So it's kind of interesting how things get flipped in such ways that you don't expect.

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PAOLO DAVANZO: [INAUDIBLE] I think Karen, I heard you ask about precedence and how you build an audience. Also, from Heidi. We, I'm a filmmaker and an educator. It's a very pervasive thing to be in a city that often films about commodity and about wealth and fame and fortune. So when you make a people's film center which everyone is treated equally and you know, a kid with, an 11 year old kid with braces or a, you know, a 50 year old hip..., hipster, hot shot filmmaker, they're all loved. They're all adored, right? But when we opened in 2001, [MAKES SOUND] film was still expensive. It was still I, I'd like to say

one of the most [MAKES SOUND] accessible art forms for the consumer but one of the least accessible for the producer, right?

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PAOLO DAVANZO: Computers were expensive. F..., cameras were expensive and how do you democratize that process, right? Also, the notion of a cinema. You come to a place. You pay money to get in. So that's why we bought the school bus to bring films to the people outdoors, right, in the sense in the, the noble tradition of itinerant cinema that was in India and Mexico and all over the world. These caravans would go town to town and show films so we've continued that process to bring film to people, to communities. Often potluck meals are involved. Sharing food. Sharing ideas. Sharing love. Sharing space. And I think that's [MAKES SOUND] one of the pivotal roles that we can be as artists is to bring big people from comfortable in the setting that they're interacting with the art and the, and those sort of things. And so, those are my two bits.

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KAREN ATKINSON: So one of the things I did wanna talk about is this sort of shift in the audience and the way we all work. So Heidi and I were talking yesterday and reminiscing about getting into so much trouble [LAUGHS] because we were doing things that weren't really known. We were stepping outside of the arts context in a way and we were kind of making up as we went along. We're getting our funding and our resources from places that weren't conventional at all. So one of the interesting things that happened is that people were often beside themselves [LAUGHS] when we would show up to do something and, or we had to do a lot of explaining. An example in my case would be, [MAKES SOUND] I, across the street from the Beverly Center and where the Hard Rock Caf..., Café is there, there's now a hotel but there used to be a big parking and a kind of little strip mall.

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KAREN ATKINSON: [MAKES SOUND] And I decided with a friend of mine that it was really reasonable and fairly cheap for artists to create work in slide form. And [MAKES SOUND] so I commissioned a whole bunch of artists, about 40 from around the country to make work either anywhere from one to four slides. And they weren't actually, you know, pictures of artwork they made, but they were made very site specifically for the site. So, there was a place called the Bloomsbury, Bloomsbury f..., Flower Mart, and had this very long conversation with them about you know, creating a space. So we talked them into it and they allowed us to build a rear projection screen in the front window. So we wanted to do this in a non-arts space.

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KAREN ATKINSON: And so, that negotiation was always very interesting, which I'm imagining a lot of you that, the idea of negotiation is so much a part of the work that we do. And so, so, the, it was a flower market by day and at night, the rear screen would come down and we would rear project from dusk to midnight. And I've since done that project in other kinds of sites. Done it in furniture stores and just odd little places all around the country. Bookstores. An architect's office in San Diego. And what was so fascinating about that is that the audience weren't necessarily, you didn't have a direct relationship with them because it was from dusk to midnight. And I would be sitting behind the screen so I would hear all these really great conversations about this new form and people would be walking by and see something and pretty soon, they'd have to stop and have a conversation about it.

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KAREN ATKINSON: So it was fascinating. So I ended up doing these kinds of projects whereby I included a lot of artists and the audience, you know, it wasn't, it wasn't kind of a direct relationship which was interesting. So I learned a lot from people, about what they

thought about these kind of interventions in that process. And I think now it's very different when we make work. I think that it's still difficult to negotiate a space but at least people have heard about it so it's not quite as difficult. One other example is that Sylvia Bowyer and I commissioned then, commissioned artists to make work in slide form and projected it in two commercial theaters in between the popcorn and trivia slides. Remember those really bad, awful slides of chiropractors and all of that?

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KAREN ATKINSON: So we went to the National Cinema Network and we managed to get these slides inserted. And it was a first time technology-wise that you could actually create a, a slide from an image on the computer. So we worked with all the artists. It was the first time you could do that. So we had some technological help. So you made a two inch by, you know, small slide and then we projected them in those movie theaters on 12 screens both the Magic Johnson Theater and the AMC Theater in Pasadena. And for three months, every single intermission in both those, all those 12 theaters, you got to see this artwork. The really uncanny thing is there was an attorney for the National Cinema Network and they censored a bunch of the work at the last minute. So what we found out on the down low is they thought we had figured out how to subliminally put messages in the pixels.

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KAREN ATKINSON: And so, [LAUGHS] we scared the shit out of 'em. [LAUGHS] The heck out of 'em. Sorry. You can edit that out. [LAUGHS] So it's like things like this where you have to, you know, the negotiation just kind of doesn't stop. And so, that was a really interesting thing. Even so some of the work was made very specifically for the Magic Johnson Theaters. These, you know, upper echelon attorneys, white as can be, just didn't get it at all. So we ran like hell and decided to do it at the Laemmle Theatres downtown and did it for three years and there were no popcorn and trivia slides in those. It was all

just a, a pure art exhibition of artists' work. And every three months, we would curate new show or do something. So again, there's very interesting sort of shifts. I'd like to hear maybe some of the experiences that you have about making this kind of work.

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HEIDI DUCKLER: Yeah. I think that's a very, very interesting topic. If you'd like to chime in. I mean, I think that you know, life has changed so much. You know, we used to be able to kind of do what we wanted a little bit more and now, there's always insurance and lawyers and people following us around and a lot of this work is, is a little bit unplanned, you know, because if it's responsive as an artist, you need to have that ability to be, to be extemporaneous and sometimes I'm always being asked, Okay. What are you planning on doing here? You know, well, you know, I, [LAUGHS] you know, I, I need some freedom. [INAUDIBLE] Yeah. Right. And you need some freedom to, to experiment and, and sometimes it's hard for the, the bureaucrats and, and, and, and you know, those who run venues to, to, understand that and, and makes it difficult to, when you wanna able to be subvert a space and, and you know, and use it in ways that are unconventional that you may not know exactly what you're doing at first because you want to improvise and play and, and so you would need the freedom to experiment and that goes against the grain in institutional, institutions, you know, which are not accustomed to that kind of, that kind of work. So anyone wanna, wanna respond to that?

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KAREN ATKINSON: You've been doing this for 15 years. [INAUDIBLE]

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HEIDI DUCKLER: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

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KAREN ATKINSON: Tell me a little bit about [INAUDIBLE] and how things work.

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ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: Well, actually, there were, there was a rebellion in 1970. The assassination of Ruben Salazar, okay? And Cesar Chavez stated, Show your solidarity. Take your art to the streets. And foolish me, I'm still doing it today. [LAUGHS] But we broke through the... [UNINTELLIGIBLE] the tradition of conventional art gallery art. But we had books by Robin Dunnetts, a, a colleague who said street galleries so we titled this thing and, and the audience. Like well, who's your audience? I go, Well, worldwide. You know, 'cause we, we had guidelines and they said, Give art to the people that don't have art. So, so it, it was a new thing and, and you have historians talking about our life's work today, you know.

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ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: So it's a great accomplishment but then there became a moratorium. You have imminent domain issues and then you have intellectual property rights. I shouldn't know this. I'm just a kid on the streets you know but all this weighs in and hopefully we have a, a little clearing today where we can really close the argument. And say, This is people's art.

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PHIL RANELIN: Yeah. Well. All these ideas is swirling around in my head but I can't really convey. [LAUGHS] But a lot of things that have been said remind me of a, of once when I recei..., okay, I received the Kola grant which led to my receiving another grant to do workshops on Eric Dolphy in Panama. And so, we had everything in place. We received the grant of course. Three, three week residency in Panama. I had no venue to perform the workshops. I didn't even, well, I had a place to stay but everything... What I'm getting

at is everything was not in place and so we had to improvise. Actually, I went by myself but my promoter was back here in LA emailing people and this, that and the other.

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PHIL RANELIN: And so anyway, when I get to, [LAUGHS] when I arrive in Panama, they told me that I had a meeting to meet with the, the Danilo Perez Foundation to see if that would be a potential place to present the workshops on Eric Dolphy, who happened to have had parents who were Panamanian. That's how we approached the, the whole thing. So. [LAUGHS] Anyway, I go to this, I go to this meeting and there are people, I don't speak any Spanish at all and there are people sitting there, you know, talking in Spanish and everyone is smiling. I'm talking and they seem like they maybe understood what I was saying.

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PHIL RANELIN: So anyway, at the end of the meeting, everyone smiled at me and they were actually interviewing me to see if they wanted me to present workshops in their venue. Little did I know I didn't know that at the time. But anyway, these two elderly people look at me and they said, You need ride to the hotel? I said, Oh, yeah. Thank you. So I'm riding in the, in their car. I don't know if any of you know the name, Danilo Perez but he's a pretty famous jazz pianist from Panama. And he has a foundation, a major foundation. 20 pianos and, and it's, and you know, in the complex. And anyway, I'm in the car and this elderly gentleman is driving and I said, By the way, how do you know Danilo? And he said, he kinda smile and said, I'm his papa. I said, Oh, my God.

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PHIL RANELIN: So his, Danilo's parents took me to the hotel and that led to me coming back in 2015, performing on the Panama Jazz Festival as one of the headliners and the whole festival was dedicated to Eric Dolphy, which I had originally actually, I'd done the

workshop so yeah. We all have to figure out ways of doing what we do. I guess it comes down to that. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for jumping off the subject.

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KAREN ATKINSON: Oh. We already have.

ALL AT ONCE: Yeah. [LAUGHS]

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KAREN ATKINSON: Does anybody have any questions they wanna bring up or...?

00:37:09

NANCY BUCHANAN: I was wondering to follow up on you know, the restrictions and contracts and liabilities. I mean, do, do, do people have ways around those kinds of barriers. I mean, are, are there more difficulties in just giving your work away publicly and what are some creative ways that artists have dealt with that?

00:37:39

HEIDI DUCKLER: It's a great question.

00:37:45

ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: Intellectual property lawyers. [LAUGHS] You have to have lawyers.

FEMALE: No more lawyers. [LAUGHS]

00:37:51

ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: But there is around two intellectual property lawyers. Ones in San Francisco and a couple out here in Pasadena. But I, I've been in litigation for 10 years and it almost killed me. I mean, it, it just kills your creativity. And, but that's the struggle. But –

00:38:11

NANCY BUCHANAN: What, what exactly do you need them to do for you?

00:38:15

ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: Well, your work gets whitewashed. There's imminent domain. Everything I've done has been under attack and destroyed. And I have, I gave my life to this city 50 years. And it comes to the point, now we're full circle. I'm getting back on my feet again. I'm able to paint on the streets, engage with the children and the public 'cause it's their demand. They want to see the artist. Now there's four or five of generations artists popping up left and right and that, that's the reward. So artists have to be thick-skinned. It's not about talent but it's persever..., ...verance and stamina.

ALL AT ONCE: [LAUGHS]

00:39:01

ANNA BOYIAZIS: I'm negotiating access which is a whole different type of negotiation where I'm involved in a community for more than a month. Maybe a month or two months proving to them why I'm committed to their story and that they can trust me. And often, most recently, I was in Tanzania teaching English lessons to their people to show that I was devoted to them. So it's like the flip side of what you're talking about but I understand the negotiation is a part of it.

00:39:37

LYNNE BERMAN: Well, I have had a past where I, I guess I break rules 'cause I will just show up and do things and I sometimes get kicked out. And I've found it's been kind of interesting. Like at the public library didn't, we didn't get permission and we set up like this structure and the guards kept coming around and going what are you doing and apparently the land we were on wasn't even owned by the library. It was owned by a private company and they had their, their own guards and I think they were all actors who were rehearsing their lines. And finally, they just said, whate..., and it was so weird. They're like just don't, don't and, don't disrupt the wedding going on. I'm like they, [LAUGHS] well, they may have some complaints. But I, what I wanted to bring up was the, the idea of what is public space and how important public is and how so much of our culture now people are going into public spaces that are extremely controlled.

00:40:34

LYNNE BERMAN: Places like the Americana, the Grove and finding the unexpected. Even, people don't go to movies anymore. People are not going, people aren't going out as much into kind of unexpected environments and I think maybe this idea of doing these performative works in the world, out in public space which is part of I think what this whole salon is about is to, to invest the energy into public space which I think is extremely important politically right now.

00:41:08

HEIDI DUCKLER: I think that's a very interesting subject about you know, what is public space? And, is it public space? Or so much public space is actually it's private space. It's very confusing and I think that it does tie in to what you're saying about community support and, and you know, and, and that space and who owns that space and, and how is it, you know, how is it managed? Does anyone wanna talk about that? I think that's a very fascinating subject.

00:41:37

NANCY BUCHANAN: Yeah. Well, what about also the way that there's rumors that maybe protest will become illegal. There will be laws passed against people being able to come out and express their opinions and I feel that that's one of the most important things right now is to make sure that the people of this country can be heard because there's so much like alternative stuff floating around [LAUGHS] whether it's called fact or whatever you wanna call it. So I think that everyone in the arts can contribute by making sure that we keep the pressure on to keep some spaces open to the public.

00:42:23

KAREN ATKINSON: Okay. So... Oh. Stay in the Streets. Stop what's his name. [LAUGHS] Just in case this is a bi-political audience or something. [LAUGHS] So does anybody have anything in particular that they wanna bring up? So one of the things that I'm struck by is this shift in how artists work these days. And I think part of the, the idea of thinking about the precedence of what we all do is really interesting and it's one of the reasons why I did a whole bunch of free research to sort of find out what had taken place in Los Angeles 'cause a lot of those artists weren't being talked about at all anymore but their work was actually really amazing. I think there's a lot of artists who looked at the public space as another venue but a way in which there's such a diversity of the way that we all work.

00:43:19

KAREN ATKINSON: So if you go into a space without permission, that's one thing. I always chose to negotiate a space that seemed like it was hard as hell. And therefore, people wouldn't give me money because they thought there's no way that you can pull that off. So I, you know, when I was working on the project to put artists slides in the theaters, it was a 13 year project. I proposed it to every artist run space in Los Angeles

and they all said, that's too big. You're never gonna pull it off. So it took 13 years to be able to get a small amount of money as some sort of seed funding and make it work.

00:44:02

KAREN ATKINSON: When the lawyer decided to censor the images, we decided that we would make it incredibly public and we built it, it was when websites were first using graphic images and you could actually put something up on the internet. Nobody actually really knew much about what it was but that was a really interesting way to push talking about public. And then we also put all the artists' images in a reel and the, the idea was that they were creative this high tech way. But we actually put them on reels in a view master so the way that you actually looked at them was in the lowest tech way [LAUGHS] possible. So we're always pushing those kinds of ideas about finding a theater and a national cinema at work or going after donations from a national company and trying to make that stuff work and a huge thing about negotiation. And I have a quote on the wall and actually my favorite art supply is tenacity. Maybe you guys can talk about what your favorite art supplies are in terms of making this kind of work. You, your, you're a, talk about your, yeah.

00:45:10

KAREN ATKINSON: So you have a CD called Perseverance. Maybe you can talk about that. Why you named it that?

00:45:18

PHIL RANELIN: Yeah. This is great because this is a result of the Kola Award in 2007. As I said earlier, I, I presented, I composed and performed music for Melba Liston [SIGHS] and perseverance is what I've been about all my life. And so when, when I did, the, the CD came as a result of the 2007 Kola Award which I dedicated three songs on this CD to Melba Liston. So, that's the connection with that. But the story of my life is perseverance

because I had to as, as an independent and all of us actually everyone in here is independent in a sense because we figure out ways how to do what we do and I was always told that if you believe in what you do then it should take care of you. And so, so far, so good. [LAUGHS] But I don't know. I mean, it's a, I'm so, I feel honored to be involved with a, you know, group of artists and I've been honored to have been involved with some great musicians in my lifetime. I, first, I, the first good guitar player that I played with in my life was Wes Montgomery in 1959 and from that point, he convinced me that I could make it as a musician.

00:47:03

PHIL RANELIN: So I ended up with Motown Records and Motown Records allowed me to form Tribe Records which was an independent label in Detroit that led to this. So I don't know. It's a continuum. Sorry for the rambling.

00:47:34

ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: Well, Berry, Berry Gordy. Yeah. You know I've done street art and I define my life through street art. Then you have the LA PHil uses my, my art work as cover art for the opera. So this transformation from street to opera, it was a great honor that due to mal... John Adams. They used my art as cover for that so it, it really inspired me that, to have a classless view of things and it... I think this was a success that what I stood for, and what I, I strived for was to have a classless world, you know, as puritanical as that can be. So it's a great honor to be at this point in time like all of my, our colleagues here that we've accomplished something and, and we're just a part of that curve and we're still in progress.

00:48:39

ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: So painting street art and being around this corridor to get into this, this is the most majestic gallery in this city and, and I, I call this place the hill. So it

was, it wasn't a struggle, a struggle, a struggle but to be a recipient was like a, climbing another mountain. I covered the Pyrenees, the Rockies, the Metro Cannes all on bicycle. So part of the stamina but this was a great challenge and it, it gave me breathing room to, to be identified as an artist of the city which isn't a given thing if there's zip codes as class division and this is an issue that's so com..., so compromising, confounding today. '93 I, I did Bridges To East LA. That was a title of a piece. Bridges, bridges that divide or bring communities together. Now we're building walls. End of conversation.

00:49:50

KAREN ATKINSON: Yeah. Can you talk about your own experience?

00:49:53

ANNA BOYIAZIS: Yes. I think it challenged me to be a curator and that was a new thing to trust that I knew what to choose to put up.

00:50:06

KAREN ATKINSON: That's great. Yeah.

00:50:10

HEIDI DUCKLER: Yeah. I think when, when I was asked to do a performance in the, in the, here in the gallery, that was a huge challenge for me because of, it's not what I, since then I have created some work in galleries but typically you know, because we always create the work on site, we, and that's all we do, it was a, it was a big challenge. And so we brought a, we brought a large object inside the gallery that we could respond to and we did that and we moved it through the crowd and outside the gallery. Actually, we ended up moving it outside the gallery and into the space, into the garden space and so we did kind of break through these doors and the walls kind of in our own way. But so we found a

way to make that, to, to do that in an authentic way for us. But yeah. It took some thinking and working out.

00:51:10

PAOLO DAVANZO: I'll... Oh. Go ahead.

00:51:13

KAREN ATKINSON: [LAUGHS] So for me, I actually work everywhere all the time.

[LAUGHS] So it wasn't really particularly a problem. What was so interesting to me about the Kola Award is that I actually have three ruptured disks and at the time, I was in a wheelchair for six months. And I had made this proposal to do this giant, big fabulous thing, right, you know, because I'm so used to doing big stuff and installation work and I couldn't do any of that. And so, what was interesting is that it forced me to completely rethink my work and because of Kola, I was able to get a computer where I could start actually making movies as the best sort of element I can think of. But I made a work about my great aunt who was in the Japanese internment camps and she was one of very few Caucasians. She married a Japanese man.

00:52:07

KAREN ATKINSON: And I projected this work on a glow in the dark screen which is very, very hard to document so there may be no historical reference to my Kola project actually. But it actually allowed me to be able to sort of shift my work and it completely changed what I did. And I think now I wouldn't be doing the work that I am doing now as well as running a business and, and being a software developer and all those odd ball things. So, in answer to that question that was posed my right and left brains talk to each other which is con..., sometimes kind of odd. So I am much more interested in the site whether it's in a gallery or outside of a gallery that the site becomes really, really important to me and everything that I do is site specific in some way, shape or form.

00:52:55

LYNNE BERMAN: Well, I think I eluded to before that the Kola grant kinda pushed me back into performance art and I think it literally pushed me because the year I got it was a weird year where we were asked to do a public art project in addition to our Kola grant and Joe Smo can address that because I still don't quite understand. But anyways, so we all looked at each other like, well, you have a Kola. We have a public art way. We don't do public art and so I had to come up with an idea of like, I'm gonna do public art. I didn't wanna just hang my drawings in, in the gallery. I thought I'll go do a public art piece. And it, I think it helped me to start rethinking ideas about public space and interaction and performance so it was unexpected and I had to come up with something. So that was my Kola experience. And it did influence work that I'm involved with now, that I hadn't planned on be doing, that I hadn't planned on doing at the time. [LAUGHS]

ALL AT ONCE: [LAUGHS]

00:54:02

ELIZABETH LEISTER: I, I really enjoy working in both ways and I, I do work in both ways. My Kola experience allowed me to do a performance here that was much more polished I guess than the way I had gone about it doing similar types of performance with dance and drawing previously so that was wonderful. And I keep thinking about this one project that I was involved with a couple years ago. Cindy SOUNDS LIKE: Reem who runs or she was running a, a organization called Craft Someone House partnered with SOUNDES LIKE: Hintra culture and we did a huge day of installation and performance out in the desert. It was the hundredth anniversary of the SOUNDS LIKE: Yanu Del Rio commune out there and it was based on this female architect who designed the, the, the space there but it never actually, it never actually got built because they realized they ran out of water and had to move on.

00:55:13

ELIZABETH LEISTER: So that was an extremely challenging project. We had gone out previously and all of the artists selected basically where they were going to create a performance or an installation. But then the actual day of the performance, it was incredibly windy and my performance ended up being at like 5:00 in the afternoon when it was like, I don't know, 102 degrees. So all of my plans, they didn't completely fall through but I had anticipated performing for a good 20 minutes and could barely get through 10 minutes. But I enjoyed that kind of challenge and sort of, I don't know being flexible to you know, what might occur in, in the moment, in a really challenging space like the desert. So yeah. I think I'll leave it at that.

00:56:15

PAOLO DAVANZO: Oh. Do you... Yeah. Yeah. Traditionally, galleries freak me out. I don't feel welcome there. I don't feel... I feel I'm not cool enough. I'm not beautiful enough. I'm not. I don't get, I don't get it. I can't afford it. So I mean in general, I'm not a fan of, of galleries. But when, when Kola approaches you, this is the people's gallery. I mean I look at that list of the last 20 years and I wanna cry. Some of these artists that have been my mentors, have been my friends, some are no longer with us perhaps. And so, this really feels it always has. It's like the people's gallery right. So to be here, is something very special, I think when Joe asked that question, I, I saw him kinda maybe look at me and, and look at all of us but I spent a lifetime helping others. My mother said, Always nurture the system. Replenish the system. She was an activist. Died when I was very young. And so I've committed my life to helping others.

00:56:58

PAOLO DAVANZO: But when someone says, you're beautiful. You're powerful. Here's \$10,000. [LAUGHS] Make your own work. It's wonderful. And you know, and I did. I, you know, yeah. And so I think everything has its place. This gallery has a tremendous history

and it has a place but I think in general, yeah. We need to keep bringing art to the people. We need to keep making people feel comfortable with art and not feeling that you have to be cool. You have to be beautiful. You have to enter this pristine space. So.

00:57:23

KAREN ATKINSON: So I know we have to wrap up. I'm gonna give each of you a chance to just make a closing comment. So why don't you start.

00:57:30

PAOLO DAVANZO: Oh. I think I just did. Yeah. [LAUGHS]

00:57:33

KAREN ATKINSON: Okay.

00:57:34

PAOLO DAVANZO: I'll pass that.

00:57:35

NANCY BUCHANAN: Yeah. Well, this place has always been to me really key for the city of Los Angeles. I mean at a time when diversity wasn't as celebrated as it is now. You could always find diversity in this space and you could see, you know, the rainbow of artists that work in Los Angeles. And to, to have your work validated by your peers is also, I think, one of the most meaningful things in an artist life so everything about the Kola program, I think is, is incredible and wonderful and should continue.

00:58:21

ELIZABETH LEISTER: Yeah. I would, I would back that up completely. You know, the Kola grant, it's wonderful to get that money to be able to buy some equipment or supplies or

paper, dancers, collaborators but along with that is just this really wonderful feeling being supported by the LA art community and, and artists here. So yeah.

00:58:52

LYNNE BERMAN: Thank you, Kola. And I just think it's really exciting to be around a group of other people who work in various ways in performance and, and are offering also free experiences to people because again, so much in our culture knows about buying and selling as I think Paolo mentioned and you know, not just having an experience. So I think in performance, you can offer that.

00:59:21

KAREN ATKINSON: I got my Kola grant in 1999 so it was one of the first ones and it was... I mean, now there's actually funding for artists from a lot of different sources but back then, there was practically nothing. And the culture wars were going on. The NEA was in crisis. All these different things had been going on for a long time. So to get that was actually really amazing at the time because it was one of the few times that you could actually sit back and make a decision about what you wanted to do. Not necessarily what you felt, felt compelled to do. I think that you know, it's a really great way to bring artists together. It's a way to sort of celebrate the art in Los Angeles and I think that Kola has been an amazing historical precedence in Los Angeles and I'm glad to be a part of it. So I wanna thank all of you.

01:00:13

HEIDI DUCKLER: Yeah. Ditto with everything that's been said. I'm just so happy to be here. I mean, the Kola grant is such an honor and you know, it's just, it's so special and you know, and I realize that this is just a municipal. I love that word. Municipal. We, I hardly ever use that word. There's a municipal gallery, right? And, it gives you such a civic pride and, and pride in your city and your colleagues and you know. It's, it's both, it's, it's

uplifting and it's also just kind of grounding at the same time. That you just feel, you know, I just feel so comfortable and, and elated at the same time. And it's just really great and I'm, I'm very thankful and I just got to hear what all you, I just got to meet you for the first time, many of you, and so it's just been great and thank you so much.

01:01:08

ANNA BOYIAZIS: A lot of others have talked about how the grant changed their trajectory. I had already changed my trajectory so it I was more confirming that people cared about what I was working on and that was so valuable in those years. And it challenged me to go deeper into a body of work that I had, I had already been working on and continued to work on and really went deeper and deeper. So I'm thankful for that, the confidence in me to do so.

01:01:38

ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: See you at the laundromat. I do my best business and, and, and thinking and exchanging at the laundromat today.

01:01:50

PHIL RANELIN: Okay. Yeah. Well, the Kola grant did wonders for me and especially at the time in 2007, I was just kinda recovering from a near fatal accident which happened at the end of '05 and so I, I really had only been performing for out of the wheelchair at least for about five or six months. But anyway, the Kola grants, too bad it only happens once but I was so grateful and thankful to have received it and as I stated earlier, it led to a lot of wonderful things after that. So yeah. Thank you, Kola.

01:02:35

ERNESTO DE LA LOZA: [INAUDIBLE]

01:02:39

KAREN ATKINSON: So I wanna thank all of you for participating. This has been really fabulous. It's really great to actually hear, you know, what has perpetuated and created all this and I wanna thank you all. Also for your historical precedence of actually creating the genre in the first place and perpetuating such an interesting dialog. So thank you very much. Yup.

01:02:59

HEIDI DUCKLER: Thank you, everybody.

OFF CAMERA

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]