

## **Salon Conversation #3 Session 1**

Moderated By: Eileen Cowin, Jen Hofer and Jesse Lerner  
With maRia Bodmann and Sam Erenberg

00:00:07

JESSE LERNER: So, maybe we should start by introducing ourselves.

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JEN HOFER: So, we had this idea that we would possible introduce ourselves by saying our name, our preferred gender pronoun, what neighborhood we live in, in the city, and if there's a particular project that we're working on in a very pressing or passionate way at the moment. Do you wanna start?

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JESSE LERNER: Sure. I'm Jesse Lerner. You can refer to me as he or him or his. I live in Chavez Ravine, but my studio is in Echo Park. I guess I feel like as much an Echo Park-er as anything else, just because I've been there for a really long time. And the project that I'm working on right now... well, there's several. But I guess I would pick one with Los Angeles Film Forum. We're doing a survey exhibition of 18 programs and a 406-page catalogue about the history of experimental film in Latin America with the support of the Andy Warhol Foundation and the Getty's Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA and the Mike Kelley foundation.

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JESSE LERNER: I think that's everybody.

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EILEEN COWIN: My name is Eileen Cowin and I live in Santa Monica, but my studio's in west LA. And I guess you could refer to me as she or her or whatever. The project that I'm working on now is I'm doing the art for the platform levels of the Martin Luther King Jr. metro station. I however, have sort of finished my files, but now we have to wait for the station to be finished. So, that usually takes quite a while. But that's what I just, last week, sent in my files for that.

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SAM ERENBERG: My name is Sam Erenberg. He, il in French, I suppose. I live and work in Santa Monica as well. At the present time, I'm working on a series of painting titled The Battle of Los Angeles, based on a Los Angeles Time photograph that was taken in 1942 about anti-aircraft batteries that went off one night, and that's it.

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MARIA BODMANN: My name is Maria Bodmann. You can call me she or her. I live in Grenada Hills, which is part of Counsel District 12. And I just recently finished a project, the beginning of April, which I do shadow theater. The roots are in Bali, Indonesia. This was, I wanna say, one of the first times a shadow play was ever done in America that was a political satire. And so, it was a lot of fun to... it was very cathartic for the performers and for the audience as well. I'm all excited about it.

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JEN HOFER: I'm Jen Hofer. I live in Cypress Park, which is in northeast Los Angeles. You... I prefer to use she or they, either way. And I am working on many pressing projects at the moment, one of which is actually directly related to the topic of this conversation and directly related to Jesse, which is another show through the MAK Center for Art and Architecture, through Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, Los Angeles, Latin America project.

Jesse and a couple of other colleagues are editing... curating an exhibit and editing a book that focuses on the role of Disney in Latin America.

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JEN HOFER: And I am spearheading the translation of the catalogue and book that will accompany the show. And so, I have been minutely reading, word by word and space by space, Jesse's essay over the last few days and comparing the translation to the original. So, I feel extremely connected to your work right now and also, thinking a lot about Hollywood for export and how that has had political ramifications across the Americas and across the world, thinking about both political satire and issues like imperialism, what kinds of quote, unquote products, ideological and otherwise, we might export, which also leads me to think about militarism.

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JEN HOFER: And the other projects that I'm working on right now most closely are two translations. One is by a queer, Uruguayan writer named [UNINTELLIGIBLE], a book of very wild, anti-capitalist poems. And the other is a book by the Mexican writer [UNINTELLIGIBLE] which is about the contemporary violence and basically civil war that's going on in Mexico.

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EILEEN COWIN: Well, I thought maybe we should sort of say what the topic is supposed to be and maybe how we're gonna think about it.

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JEN HOFER: Or not talk about it.

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EILEEN COWIN: Or not talk about it, because so it says, in what ways have the rich cinematic storytelling and documentary traditions of the LA film, television industry

influence the literary, performing and visual arts? So, I think the word that kind of stumped us a little bit was industry, at least me. It stumped me. I don't know. And it stumped Jen, maybe, but it didn't... I don't know about you, Jesse, but...

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JESSE LERNER: Well, I think they mean commercial cinema that comes out of Los Angeles, as opposed to art cinema, experimental...

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EILEEN COWIN: No, I understood that. I mean, I actually went on Wikipedia and looked film industry.

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JESSE LERNER: Okay.

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EILEEN COWIN: Cause I thought, how do they do it? And it says, comprises the technological and commercial institutions of filmmaking, film production companies. I thought it was interesting now, just because the writers are gonna go on strike. And I thought it was just an interesting topic now also, because of that, you know, and how it would affect [UNINTELLIGIBLE] affect people and that. But anyway, I'm... I don't really think that much about the industry and I also don't think... and I think that Hollywood is more of a mindset, instead of a place. So, we could take it from there. I don't know how the rest of you feel about it.

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JEN HOFER: Well, we had thought that... and just to answer your question, as an experimental poet, my mode is always to understand the grammar and then break the

grammar. So, I just read right past that word and decided that I would think about film and sort of the... I was thinking also of commercial film industry, in the ways that it affects the artworks that I care about, and not worry about anybody else's definition of the industry. But we had thought that we might go around again and just, since this is such a small group, like really have just a conversation rather than like, us talking at people. And maybe give an example of... let me just look at my notes. So, one project or piece of art of any sort that either by yourself or by someone else whose work you enjoy that, in some way, interacts with the film industry.

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JEN HOFER: And so, I can start us off. I wanted to give an example from my own work, which is the work that I produced with Mike Holigrant [PH]. But I wanted to start us off with an example that might be known to all of us. So just like, what do we mean when we say, art that interacts with or interfaces with or intertwines with the film industry? So, are people familiar with the Thom Andersen film, Los Angeles Plays Itself? So, for me, that piece is a really good example of a piece that is not, itself, a commercial film by any stretch, but in many, many different ways and very complexly interacts with commercial filmmaking, with the idea of Hollywood, both as place, as concept, as character, as sort of an air that permeates a particular way of making art in order to make his film.

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JEN HOFER: And I see that film as poetry as much as it is film. I see it as essay. I see it as polemic. So, that would be one example. And so, I... we thought we might start by just bringing some artworks into the conversation to sort of help us think about, what do we mean when we're thinking about artwork that, in some way, interacts with film?

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JESSE LERNER: Well, a film like Morgan Fisher's Standard Gauge, right, is not a commercial film by a stretch of imagination, right? It's a 40-minute take of a light table. And on the light table, he puts different pieces of film and he talks about those pieces of

film. And some of them intersect with... some of the things he talks about intersect with, you know, autobiographical. You know, I picked up this film when I was visiting my friend in the projection booth at the such and such theater. Others are more historical references. And other... and as, you know, an experimental filmmaker who also, I think, he has day jobs, occasionally, in the film industry, he intersects with different elements of commercial filmmaking or different places in the production, exhibition, distribution of commercial films.

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JESSE LERNER: But, the end result is this very sort of playful, structural film, experimental film that's all about these little fragments of other films.

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SAM ERENBERG: I grew up in a Hollywood family. My uncle was a film and TV director and my mother worked for ABC News as a researcher. So, there were people in and out of the house from the time I was young. I was invited to some sets as a kid and so, I have fond memories of those experiences. But it really wasn't until I started art school. I went to Chouinard. And my studio is in the curfew zone of the Watts riots. And so, I experienced that firsthand.

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SAM ERENBERG: And since my mother was a social activist as well and worked in South Central LA with gangs, that had a profound influence on me. But it wasn't until years later that I began to make work about that experience. One piece that I... I'm thinking of, that had a direct relation to Hollywood was a piece based on the 1953 sci-fi film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. There was a remake in the last 10 years or so. I found a... it was a project organized by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

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SAM ERENBERG: And I did an installation in the... in an old theater, the State Street Theater, which was turned into an arcade. And of course, at that time, the arcade were

war game videos that kids were playing. And so, I took over the box office and the marquee and I used the old, metal letters that I found that they still had stored from the time it was an active theater. And I got a copy of the original film, which I screened in the box office.

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SAM ERENBERG: And they also made new posters for the display cases in front of the theater. So, it was obviously a kind of tongue in cheek, partly tongue in cheek, but partly serious critique of war and foreign policy. And I believe that was... I believe the original film was a British and American production.

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MARIA BODMANN: I was drawn to this discussion because the artform that I do, Balinese Wayang Kulit shadow play, traditional. It's ritual entertainment, which is something I don't know... I mean, maybe in church you might have ritual entertainment, but maybe not. It was also the first screen entertainment known to man, where you had a screen and a lamp. And you had characters that have holes in them, and you play between the screen and the lamp and you tell a story. And I had a [UNINTELLIGIBLE] to Bali and I lived there two years in the 80s and learned the art.

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MARIA BODMANN: It's a really difficult art. It's in several languages at the same time... well, several languages, one puppeteer, four live musicians and a couple of assistants with a flame that goes about that high, which we can't do here very often. But I'm also a multidisciplinary artist. I call myself a multi and I'm happy to combine the arts. And that was another thing in Bali, that they combine the arts. They don't put music over here and dance over there and theater over there somewhere. They mix it all up and I feel it's so authentic that way, to have everything live.

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MARIA BODMANN: Maybe not so easy to do here, but my first... what I really wanted to do was take the Balinese shadow play and perform something western, so that people here could understand how a Balinese person sees shadow play, cause they know the story. It's usually the Maja Bharata [PH]. They know the music. They know the jokes. And I also needed to get away from, oh, this is shadow play, you know, or whatever. I don't do hand shadows. So, first of all, people hear puppetry... that's why I call it shadow theater. They think kids.

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MARIA BODMANN: The story that I had to come up with was Alice in Wonderland, because that had all the elements I needed. I divided it into episodes. We played... I had a... I had a four-piece rock and roll band instead of a Gamelan ensemble. And I pretty much, verbatim, used Lewis Carroll's words and made up some of my own nonsense to put in there, cause in the Balinese style, it's... there's an archaic language that only priests and performing artist understand. So, the main characters of the Maja Bharatas speak this high, old language. And the common characters speak Balinese.

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MARIA BODMANN: So, you have two languages going in there already. So, the nonsense kind of was the foreign language for here. And I came up with Alice in the Shadows, and I hope it achieved my desire to have westerners understand the story. I had to do some translation, because some of Lewis Carroll's words are archaic at the, you know, some... I can't think of one off hand, but some of the things, we don't have those things anymore or we don't use those words anymore. But that's how I felt it fit in with cinematography. It's also live animation of sorts, without a stop motion.

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MARIA BODMANN: And so, here I am.

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JEN HOFER: So, I wanted to talk briefly about this practice that... and I don't necessarily wanna talk about it, but I was involved in a puppet theater collective for many years here called Sunset Chronicles. And one of the main sites that we used was the old Kim Sing Theater in Chinatown. So, just to say, you're not the only person in this conversation who participated in puppetry not for children, although it wasn't not for children. It just was also... was for all kinds of people.

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MARIA BODMANN: Mine too. Mine too.

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JEN HOFER: But, I'm actually resonating a lot, Sam, with your description of your work, because much of the work that I do... some of the work that I do in my poetic practice has to do with filtering through the ways that language becomes militarized and military thinking and a sort of permanent state of war is normalized through language. And using writing from within that language to critique that language and that mindset and then, the kinds of foreign policy that result from that mind set.

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SAM ERENBERG: It wasn't until years later that I discovered Guy Debord and his treaties on... I forget the title. It's a complicated title. On Watson [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. And I actually made a piece. I actually copied the entire written piece, letter by letter by stamping each letter on... into 18 panels of wood. And so, you know, this kind of history about race. And since I grew up in south... was south Los Angeles, Baldwin Hills, really, and not South Central, I was exposed to different ethnicities.

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SAM ERENBERG: And so, that had a pretty strong effect on my work. the piece I made for COLA was about military intervention, called Mementos. And they were painting and not film, and so I really stopped making film in the 70s, essentially, but...

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JEN HOFER: Well, the piece I made for COLA was about water.

SAM ERENBERG: Yes.

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JEN HOFER: But, and thirst and lack of water and drought. But the form that I was using is called live film narration and I might explain it even if you all are familiar with it, just in case someone ever watches this and doesn't know what live film narration is. Some people also refer to it as neo-benchi. I don't tend to use that term. But a benchi, in Japanese culture, in the silent movie era, was a film talker. So, there would be a silent film and then let's say, the very famous benchi, Jesse Lerner would be performing all of the parts and saying everything that happened in the film. And then when the talkies came along, the benchi no longer had a role to play, but they were very famous. They were stars. They were like movie stars. And with Japanese colonialism, imperialism in Korea, that also... that tradition also extended to Korea. It was called [KOREAN] in Korea and extended to some other places as well, in east Asia.

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JEN HOFER: Jumping forward, close to 100 years, some poets and artists in various places, Walter Lou [PH]. Konrad Steiner [PH], a few other people, started doing this practice where they would take a clip from a film, mute the sound and re-narrate the film. So, it was, in a sense, very different from benchi or [KOREAN] in that they weren't trying to tell the story of the film, because obviously, you can just watch the film for that. But it's a practice where you are using the image to generate the work that you're making as a

writer and then performing back with the image playing alongside. So, that's what I did... that's part of what I did with the grant that I had for COLA was to be able to make a completely new work, research-based, and then perform it at [UNINTELLIGIBLE] performances. It was the first time I made a multi-voiced piece, which was amazing.

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JEN HOFER: But, the first ever live film narration pieces I did were two, what I think of as atomic noir. A 1959 film on the beach, which is about nuclear apocalypse, nice, uplifting film. And Kiss Me Deadly. And so, I collaged pieces from those films to be about, I don't know, 13 or 14 minutes long. That's the length of my piece. And then wrote back into those pieces. And those pieces specifically are about militarized language and sort of, from an... obviously, anti-militarized standpoint. But so, they're obvious... I mean, it's probably obvious from the description, very intimately connected, less...

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JEN HOFER: Well, maybe actually, in some ways, with the commercial-ness of the film industry, to take a very... like noir is a very iconic, formulaic form. It's a commercial form. It has all kinds of ideological underpinnings, and then kind of undo it from the inside, which is... you could also think of as a kind of translation. But it's also using film in a completely different way, less as entertainment and more as something to sort of take apart and then remake into poetry and sort of defamiliarize on purpose. So, we had one other thought that... and you've maybe spoken to this a tiny bit, but to just maybe, if each of us wants to go around and say a question that we come to this conversations with.

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JEN HOFER: What brought you here or what kinds of questions do you... does each of us have about the ways that artistic practice of different sorts can interact with film, and that maybe we would use those questions to fuel the rest of our conversation.

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SAM ERENBERG: I'll start. Like Jesse, I began in experimental film and but I was not aware that it was serious work, because the art world wasn't exactly enthusiastic about my experimental films in the late 60s and 70s, so they went into storage for 35 years. And a fellow who run the... John Wyatt, who runs the Forever.... The Hollywood Forever Cemetery, got ahold of some. And so, they ultimately landed up in the last Pacific Standard Time time that the film forum did.

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SAM ERENBERG: And so, some of... when I made them, they were... I didn't think of any... of any area that I was exploring, for instance, political, social. They were just kind of spur of the moment, experimental films that I didn't really think about before [UNINTELLIGIBLE] I would have an idea during the day and, if I needed somebody to work on them with me, I would try and find them. And that's how they were made. And the art world did change, of course, in the... you know, when... on the onset of video.

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SAM ERENBERG: And so, I guess the question is, why hasn't the art... the Los Angeles... I didn't actually bring a question, but now that you're asking, why hasn't the film industry... and when I say film industry, I mean Hollywood, experiemmental, documentary industry here in Los Angeles, and that's film and TV, why has that not integrated more with the art world?

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MARIA BODMANN: That's a great question. I mean, just a quick response. It's not commercial. But it would be a wonderful thing.

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JESSE LERNER: But there's, there's a part of the art world that is commercial, right? There are commercial galleries that make lots of money selling paintings that, you know,

maybe the... maybe what you're doing doesn't fit very well into something that can be commodified, but...

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MARIA BODMANN: All of the artist friends that I have aren't doing...

JESSE LERNER: Are making the wrong...

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JEN HOFER: Surely, that speaks well of you.

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JESSE LERNER: But it's not that it doesn't exist, right?

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MARIA BODMANN: Right, exactly. Yeah, for sure.

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EILEEN COWIN: I don't know how they wouldn't... how it wouldn't be integrated in. I don't know, because well, they're both about making money. The art world now is about making money and I think the film industry is about making money. I was reading this morning, there's a new film coming out called The Circle, based on Dave Eggers' books and it's with Tom Hanks. And the whole article was whether or not it would surpass The Fate and the Fury in terms of sales. That was the whole article. It was all about; will this film make more money? You know, will it surpass it as number one in the box office?

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EILEEN COWIN: So, I don't see how the art world would fit into that. But the art world, which is a separate, little world, also is about making money, only, right? The gallery

world, you know. And I sent Jen a quote this morning, but of course I didn't print it out, Jen... about Damien Hirst talking about how he's kind of reared his ugly head again in the art world. And he has [UNINTELLIGIBLE] show in Venice and it talked about how kitsch his work is. And it... and then it said, it's not just this or it's not... it's very Hollywood. You know, it's not just this kitsch. It's not... but it's very Hollywood.

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EILEEN COWIN: So, it's just, again, this idea about... the stereotypical idea about what Hollywood is. But I don't usually think that things, you know, especially commercial aspects kind of go back and forth like that. I don't think they do.

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SAM ERENBERG: Well, one reason I brought this up is the painting that I made in COLA were picked for the Irish [UNINTELLIGIBLE] International. It was curated by Koyo Kul [PH] from Senegal. And so, the moving images in the biennial were all very... they were... with a couple of exceptions, they were all very... they felt kind of grassroots, the force of grassroots. And their production value was deemphasized, like a lot of video art I see today, especially in museums and in biennials.

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SAM ERENBERG: And there was something really authentic about it, many, perhaps because they didn't have... the artist didn't have money to really create the production value. It was more... it was mostly, I would say, talking heads that were exploring the ideas that you were talking about in your own work. And so, I see less of that happening here in Los Angeles than I do in other countries when I go and look at art. And so, perhaps you have some comments about that.

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JESSE LERNER: Well, I guess, I would suggest that maybe there's more than one art world, right, that there's part of the art world that's... you'd find at Gagosian and these

other sort of blue-chip galleries, where... and I'm not going to, you know, dismiss it out of hand. Some of the work there, we might like a lot, but it is about buying and selling commodities. And it's not just about money, but there's an equation... there's money in the equation. And then, there are other parts of the art world where you might have harder time turning a shadow performance into a commodity. So, it just isn't going to attract that particular... you know. the blue-chip galleries aren't gonna be knocking down your door and seeing who's gonna get you signed first.

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JESSE LERNER: And the same thing might be true for the world of moving images, that there are parts that are about, you know, whether you're gonna surpass *The Fate of the Furious* box office or not and if it isn't, then... if it doesn't, then it's not a success. And then there are other kinds of moving images that, you know, might be about something else. And you know, certainly nobody made an experimental film thinking that this was gonna be their... you know, their meal ticket for the next week or weekend even, right? So, and I guess, in terms of my relationship to that industry, I mean, I feel like, especially in conversation with filmmakers in other parts of the country, you know, I sort of benefit from having all that infrastructure.

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JESSE LERNER: I make films and, you know, the fact that there are labs and places that, you know, repair cameras or rent you the lens or, you know, find you the tripod that you need for one particular shot, they're all over the place here. It's really an advantage, compared to trying to make films in, you know, rural Uruguay or something like that where that infrastructure doesn't exist. So, maybe, you know, I go in those places and I'm a little bit of a freak in that, you know, they can tell that I'm not coming from a big studio, and yet I'm too old to be a student, and they're not quite sure how to place me.

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JESSE LERNER: But, you know, they'll certainly take your money and be happy to have you as a customer.

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JEN HOFER: Were you gonna say something?

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EILEEN COWIN: I was just gonna mention what you said about something being authentic, because it sort of had a grassroots kind of approach. And I think that, sometimes you'll look at something and I'll go, oh, high production, you know, this... and I kinda like those high production things, myself. But I remember when Peter Sellers, the director not the Pink Panther and Bill Viola were in a conversation at the Getty. And Peter Sellers was saying, kind of not outright, but inferring, he liked the work that Bill Viola did early on, because it felt, I guess, authentic. And the work he's doing now was such high production, it seemed a little chillier, little more removed.

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EILEEN COWIN: And I thought that was interesting, to me, because now, all of us can do high production work, because the cameras are so much better and even handheld camera, you can rent them any... you know, rent them in places and cameras are... the quality's great and that's one thing I think we get from being here is that.

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SAM ERENBERG: I remember looking at Warhol's early films shot in 16 millimeter. And recently, I was in New York and I saw them on a monitor in the gallery and... it really changed the... you know, the sensibility of those films, just being in... just watching them on a kind of slick monitor, compared to having them screened in a theater with also... with other people sitting next to you is quite a different experience.

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JEN HOFER: Well, I was... that sort of leads me back to something I was thinking about in relation to your question about the art world and the film world and, I mean, I have a couple thoughts about that. But one thing, I was thinking about your mention of ritual and ritual entertainment. And then what I wrote down when you were talking about that was to wonder if all art is ritual and if in... I mean, I think in some way, movie-going is ritual, that sitting quietly in the dark with many other people, some of whom... most of whom you probably don't know at all, and then sharing an, often narrative experience or a visual experience of some sort feels like a kind of ritual to me. And poetry feels like a ritual to me.

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JEN HOFER: All kinds of arts, in some ways, feel like a ritual. And I feel like that is a very different way of conceptualizing art in that way, or conceptualizing art as a way to talk back to more... to talk back to the status quo, to talk back to political ideas that we might not agree with, to talk back to the kinds of instruments of information-giving that are trying to tell us to think one way, when we might wish to think another way or encourage others to think another way. That, to me, seems like a very different, and for me, personally, more vibrant conception of art than to think about how my work might travel. Now, this is also a very experimental poet way of thinking about things. And then I also translate experimental poetry from Mexico and Latin America.

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JEN HOFER: So, you know, like four people read my work. Okay. So, I don't have to worry about being commercially successful, and I don't worry about that. What I worry about is, which kinds of conversations am I able to be in because of the work that I make? And how will that work circulate and traffic, not in terms of commercial value or monetary value, but in terms of heart and idea and connections to the grassroots. I work a lot as an activist and think a lot about the ways that people use their agency to make meaning. And that, to me, also feels like art making. So, I think, our conception of what the art world...

art worlds, which I think is a very good way to think about it. Which art worlds we see has a lot to do with which direction we're looking in or sort of what we're valuing.

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JEN HOFER: And then, just finally, I wanted to mention that I was thinking about... while you were talking, Jesse, about the kinds of resources that we have access to because we live in Los Angeles with this industry here, I was thinking a lot about the Echo Park Film Center, which you may be familiar with. It's, as its name suggests, in Echo Park. It's run by Paolo Davanzo and Lisa Marr and many, many other people. It's a large collective of folks. And they do amazing work, both screening films, curating, teaching youth and elders and all kinds of other people about filmmaking skills, both digital and analog. They have all kinds of other resources. They have equipment you can rent. They have films, experimental film you can rent, all kinds of stuff, and they're not solely... their work is by far not solely possible because we're in Los Angeles, but it's made... facilitated, I think, a lot by being in this place specifically, and being, in a sense, in opposition to what we might think of, traditionally, as film culture here.

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JEN HOFER: So, I guess my response to your question or your thought was to sort of be like, okay, yes. And then, how can we be oppositional or how can we be... how can we dissent in a beautiful and artful way?

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SAM ERENBERG: I was radicalized when I first saw the battle of Algiers, but that was 1966. I was 22 years. That was 50 years ago.

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JEN HOFER: So, you haven't been thinking about this for very long, is what you're saying.

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SAM ERENBERG: I still think about it.

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JEN HOFER: Maybe that should be our next question. What radicalized you?

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MARIA BODMANN: I just wanted to talk a little bit more about the ritual, because I find that, as a culture, I don't see the ritual. What you just mentioned, going to the theater is a ritual. I moved up to the valley from Silver Lake for more space for my buck back in 94. And so, I was telling a friend, there's just no ritual in our culture anymore. And she said, well, cruising Sepulveda Boulevard is some kind of a ritual and there even are signs that say, no cruising in this area and stuff. And I think, wow, you know, in Bali... I'm so in tune with Bali, so I... it will always come up.

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MARIA BODMANN: They didn't even have a word for art until the twentieth century, because it was all tied in with ritual and with their religion, which is very strong. And it's a cool religion. It's a combination of Hindu, Buddhist and their original Animism. So, it's all about love and giving thanks and balancing good and evil. And I don't know. I keep trying to figure out the ritual. I'm drawn to ritual. And I feel that maybe, as a society, we would grow or at least grow tolerance if there was a little more ritual in our lives.

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MARIA BODMANN: And I don't think ritual can be commercialized. So, I never did think of... I mean, I know there's commercial art. People design automobiles. There's a vast amount of commercial art, but I was never drawn to that kind of art. I was always drawn to this... I don't know, corporeal, ritualistic art, which combines all the arts, because that wouldn't separate the arts.

00:38:05

EILEEN COWIN: Do you think that Los Angeles, in the age of the internet and... can still be an influence? I mean, do you think that one place can influence? I know, when I mention to people that I was doing this talk, they said, boy, what an old-fashioned topic, they said to me, because...

00:38:25

JEN HOFER: Well, we didn't think of the topic, did we?

00:38:27

EILEEN COWIN: I know we didn't think of the topic. The topic of... they said it was kind of old fashioned because they said, well, you know, we can talk about the history. I mean, I have... I went through all this stuff and I have notes about Joan Didion and I just... oh I'm... god, I just... you know, Raymond Chandler. And I just went through all this stuff and then I thought, but now, I don't know. I don't know if it's the same thing, except these stereotypes do get perpetuated, like what I just said about Damien Hirst and they... how they related to Hollywood. They're... I'm from New York, originally, and there are those stereotypes about New York. When I tell people I'm from New York they go, is it... you know, is it safe to be on the subway at night? I'm going, oh for god sakes, really? Of course it is. You know, but people still have that old idea about what New York was like.

00:39:16

EILEEN COWIN: But when people would say to me about my work, it looks like you're really influenced by Hollywood and the films. I'm going, I don't... I don't think so. I mean, I'm... I was influenced by film, but I saw every kind of film, you know. I mean, one of my favorite films, when I was... I didn't mention [UNINTELLIGIBLE] earlier, but like some film like Wings of Desire, which is not a Hollywood film, you know. But I was also very involved with, you know, film noir. That was another thing, but that was in my photographic work, not so much in my video work. But I just wonder now if LA or New York or... well Ohio has influenced us greatly recently, but in terms of politically.

00:39:57

EILEEN COWIN: But, is... can any one place be an influence now, you know, with an internet and the way things just get seen by everybody, everywhere?

00:40:06

MARIA BODMANN: Well, I remember, back... gosh, I don't remember years. It all becomes a blur, but it was probably the late 80s when I also play Gamelan, besides shadow theater, and we were... our dream was to have a CD. Oh, my god. And if we can get a CD mastered. And then, how many copies will we get? And if we don't play perfectly, we'll have to listen to that mistake for how many years later, you know. And now, I can make a one up CD. You know, the technology has just gone so far that the geographical location almost doesn't matter.

00:40:49

MARIA BODMANN: I'm also from New York, which is why I reacted when you said that. It's very safe to... I used to travel the subway when I was eight years old by myself, you know. I loved it. I don't know what it's like now. I don't wanna know, but...

00:41:04

JESSE LERNER: But, doesn't the location... I mean, even if it doesn't frame your work or your think... your thought process while you're making your work, it's gonna frame the reception, right? Whenever you read an article in the New York Times about something in Los Angeles, there's always like a snide remark about, you know, when those Angelinos get off the freeway and finally get out of their cars, you know, something that is actually happening in Los Angeles, but it's always framed. Even if, you know, the person that they're... whose work they're reviewing doesn't own a car and...

00:41:40

EILEEN COWIN: Well, every once in a while, they even review a show from Los Angeles, and then you get all excited.

00:41:44

JESSE LERNER: I suppose that's progress, but I guess my point is that, even if you're not thinking about how, you know, being... living in the valley is framing your next piece, when you perform that piece, people from outside Los Angeles will say, oh, this isn't the Balinese version of the shadow theater, but rather, an Angelino's take on it. And somehow that's gonna help us understand what it is and what it's about.

00:42:17

MARIA BODMANN: That's totally true and I couldn't have done what I have done with my life in New York. It had to be here. And I... the only place I would ever wanna move to is Bali. I love Los Angeles. Los Angeles I find so supportive. It's also the gateway Asia. Even when I've performed on tours with traditional stuff and, you know, I'm not trying to be Balinese, cause I never will be Balinese in this life anyway. So, sometimes they didn't want this white girl from New York doing Balinese stuff. But I'm a translator, cause the real good Balinese dalang, which are the shadow masters or artists, they can't speak English.

00:43:03

MARIA BODMANN: So, you know, you'll hear a show of [UNINTELLIGIBLE] you know, and blah, blah, blah. Don't you wanna know the story? So, I find myself as more of a translator. But I didn't even think about Bali or is it part of Indonesia or where is it located on the globe, until I went to Cal Arts, actually. But so, yeah. I guess, geographic area is important, but we could do anything anywhere now, as long as we have a connection.

00:43:39

SAM ERENBERG: The... I mentioned my studio being in the curfew zone. So, one night there was a National Guard blockade right at the corner of Adams and Hill. And I looked

out and because there seemed to be some action. And they said, get away from the window. So, but what was interesting about that is I didn't have a camera. I didn't record it. And if I had tried, they would have... probably would have shot at me thinking I was a looter or something. They didn't... I don't know if they knew, I was living... I was living in the loft on the second floor of the building.

00:44:20

SAM ERENBERG: But, I mean, that was kind of the beginning of TV news looking above, if you remember. That was 1965. There had been... later on, I did research about other work I did about surveillance. When I started to do some research about surveillance, especially with the present-day technology, I discovered the history. A lot of that began in... right here in Los Angeles with KTLA. Actually, the war college somewhere, did some... they did research about how the LAPD was and the National Guard and the LAPD interface with each other.

00:45:10

SAM ERENBERG: And part of it was how it was covered by the local news from helicopters above the streets. And so, we see a lot of that now, throughout the world, I mean, especially in areas of conflict and war. And a lot of that began here, I believe. I mean, there... RCA did some experiments with putting cameras in the noses of airplanes in the late 40s, after World War II. But I don't think they ever took it... the media never took it to... I mean, and then the BBC did some similar experiments with it. But I mean, the pervasiveness of covering Los Angeles by the air is certainly part of the lens I use to look at Los Angeles.

00:46:07

SAM ERENBERG: And it's really affected my work.

00:46:12

JEN HOFER: I guess, I wanted to go back to an idea that Maria was talking about, that we could do anything, anywhere. And I guess I'm much more aligned maybe with the way

you're seeming to think about things, Jesse, where... that where we stand or where we make our work from does matter. And yes, there's great dispersal with the internet and just with the moment that we're in in all kinds of ways, and our work can circulate in different ways that, 50 years ago, it would not have been circulating with such ease or a person can... you can post your work online. A person can see it and comment from wherever. Like, obviously, I'm aware of that. But I actually don't think that... first of all, I don't think that we could do anywhere. I don't think the thing would be the same.

00:46:55

JEN HOFER: I don't think the doing would be the same if we were doing it from here versus from New York versus from Mexico City versus from wherever else a person might be. And particularly, if you think about any kind of work that is involved or engaged with grassroots anything, grassroots artmaking, grassroots activism, grassroots education, those roots look different and feel different in the different places where we are. And the people who are doing things are different in different places where we are. And I also think it's not true for everyone, that we can do anything anywhere. I think... and I think it's not true for everyone. Like, the folks who are anxious about safety on the New York City subway, whether that anxiety is baseless or based in reality, who feels anxious in public and why, has become a very different question, I think.

00:47:49

JEN HOFER: Or maybe it's the same question framed differently. Now, in the era of rampant murder of black and brown bodies by the authorities, different kind of rampant murder than what you are talking about in the 60s or what we're... many of us commemorating 25 years since the 92 uprisings. But I think it's... for me, it's really, really important to think about the actual non-universality and specificity of being a particular body occupying a particular subject position in a particular place. And so, that would also mean, to return to our topic perhaps, that the ways that we interface with the artifacts of the culture that are all around us, which in Los Angeles, do have something to do with

Hollywood production and with lots of other things as well, probably are different based on how we receive those artifacts and who we are.

00:48:43

JEN HOFER: I mean, definitely are different based on who we are as we receive those artifacts. And I think it's just really important to keep that in mind. And I brought some poems that had to do with our topic today, but maybe someone else wants to talk while I look for the one I'm thinking of. They're not by me, but by other Los Angeles writers whose work I love.

00:49:00

EILEEN COWIN: Okay. So, when I went, tried to research this topic, which I really didn't research the topic, cause I... the industry thing kind of threw me. So, I was researching this idea of how people thought about LA, just the idea of Los Angeles because it's just such a... it's a very unique place, I think, Los Angeles. Geographically, it's unique. And Harryette Mullen, the poet who Jen knows, when she was giving a talk a couple of weeks ago she said, I still don't understand Los Angeles. It's wonderfully complicated and tragically complicated. So, I love that. And then I found that like, other people have said almost a similar thing. There's always this and that. Like Bertolt Brecht was talking about the very same streets can feel like purgatory or the promise land, all depending on the current status of your Los Angeles dreams.

00:49:52

EILEEN COWIN: So, that... you know, I just... so it really was wonderful to see how people would say, it's either... it's this and that. It can be both at once. And then there was an article. Just, all these articles kept coming up. You know how like, when you all of sudden [UNINTELLIGIBLE] looking... you're not looking for something, but all of sudden, they'll just kind of float around there. And Werner Herzog was saying how he started to... he was going to move to San Francisco, but felt that it wasn't the most exciting place in the

United States. And he said, we wanted to move to the city with the most substance, and it was immediately clear that Los Angeles, that's the place.

00:50:34

EILEEN COWIN: So, I just love that idea that people are thinking, okay, Los Angeles is that exciting place, but it's also tragic and it's also difficult and it's everything.

00:50:46

SAM ERENBERG: I've read accounts of when the film industry, or was it Disney, brought Thomas Mann and Dali and different European artists to work in the film industry. They absolutely hated it here, you know, and they lasted about six months and that was the end of it. But, you know, that was then and this is now. I think... I think New York has had its day. I like to say that.

00:51:21

JEN HOFER: So, I can read this poem or we can have a big New York, LA fight, but...

00:51:26

EILEEN COWIN: I like both places equally.

00:51:29

JEN HOFER: I'm totally joking. I think we have to end soon, so maybe I'll end with this poem, unless somebody else has something they wanna say after I read this poem. But I... this is by... this is from a book called City Terrace Field Manual, which is by Sesshu Foster. I was trying to look on the wall to see if he had gotten a COLA grant, and I actually... I don't know if he has or not, cause I... He did? Great. I'm glad. Well deserved. And it's published by a press called Kaya, which used to be located in New York. They're about twenty-some years old now. They are based here in Los Angeles. They focus on Asian diasporic work. And part of the reason I brought this book... I brought a stack of

books, but part of the reason I brought Sesshu's City Terrace Field Manual is that it is very Los Angeles, but it is a Los Angeles that is often not represented in the ways that, when the world says something like, Damien Hirst's work is so Hollywood or something is referenced as so LA, I'm pretty sure that the consciousness that would say that is not thinking about city terrace or about the kinds of worlds that are described in Sesshu's book.

00:52:29

JEN HOFER: So, I wanted to read a poem that, to me, is very, very Los Angeles, sort of as a way of thinking about counterpoint to some of those more Hollywood-esque ideas. It's about a minute long. I usually warn people, since most people are like, ah, poetry. So, it's about a minute long. Probably not present company, but in general. How to get there. Downhill from the jail where deputies run in training formation. Stragglers staggering up past the school where we played football on the lawn, down the avenue behind plaza market. The wall that cracked open. Willie Herron painted faces of the afflicted breaking through the walls of oppression after Johnny, his brother, in my class, was beaten by gangbangers to the intersection where, years later, I crash Pricilla's car into a truck that ran the red light.

00:53:15

JEN HOFER: The little Honda jumping into the air like a poodle, spraying out an arc of glass, rubber stripping and chrome fittings there. Years before the library was turned into a laundromat, years earlier, past the gas station burnt down, bulldozed, apartments and dusty, narrow shops. In the old days when people went to the farmer's market, replaced by St. Lucy's. Then, across the freeway overpass, where the motorcycle cop hides out in the morning, a right past the onramp, down into the factory district where I walked the railroad tracks with my bloody hand wrapped up in my tee-shirt. Twelve years old, and I wanted revenge for everything they were doing to us, smashing out all the windows I could in the envelope factory, smashing out every window I could until my fist was lacerated to the bone and I wrapped it up and walked.

00:54:01

JEN HOFER: Twelve years old, bleeding through my shirt, through the heatwaves on the railroad tracks in the flat, hot, smoggy sun of all those years. And where are you? Thank you Sesshu.

00:54:18

EILEEN COWIN: Okay, when I got my COLA grant, I had gotten a number of other grants before like NEA grants and all of that. But there's something about the COLA that had this show attached to it where, you know, like a year later, you had this exhibition that was very meaningful for me. And I decided I would make my first single channel video, which I don't know if I would have ever made if I hadn't gotten that grant with that show, and I still feel really good about that.

00:54:46

JESSE LERNER: With my COLA grant, I made a experimental film called [UNINTELLIGIBLE] sublime, maybe an experimental documentary and showed it here, of course, to premiere it, but then it subsequently went around and showed at lots of film festivals including Rotterdam and museums and different sorts of exhibition spaces for film.

00:55:11

JEN HOFER: So, with my COLA grant, I wrote a number of poems, some of which were made... I made into live film narrations and it gave me the opportunity, as I said, to make my first piece with multiple voices. So, I was able to collaborate with actually other folks that got the COLA grant, Douglas Kearney and then someone from Texas [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. And then that work has been performed. It was originally performed at grand performances, but has been performed elsewhere as well. And for me, I mean, I suppose, with any grant, I could technically have made a multi-voiced live film narration

piece, but there's something about... and also, this is not the first support I have ever received, but this was the first support I've ever received specifically as an Angelina. I'm originally from the bay area and I live here on purpose.

00:55:55

JEN HOFER: And so, to be seen by someone other than myself as a Los Angeles artist and validated as such, and to be in the company of such an incredible, incredible group of other artists who've gotten this grant was very meaningful to me. And it inspired me to make work that was specifically based on a very important moment in Los Angeles history. So, the film that I was working through is Chinatown. I was thinking about drought and thirst and water, but this is an iconic film, obviously, about an iconic moment. There it is. Take it, as Mo Holland [PH] might have said or did say. But so, for me, to really start to conceptualize, what does it mean to be an artist, a writer making work in and of Los Angeles, was really, really special.

00:56:42

JEN HOFER: Even more so, the support is great, but this specific form of support was really great, and maybe goes back to what we were talking about in our conversation about what it means to be working from a particular place, that it's not the same to be working from Cypress Park as it is to be working from wherever else.

00:57:02

MARIA BODMANN: The COLA grant actually changed what I do quite a bit, because everything that I was doing from post-college at Cal Arts until then, I was doing work that was either Balinese or derivative. I wasn't doing anything that was just all me. So, I wrote... I'm a three-time cancer survivor and at that time, I was a one-time cancer survivor. And I wrote my cancer story in shadow. And I added elements of things that I had learned at Cal Arts, which like musical [UNINTELLIGIBLE] type of work.

00:57:48

MARIA BODMANN: And that, I had never... I had never mixed all these things before using effects boxes with my voice so that I could sound really like different people. And I don't think I would have done... I don't think I would have done that without the COLA grant. And I love Los Angeles. I would never move back to New York, unless I could live in the Dakota's building. But yeah, so I think California, Los Angeles, I've been here over 40 years and I've been dubbed an honorary native. So, I love it here. I have nothing against LA.

00:58:30

SAM ERENBERG: I'm still working on the project that I exhibited in COLA, zero nine, mementos, historical events. Just a kind of overview of American foreign policy. I'm up to about 400 small, black and white paintings with text now. And they went into storage in 2010, after they were exhibited. And then, as I mentioned before, they were... I took them out and shipped them to Ireland, which was really an extraordinary experience for me, because I had opportunity to meet all these amazing, young artist from Africa, from Asia, Latin America.

00:59:18

SAM ERENBERG: And I'm thankful to the city of Los Angeles for the support that I received. I love New York.

00:59:26

EILEEN COWIN: I like both place. They're both places I like. You're ganging up on me.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]