

COLA20 Salon Conversation #8

Moderated By: Bruce Bauman, Stephen Berens and Katharine Haake
With Alexandra Grant, Sarah Maclay and Susan Silton

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BRUCE BAUMAN: Hi everyone out there in cyberspace. We're here today to speak about our experiences as artists in Los Angeles. Everybody here is a COLA Winner. And we come from various backgrounds and we're just gonna start off by speaking about what it's like to be an artist in Los Angeles and what the COLA perhaps did for you in your art practice. We're gonna start to my right. By the way, I'm Bruce Bauman.

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SUSAN SILTON: Hi I'm Susan Silton. I'm a visual artist who has also had a dual practice in graphic design. So I've been familiar since the '80s with worlds of publishing as well as following my own practice, which takes many forms. Sometimes installation, sometimes photography, sometimes... Often, these days, performative, participatory and publishing projects.

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ALEXANDRA GRANT: I'm Alexandra Grant, visual artist who's practiced, as a painting practice that focuses on exchanges with writers and using literary texts as the source for my images. And over the years, I've gotten to work with pretty extraordinary people like Michael Joyce; the French philosopher, Hélène Cixous, and Keanu Reeves. I have another practice which is a community building philanthropic practice called the grant LOVE project. We're very interested in community building through artist philanthropy and

right now, I'm in the middle of starting a publishing house that's focused on artists' books and it's gonna be called the X-Artist Books [SOUNDS LIKE].

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ALEXANDRA GRANT: And as a visual artist, what I realized is that we really are responsible not only for creating our work but the world and the context, the work needs to fit in and we... I learn this lesson when I had a, my first museum show in L.A., in MOCA Hélène Cixous offered to write an essay for the catalogue that Michael Worthington was designing and certain people within MOCA's hierarchy didn't know who Hélène Cixous was, which every woman on staff, like freaked out. Six months later, they used the Google and realized, wow, this is a very important philosopher. And so when I did a project years later with Hélène, I realized that I needed to create a Cixous reading group. That I was in fact, not only responsible for the work of art but creating a context of reading her work.

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ALEXANDRA GRANT: The group lives on. I don't run it anymore. So very, very interested in how there is such a strong intersection here in L.A. between community building, book publishing, world creating and how artwork functions within that matrix.

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SARAH MACLAY: Hi. I'm Sarah Maclay and I'm, I'm a practicing poet. I've done a lot of other things having to do with various kinds of performance as well over the years and written, written a piece that's kind of at the intersection of theatre and dance. Also, that's been performed a few times. But as I'm listening to you talk, I'm thinking, I'm also a teacher. And I just had a class in the fall that was acrostic poetry class. So part of our practice was to, to go to galleries and museums and explore art of all kinds, broadly interpreted as springboards for varying kinds of, of poems.

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SARAH MACLAY: And I, and a lot of my work increasingly is acrostic also. So there's that kind of interesting, you know, one art feeding another thing. I've also been really especially in the last few year, to be published by a wonderful publishing collective that Kate is actually a part of, What Books Press, in a collaboration that my friend Holaday Mason and I were working on for a long time. A braided collaboration of poems. And, and as well a-another, another publication that just grew out of a workshop that's been running for 20 years, in the form of anthology, with the press in the Bay Area.

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SARAH MACLAY: And have seen a lot of re-reading series, anthology starting to come up and more sort of small independent publishing presses in the last, especially 10 years. So there's sort of this interesting, interesting thing where things that have been going on live are starting to find more, more permanent homes here. As well as, you know, publication in, in journals all over, all over the country.

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KATHARINE HAAKE: I'm Kate Haake. I identify... I guess I have a lot of hats but I identify primarily as a teacher-writer. I have been writing fiction and now non-fiction for, I don't know, for 30 years. I'm a fourth-generation Californian. I... My family comes from Northern California and I never expected to end up in L.A. I came here on a five-year plan, 30 years ago; I had no intention of staying. And it's a city that still completely confuses me. But I would never leave. I think it's an amazing place and one of the reasons why...

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KATHARINE HAAKE: And I've also done a lot of work in creative writing, theory and pedagogy, which has grown out of my 30-year career at California State University, Northridge where I landed somehow, all those years ago, to discover that among my

students... In every cohort of students that I've ever had there were people who were writing as well as any place I had ever seen and that was inspiring to me and, and kind of opened up the idea of this place as a sort of open-ended geography of possibility and talent, really. And I have also been involved in this publishing collective, that you mentioned.

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STEPHEN BERENS: My name is Stephen Berens and I'm a visual artist. I moved here in 1980. I taught for, at university level, for 25 years or maybe more. And while, while teaching I developed a history of modern criticism course. But I think I was invited to be on this panel because I'm one of the co-founders of X-TRA, which is the largest running art criticism publication in the history of Los Angeles. And when I was asked, I actually, I, I suggested I probably was not a good person for this panel because I'm not extremely positive about the way in which our criticism gets funded or is taken, not taken seriously in Los Angeles.

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STEPHEN BERENS: I think there's been a history; you can look at the history of, of failed magazines, art criticism magazines in Los Angeles over the last 25 years. So but I, I co-started this with Ellen Birrell and Jan Tumlir. Because a-as, was already said... I, I think you need to form a context for art and I think that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to form a context for, for the art that happens in Los Angeles. Provide not only what else is going on in the city. But also what's going on in the, the larger world and so that that work gets treated seriously. So I, I think that's really important and so...

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BRUCE BAUMAN: As I have mentioned, my name's Bruce Bauman. I consider myself primarily a novelist and fiction writer. I've written pop criticism, I've taught at Cal Arts in

the MFA and BFA Critical Studies programs and writing programs for 15 years. And I was Senior Editor of Black Clock magazine for its entire 13-year run, which was edited by the great Los Angeles born and raised novelist Steve Erickson. I am myself a born and raised New York City person from Queens. And I moved here in '99 because my wife is from the west, she's also a visual artist, Suzan Woodruff, and she didn't like living in New York as much as I did.

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BRUCE BAUMAN: So we got our resident... She live-, she's from Arizona and then lived here and she'd look out the window and see a sunny sky and I say, "It's 27 degrees, don't believe the sun," you know, she didn't get that. Anyway, we got a residency at 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica, I leave work for a year and I said I would give it a chance and 19 years later I'm still here. And I actually love it here even though most of my friends in New York think I'm lying. And I was actually secretly living in a garret in Brooklyn. I think Los Angeles is a great place to write. I am not sure about some other... I have reservations about other ways the literary world works in Los Angeles.

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BRUCE BAUMAN: That Los Angeles is not got its due for the amount of great art that is being made here, that the east coast still has a rather, should I say, snotty attitude sometimes? But it's getting better. It's a lot better than when I first moved here, I will say that. I can tell a story later about that. So I don't know. I, I think maybe if we just go on our experiences of, of, of L.A. and, and you know, Stephen, maybe start with you 'cause you have more ambivalence than I think some of the other people and I'll go last 'cause I also have ambivalence.

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STEPHEN BERENS: Well I, I think that... Again, I think writing a-and publishing can have a really imp-, it is a really important way of, of providing context but also I think building kinds of communities and, and the, the problem with... One of the problems, I think, with publishing, at least for me, was that you publish something and then you send it out and you don't hear a word back. Right? So that, that as a visual artist who's used to having exhibition up, you've got more feedback. At least I did. So you, you... That... So to, to sort of counter that, one of the other things we've done at X-TRA is really to have, to, to do more and more of that.

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STEPHEN BERENS: So we do between 4 and 20 events a year where... And we, and we go to different parts of the city and we collaborate with museums, non-profit spaces, commercial spaces, and we have readings and, and there were kinds of events around the publication, sometimes, but sometimes not. And I think those are really useful. They bring together and each one, because each one has its own constituency. So we bring some of the people that, that go to a lot of our events in with people who go just to events say at the Armory in Pasadena, there's a group of people that just go there. And so we bring those people together and I think that's one of the important things we're doing. And, and in this upcoming year, it's our 20th anniversary, 20th year of publishing, so we're doing, I think 20, 18 events, something like that, in, in a variety of in-institutions.

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STEPHEN BERENS: And we're, I'm really excited about that. I think the publication as, does what it does, which I think is... Also provide a place of record so that there's so many... One of our main concerns was there were so many important exhibitions happening in Los Angeles. But nobody was writing about them. So that we felt like at least this way, you know, we would have some impact to record certain kinds of exhibitions

that might not be recorded because of a lack of, of other serious sources in the city. So I, I mean, I, I, I'm ambivalent but I, I'm not that I, I don't think it's important. I think it is important.

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ALEXANDRA GRANT: I have a question for you. So first, I wanna say thank you for X-TRA. It was the first place I published an artist project, it was the first place I wrote a review, even though I was late and had to be published online. And it also published a translation of Hélène Cixous' work. Also I think late, so it was online and not in a book. But I'm a painter, not a writer. And –

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STEPHEN BERENS: I think it was it in the publication.

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ALEXANDRA GRANT: Maybe it's in the publication. Anyway, so for me X-TRA has been a real home for experimenting outside of the confines of my painting practice. I'm really grateful for that support. Not just to me, but from other artists. But the reas-, the question I wanna ask is you at some point made the transition from just the magazine to the online world, of which I've been able to publish on both through X-TRA. Can you talk a little bit about what happens next? Is it videos? Is it blogs? Like where do you see... 'Cause it must have been a big transition to move into the, onto the internet for you guys and then do you see another transitional phase coming up in terms of publishing to respond to, you know, how millennials perceive things or you know...

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STEPHEN BERENS: I, I, I, I don't have the answer. If I had the answer, I, I... We would be read by a lot more people. But it's not that we're not, we're making efforts and we are

over this... We have a couple of grants over the next year and a half to actually work on that and because we don't have, we haven't made the end roads that we could make. I mean we have a lot of material on... We have enormous amount of material online. We have with... You know, I don't know the numbers, like 70,000 people go there a year, different people. So people go but, but... Well we'd like to do, we'd like it to have, as you said, I think a real presence online. So we're working...

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STEPHEN BERENS: We just, we're in the, we're in the first phase of... I don't know how many phases, we're in this first phase and we've had somebody come in and look at what we're doing and it's gonna help us reorganize things and figure out how to get the stuff that we have out there more. But then our next phase is gonna be to figure out how to generate more online content so that... And some things could be as simple as, right now, the publication comes out four times a year a-and so everything gets released at once. So a simple thing would be to re-, to release the articles when they're done and then have them compiled in the publication. So that it, you could reach more people. 'Cause it... My experience is...

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STEPHEN BERENS: I mean you have to have a real presence in art. You have to... You can't do something every four months and expect anybody to pay attention. So to ma-, it is a different thing. So I, I don't have the expertise but we're hoping to work with, we have to identify people you wanna work with, who are gonna try to help us do that. But maybe you... Are your publishing ventures doing more or not?

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BRUCE BAUMAN: I actually have a lot to say about this because Black Clock was a print magazine. And our circulation, you know, it was a few thousand, it was really good for a

literary magazine. But we... There was an article by Jeff VanderMeer in LitHub about who owns what on the digital thing, digital world and writes when, when we had Don DeLillo in the magazine, we got to publish it once. We couldn't put it on the line and other famous writers, they went right back to them. So we couldn't put the magazine online for that reason without getting all kinds of crazy permissions. I think the world is really going to change in that. I know say, I think it's a great thing for Los Angeles writing community. I, I can't speak to the art community because it doesn't matter if you're in New York, LARB is now reaching all over the world.

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BRUCE BAUMAN: It's one of the most widely read publications about the literary world. I put something on their blog, you know, a song in the... Song, Old Songs for the New Resistance like ba-, like you know, screwing Trump. And it got read in one day more than probably everything else I've ever published in my life. 'Cause it was shared like a hundred times and that, that has changed the way, I think, it's... I think it's a threat to, when you're publishing, which I can talk more about later. But I also think it's both a great thing for writers and potentially a bad thing for writing because of the need for content. There's so much shit on so many of these lit blogs now. People aren't copy-editing.

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BRUCE BAUMAN: They just need content. So I think we're at a crossroad that could be really good, really detrimental to, to, to the future of art and of writing around the world. And I don't have an answer but some mornings I'm really pessimistic. Other times, I think, that we're going down. George Orwell wrote an essay in 1948 about language and how it can lead to fascism and that the English language is in a bad way and if you listen to our president, it's in a worse way than you can ever imagine. And I think that's really dangerous.

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SUSAN SILTON: So it's, it's, it's challenging 'cause we come from different constituencies. But having been here all my life and been here since a practicing designer and, and artist since the '80s, I've seen issues come and go, magazine projects come and go, I mean it has been astonishing that X-TRA continues to find new ground, you know. And, and it is a gem, really in, in the community. No, it's true. Both because you survive and also because of the approaches that you take.

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SUSAN SILTON: My ambivalence is about the city a little bit but in terms of... I mean I wanna say two things, one is, is about something a little bit more positive which is about the possibility that is inherent in the city. And that I think is due to, to some extent trying to navigate the large typography of it. I mean if we look at just at, at Rouchette [PHONETIC] and the kind of projects that he was interested in early on, publishing projects. That was about navigating, traversing literally this, the city and cataloguing it. But zines have always been a huge part of, of the city.

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SUSAN SILTON: And you know, artist books have always been a part of the city. Judith Hochberg was an early supporter, she was a, I think she was the librarian actually. I'm, I'm not sure but she was an educator and very devoted to, to the proliferation and cultivation of artist books for example. One of the things that I think is, i-it can be detrimental is the way in which, I mean from an envi-environmental standpoint, it's a positive thing. That for example, paper isn't used to the same extent. I mean when I was a tot, we had no ideas about, about this, you know, in terms of preservation of, of a tree.

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SUSAN SILTON: And I still, to this day, love the smell of a book that's been printed in offset versus a digital, a digitally printed book. I just, I see the differences and I find them unsettling because I like print. And one of the things that I think is kind of dangerous is the way, is the way in which, for example, you just say how many likes, how, how much, it, it, this piece was, was read. The way in which we're cataloguing everything according to these kinds of successes. When the success is really to stay in some way vital and alive.

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SUSAN SILTON: And what does that mean? I mean does that mean that it is required to have the, the, the largest kind of circulation possible that, that didn't use to be the case. I mean circulation has always made a difference but it didn't mean that you couldn't publish.

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BRUCE BAUMAN: Oh yeah it did.

SUSAN SILTON: Always?

BRUCE BAUMAN: Oh yeah, it did.

SUSAN SILTON: Well...

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BRUCE BAUMAN: It's gotten much, much worse. But if you, if you, if you didn't publish or sell i-in, i-in novel writing, I can't speak to some of the other stuff, if you didn't sell a certain amount of books, I don't care if it was 1930, you had a hard time getting a contract after a while. And it's, it's now much worse for the big New York publishing. But... And, and, and,

and, and yes, I agree that, you know, that the thing that got ISA [SOUNDS LIKE] the most shares or whatever, I wrote that literally in 12 hours. I wrote a book that's 650 pages that took me nine years to have maybe 5,000 people have read.

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BRUCE BAUMAN: And I, you know, that book is worth my entire life that other beast, I'll probably never think about again. So that, there is always that, that contradiction in wanting to have readers and wanting to do quality work and understanding that there is a romance maybe in writing and I love writing as much as I love anything in the world. But there's a business aspect to it and if you're involved in trying to have readers of novels, you are aware of that. I know a lot of... We're all older here. Sorry to say that. But, but, but, but I know a lot of writers in their fifties and sixties who have published a bunch of books who cannot get published anymore because they did not have sales.

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BRUCE BAUMAN: And that's just, that's just fact. And, and, and –

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SUSAN SILTON: And I think that's... Yeah, that is probably always been a reality. It's just how we...

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BRUCE BAUMAN: It's, it's, it's how we perceive it and how the... I'll, I'll, I'll shut up in a second 'cause Kate should talk, is, you know, my young students have a completely different attitude. None of them, that I know for the last number of years, actually read the physical newspaper. And I still get the New York Times and L.A. Times delivered, you know. And so I can't comprehend how they do things and how they see the written word in the same way that I do. And I think that is a huge change and I think Los Angeles is

actually a place because it's always been a place for something new and different. And, and strange ideas that come out of here, you know.

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BRUCE BAUMAN: Wallace Berman probably could never have thrived in New York, to me. So we're on the verge of stuff here that I don't... I'm too old to figure out and just hope it comes out for the best.

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KATHARINE HAAKE: I'm excited. I mean I'm very ambivalent but I'm also really excited. Because first... You know, depends on what counts as success. And I identified initially as a teacher/writer because, because... I also learned [UNINTELLIGIBLE] that writing, you know, that writing has a value in people's lives that doesn't necessarily have to do with publication. And it doesn't necessarily have to do with having a readership even or wide readership. And I, when I started to think about teaching, I started to think about what really mattered to me was framing, framing sort of paths that students, or helping students frame the guiding questions that would stay in writing for them.

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KATHARINE HAAKE: And I really, really, really am committed to the idea of a sustainable literary practice. And a sustainable literary practice is completely impossible if we define success as being published by certain, you know, top-down hierarchical blue chip publishing kinds of traditional means. So what I'm excited about and also ambivalent about because sure there's a quality issue. But the quality issue is not, you know, that, that, that's a quality issue for the larger sort of art community. For the communities that are sort of emerging in L.A., the diverse, the geographically, the ethnically, the culturally diverse communities that are sort of emerging and, and starting their own publishing endeavors, which is possible now.

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KATHARINE HAAKE: Because first because of the internet and second because of new technology that allow people to publish books like this collective that I win, that I'm a part of, that I went into. Intensely ambivalent but we, we really took our queue from the young people, right? And, and, and there were, I don't know, seven or eight of us to begin with and all of us had published multiple books in a variety of like, you know, mainstream venues from New York to academic presses to literary presses and could we have gotten published, probably we could have. But we were just tired of the slog, and the slog and the business of being a writer and it seems like... And somebody was demanded enough to say, "Well we can make books."

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KATHARINE HAAKE: And we had the great good gift of having the artist Gronk as a member of the collective, which has been, for me, probably the... I mean what, I mean one really great thing about it is like discovering new writers and new people that I didn't know about and being able to bring their work into the world but the other really great thing is working with Gronk and who, with a generosity that's almost astonishing to me provides us with all the work of arts for our books. So those are some of the reasons why I'm so excited.

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SARAH MACLAY: I guess I'm... It's, it's interesting. I'm coming at, at this from a kind of different vantage point for two reasons. One, I'm a poet. And so one of the wonderful things about being a poet, ultimately, is that we don't have that, I think terrible pressure that novelists have, you know, to, to write something that's going to... 'Cause it's a real thing, you know. I mean it's a real for novelists, it's real for screenwriters. All my screenwriter friends who are, you know, like sometimes they'll have amazing things that

are in turnaround for 10 years, you know. Or, or are owned by, by companies and they can't get them out. And I also never thought I would live in Los Angeles.

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SARAH MACLAY: And I've, I'm from Montana, originally. I grew up on a ranch. And then I went to Overland. You know, so you know, I, I was thinking about living in a, in a hallway, literally in a hallway. I was gonna rent a hallway for 160 bucks when I got out of college in, in Brooklyn and I decided to go back to Montana at first and then, you know, ultimately went to Seattle and ended up here. Not thinking that I would, would stay necessarily. And I've done sort of things in the, in the industry and other things just to make a living of different kinds. But what surprised me a lot about Los Angeles is that there's this growing, thriving poetry scene that, that kind of continues, that I've become a part of. And it came out initially of workshops at [UNINTELLIGIBLE], workshops in bookstores.

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SARAH MACLAY: Other kind of private salons that people were kind of putting together, you know, as well as, as... I, I teach it Loyola Mary-Marymount University and I've been there since 2005 and I have been at USC also a little bit. But, you know, so there's that kind of also, you know, the university, the universities that we have bring some really terrific writers as well. And, and that's part of it but I mean it's, it's, it's really strange to me sometimes to think that I probably would not have written the majority, maybe any of the now for full links [SOUNDS LIKE], you know, in various chapbooks that I, that I have. Without workshop. Because it provides a sort of soft deadline, it's not, you know, like super scary but it's kinda like you don't wanna be the only person who doesn't bring the salad to potluck or you know, whatever.

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SARAH MACLAY: And there's sparring and there's that feedback that you were talking about, which is, you know. In, in literary world, as well, you can feel isolated. So there's this sort of interesting dance between when you're having your solitude and when you're sharing and giving feedback. And, and there's really quite a, a lot of stuff going here and over the more than 20 years that I've kind of gotten back into poetry after being out of it for a while, excuse me, one of the really interesting things is that it is kinda like a movable feast. I mean we actually, you know, there, there is a kind of, there, there, there's a community that, you know, will travel across town. Not always 'cause it's getting harder now, you know, it is but, you know, but, but mostly we'll travel across town to, to hear each other and, and support each other and hearing your work.

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SARAH MACLAY: And, or to take a, you know, a certain kind of workshop. And then the, the, the publishing that I'm seeing kind of coming out of that and also... Students, student publishing is also inspiring to me. There's a lot of actually really good work that I'm seeing being published at the student level, you know. So, so I'm kind of coming at it from, it feels like from, you know, from the ground up in a way. But with this huge relief that, that I'll never have that pressure, you know, and, and that there's this, there's this joy in knowing that there's sort of a sustained small passionate audience for, for, you know, for my work and we are for each other's. But that, it also, it seems to keep growing and connecting with, you know, publishers in New York and, and other places across the country.

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BRUCE BAUMAN: Well that, that's a contradiction, as a writer... I became a writer 'cause I like being alone. And, you know, when I said I spent nine years writing novel, the only conversations I had outside of my classroom for most of the time were with my wife, otherwise it's with my 70 characters in the book. So there's that and then doing Black

Clock, where we published a lot of famous people but we also published 250 people over the 13 years who had never been published before. A lot of students and that, that's extraordinarily exciting and our readings, we'd get over a hundred people and there were big parties, you know. They have readings and then we'd drink and that was good, that was great.

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BRUCE BAUMAN: And so it, it's the contradiction as a writer. You become a writer and it's the most fun I have in my life being alone in my studio and then I have to face the world, this is what I've done and there is pressure. I, I believe that. You know, poets if... You know, you guys sell a thousand copies of your book, man you're on the bestseller poetry list. You sell a thousand copies of a novel, if it's published at a bigger press, wave bye-bye. So I, I mean, there, there's, there's all of that but if you don't love writing, if you don't love art, fuck it. There's no reason to, to even be talking about this. And then the question is, you know, what you want from it and there's a quality of a lot of readers and then there's a quality of just having a few really great readers, you know, the best things that I get are with somebody I know who sends me a great email.

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BRUCE BAUMAN: The worst thing is when somebody gives me a really shitty review. So I don't know.

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KATHARINE HAAKE: Boy, I'd take a review. No...

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ALEXANDRA GRANT: I'm gonna just change the flow a little bit into something that I just it's an example. And I'm wondering what you all think about it, which is I was very

surprised and delighted to see that Chris Kraus wonderful book, I Love Dick, was picked up by Jill Solway and it's gonna be her next big TV show on Amazon. I got to go to the premiere last week and I, I remember thinking when, when the book first came out like this is awesome, what the hell is this book? The community around I Love Dick, this kind of criticality of the role of the, the male guru, kind of making fun of Marfa, which I think more of that should be done.

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ALEXANDRA GRANT: The, the, the female gaze is like put in that language and then they can... Cool, Chris Kraus is one of our like heroines here in L.A. but she's, you know, known in certain circles. And then the next thing I knew, it's like, no, no. There's this amazing TV producer, writer who's gonna turn it into a TV show. And part of it has to do with the rise of authorship in HBO and Amazon, the breakdown of TV and movies as we know it. The fact that things can be made for a niche audiences. Part of it has to do with Jill Solway's extraordinary leadership. But what do you guys think about this? The fact that you have a Chris Kraus book that's being made into a TV show. I mean it's pretty exciting, you know.

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ALEXANDRA GRANT: In terms of like that relationship of book to world building and the sort of changing economies of both the publishing industry and the television industry and then my, like other overarching question is because I have only lived in L.A. since 2001 so I still feel like the newest member of our community here, which is... How has being near Hollywood affected your practices? Because I, you know, I go in right now and everyone else is writing a script, you know. It's like, you know, any cafe, all the other writers, it seems are... And there's this other economy in terms of language. So, so I just... First the Chris Kraus question and then it's the Hollywood in publishing historically in your experiences. If anyone...

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BRUCE BAUMAN: If you guys wanna talk about... Talk... Go ahead.

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SUSAN SILTON: Well, I think it's fantastic. I mean it's, it's kind of unsettling that she would be mainstreamed in a way. And I guess time will, will tell if that's in my mind positive, or not. I think oddly enough we're living at a time when things like that so contradict the, the larger, the meta narrative right now. The fact that I Love Dick can be a mainstream HBO series or that, or that there's clear marriage, you know. And that that became a reality in my lifetime when I never imagined that it would or really or cared that much.

00:38:50

SUSAN SILTON: So I think that's kind of interesting the way in which those two things are contradictory or oppositionally in some way. But I think it's fantastic that there are people who are in, in positions now in which things like that can be made. Of course, there's now, also, si-simultaneously conversations about, for example, there's some controversy about The Handmaid's Tale and the way in which that's being brought to us by, by men and the contradiction in-inherent in that choice. Even though there are many female writers, directors associated with that project, it's still... The women are still answering to men in a tale that is entirely about the oppression of, of women by patriarchal culture.

00:39:51

SUSAN SILTON: So there's that. Your second question was about the relationship to Hollywood, right? And I think it's undeniable that, for me, anyway, that Hollywood is a, is constantly informing my, my work. I mean both for positive and, and for negative. How could it not? I mean, again, if we look at, at art, art practice, I mean the, the, the industry has created artists and informed the work that, that comes out of, of everything that, that we do here. I think we can't get away from the, the culture that exists here, that, that is

Hollywood based. I mean and all we need to do is look at the kinds of, kind of projects that I mean, for example, you know MOCA is doing with Jeff Koons, right now.

00:41:04

SUSAN SILTON: Or, you know, the, the gala and you know, it's a celebrity filled moment in, in really everything and in, and in, that includes the White House. So anyway...

00:41:23

KATHARINE HAAKE: Well not in the privacy of your own study and you know, I... It's true. If... In L.A. if you say that you're a writer, people expect that you're writing screenplays. But I always think of this moment, I was, I think it was 1975 saw Bella Canta, my class at Stanford and said that his was the first generation of writers that took on themselves the challenge of writing a fiction that could not be filmed. And, and, and that may well have been true of course, very shortly after that, the next generation of writers was desperately writing stuff that could be made into movies. But I think that's very bad for writing.

00:42:11

KATHARINE HAAKE: I, I must... You know, you said you're a poet. I'm a sentence writer, you know, so I never had the illusion that I was going to like write something that was gonna be commercial or marketable, you know. So at some level, for me, writing is the most important. It's, you know, that's what... It's a thing. That's... You said you love it, you know, I do it because it's like... The thing... The only thing, I don't know, it's a wa-, the way that you like find meaning in the world. The person that you are when you're making it, you know. So I don't think about Hollywood at all. I, I do specialize in writing fiction that no one can read. So there's that.

00:42:59

KATHARINE HAAKE: But whatever. Somebody wanna take this?

00:43:04

BRUCE BAUMAN: I mean... I think first about Chris Kraus, I think that's great. I teach at CalArts, Dick was there before I ever got there but I've heard legendary stories. I can't... I've watched the first episode, I thought it was terrific. I can't wait to watch the rest. But I think it, it's great that this happened but to me it's, it's very much in the history of America where people who are outsiders, whether it's the beach 20 years later, you know, they're insiders. And, and... That has happened throughout our sort of cultural history, I think. And so that is farther outside than almost anything else that's come before. But hey then... That, that... Is it Amazon that's doing it?

00:43:49

BRUCE BAUMAN: That's fucking great. I, I mean more power to it because so many people who were... Have never read Chris Kraus, will now be exposed to that and that can only be a good thing and I'm not talking from a business commercial aspect. I'm talking from a point of view that it can make people think about things in the way they never thought about before. The same way that trans-, [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. So, so I think that's great. And from the perspective in my own work, I would love it if somebody made a book of mine... I'm not gonna lie. If my first book was optioned, never, I knew it was never gonna happen but it made my mom really happy to read about it.

00:44:40

BRUCE BAUMAN: And that was great. But you know, I was actually told this, how does it... I was asked this. How does it feel to wri-, written a book that can't be possibly be summarized, ever? And I said, "Terrific. Except the marketing department hates it." And, a-and I know it probably won't get sold and there are things. But when I'm writing about

it. Just... I'm with you. I never fucking think about that. These guys, for one second, 'cause if I did, I think it would screw up my head. No, really. It would... The characters would stop being themselves and they would start thinking about being on screen and that is the worst thing for a writer to do. So you know, I can live the rest of my life without publishing.

00:45:26

BRUCE BAUMAN: I could not live the rest of my life without writing all the time and there's a... That's where my separation between the two is. And, and I, and, and it's a very tough thing for me to walk that line sometimes actually. When I've finished a book, not while I'm writing it.

00:45:50

SARAH MACLAY: I, I think it's great that, that projects like Chris Kraus is in and others that have been kind of in the air are finding, you know, interest and, and, and niche marketing or whatever. I think it's, I think it's terrific. I wanted to focus on the other part of your question. When I was first here, I had been working with the Seattle International Film Festival. And sort of came to the city, very, very interested especially in foreign film and independent American film. And you know, kind of knowing a lot of people and, and pursuing various avenues at that. And was very interested in it. Although a lot of it was being made at that time was not that, you know, so there was this sort of dissonance, you know, in terms of what was really interesting.

00:46:42

SARAH MACLAY: To me, because I was kind of like a Birdman lover and Lynch and, you know, and a lot of that was in having vendors. But there was this moment where I had fallen out of even thinking that I could write poetry and it was probably because I'd gotten so much more involved in the narrative side of things. And some of my poems are narrative but most of them are more lyric and, and I, through various strange

circumstances got kind of lead back to, to poetry really not knowing what I was gonna write after being away for a long time. Jumped in and, and it was like, all the time, it was like no time had passed b-, for about 15 years that I had been away.

00:47:31

SARAH MACLAY: But I had all this experience and it was this very renewing thing and I was hanging out with some, some friends who were working in the industry and we were on the beach one day and they asked... Somebody asked me, what I did, which I'd come to dread as a question, when I wasn't doing something that, you know, that, that felt like it was worthwhile in that universe. And I said I'm a poet and it was so freeing because nobody had any idea what to do with me, you know, it was like I had just thrown the shoe into the mac-, into the machine. Because there was no way to turn it into something that had utility in, from a certain point of view. So it, it was really, it was really wonderful, you know. Sort of existentially.

00:48:23

SARAH MACLAY: But it, it has that, that all that other value that, you know, that we've been talking about. And one of the interesting things about going back into the workshop space was that a lot of people who were there had also been involved in the industry as editors or actors or, or other things and so, you know, because of that like one of my, my friends wri-writes these really, really long poems with a very strong sense of editing. 'Cause she spent so many years as an editor, that's just part of, part of it. Another friend who's an actor has a sort of very amazing sense of comic timing and, and, you know, and, and sort of performance. For me, it's, it has to do with seeing I'm, I'm always fascinated with camera angles and, and we, we're talking the other night about the sense the liminality that moves like the dissolve and other things can, you know, produce, can render in the world of film.

00:49:25

SARAH MACLAY: And that's sort of dear to my poetic heart. But the other thing was that, I think, everybody who was in the workshop doing their own work once a week, hearing each other's work once a week, had the freedom of not having to wait for someone to green light a project, you know. It was just, it was, it was just something that you could go back to and, and improve on and work on all the time. And so there was, there was a sort of interesting tension between the commercial rules really of Hollywood and what could be done outside of that among a group of people who just were really committed to their art form. That was, you know, was interesting.

00:50:11

BRUCE BAUMAN: I just wanna tell one quick story then I have a question for Stephen. When I first moved here, I went to eat lunch at a coffee shop with a friend. And we're talking about our agents and the waitress said, "You two guys have agents?" And we said, "Yeah, book agents." And she walked away 'cause she was writing a screenplay but my question for you is what ultimately would you like to see... I mean the, the fact that you've lasted 20 years is astounding in, in, in any literary sense. But what would opti-, you know, your ultimate goal be or what would make you the most satisfied with X-TRA?

00:50:54

STEPHEN BERENS: Oh, that's really simple, that I could just walk away and it would continue.

00:50:59

BRUCE BAUMAN: Okay. That, that, that's cheating.

[OVERLAPPING DIALOGUE]

00:51:02

STEPHEN BERENS: I've been talking about it for years, that's, that's what I'd like to... I'd like it to be self-sustaining, right? That would actually, that it would be cared enough by the community that the people who are running it could just walk away.

00:51:15

BRUCE BAUMAN: Do you think if you do that now, it wouldn't sustain?

00:51:23

STEPHEN BERENS: No, I think now, I think we're... At this point, we're getting close to that. So, so that's why on my mind, I'd like to that. And I think we're getting, we're getting new board members. We're getting other people to help like Alexandra just did a project for us. It was really great. It helped. So we're getting, I think we're, we're really working on, on enlarging our, our community supporters. So I think that... I mean I, when I started, when, when we... I, I thought about starting this with Ellen, I asked a friend of mine who is in New York who happens to be the president of Otis now, Bruce, and I asked him if he... 'Cause he's a writer, if he thought we were crazy and he goes, "I don't know but at least half crazy to start a magazine."

00:52:15

STEPHEN BERENS: So I... And I, I took that as you should do it. So... But I, you know, I, I... You know, where there's, where there's a sort of interesting moment I think in, in culture, in, in that, on the one hand, it looks like all these funding is gonna be cut. But then of course, there was actually money added into NEA and this budget round yesterday. So and for, for, for X-TRA, it's been the big institutions have had the insight to our, our insight, the gullibility, either one, to support us. So that the NEA support us for a long time, the, the Department of Cultural Affairs have supported us since we became a non-profit.

00:53:08

STEPHEN BERENS: The Pasadena Art Alliance, people that are really interested in art and they're... And, and like, it seems like group decisions, we're gonna apply to somebody where there's a group that discusses us, we do really well. With, but going to small private foundations where maybe one or two people make up their minds, we don't do so well. So that's kind of an interesting thing for us. So I, I'm really interested in it. I, I, I wanted it to happen 'cause i think it's important to have it happen. I don't want to run it, right? And, and we have a ex-excellent executive director right now, Shana Lutker, and she's doing a fantastic job and she's bringing in new people.

00:53:55

STEPHEN BERENS: So I think that we're moving towards that, that point and I think... I mean that's where... I mean you don't imagine yourself running it. Though I don't get sick to my stomach running it anymore, right? So you know, but I think that's... That, that, the question I like, you know, the question of Hollywood, it... For, I think it's just a thing, to me. I mean it just is a thing and it, and if anything it does attract certain artists that are interested in Hollywood. Like Marnie Weber who the, or, or Paul McCarthy. I mean there... So it, it just depends what people do with it. Like I think there are certain people that, like anything, they do really well with it. Then there's other people that just don't do well with it.

00:54:48

STEPHEN BERENS: And, and, and they seem to be just as successful. I mean that's the interesting thing, that, that these big productions that happen, they're not as interesting, but they're just as successful. So if anything, it does tell me that the people with money are interested in what's going on in Hollywood. And that so they support artists who make things that, that kind of relate to Hollywood. And, and doesn't matter if it's... Or if it seems like it actually has content or doesn't have content, to me. So and the celebrity thing, I

guess, yeah. I... But is that, that's, that... I guess it, you know, it does come out of Hollywood originally, this idea of the celebrity. A-and, and but again, that has to do with money and it has, you know, like the art world, yet you...

00:55:40

STEPHEN BERENS: I was talking to a person yesterday who for years did restoration work on contemporary work. And they'd go from house to house a-and fixing the same bad kind of artworks. I... 'Cause remember he owns the same thing. I mean, you know, so money... I, I... Money i-i-is, to me, the real issue.

00:56:05

SUSAN SILTON: So I wanna ask you the question because you posed it to everybody. So I want you to say something about it.

00:56:14

ALEXANDRA GRANT: That was my strategy to avoid having to answer that question. I think in my question, I expressed my excitement about the Chris Kraus and the new generation of minority directors having the power to tell stories again, just from a queer trans, from the perspective of female desire. I want there to be more of that as a female consumer. So that's terribly exciting and I Love Dick, there... She also uses pieces of historic women experimental filmmakers. So even though the audience might not realize that they're being exposed to all, like a whole generation of, of women's work that a general audience would not have encountered. So to me that's terribly exciting.

00:57:10

ALEXANDRA GRANT: The other part of it, is this question of criticality within Los Angeles and it's part of the, a continue upward battle of X-TRA and the continued importance of that upward battle, which is how to create, not just a oneiric culture of writing but a

critical culture of writing. And, and how to continue to support that and that's a difference, as you talked about, between the east coast and the west. People came here historically to make. Especially to Los Angeles. This is an engineer city, this is an inventor city. People stayed in the east, reflecting more and came her to do. I mean that's a, that's a very gross simplification. But as in, how do you create and are there new forms for critical discourse and has it been very difficult.

00:57:57

ALEXANDRA GRANT: So this is... I answer questions with questions, Susan. So of course, like your question back to me. I mean... In a pa-, I mean... Secular, yes.

[OVERLAPPING DIALOGUE]

00:58:12

ALEXANDRA GRANT: I know. I'm like oh my god. But that, but that, that whole question of creating, you know, critical spaces is what actually lead me to write my first book. Because I wanted to make a farce about the art world and then couldn't find a publisher for it and so decided to begin a press that was interested in these outliers, like these weird, you know, collaborations that no one else was interested in publishing. Or one-offs like a... And, and so that's why I'm getting into the world of publishing because of a real need for these other experimental spaces for criticality and play.

00:58:51

ALEXANDRA GRANT: And, and I guess like, again what interested me about the Chris Kraus, Jill Soloway collaboration is that intersection between play and criticality, which is what it seems we need more of here. So I think I wanna open it up.

00:59:06

SARAH MACLAY: I have to go beyond the bounds of L.A. to answer that for a little bit. Be-, just because one of the things that I've been involved with for a decade is book review editing and, and book reviewing for Poetry International in sort of really substantial sections of often 50 to 60 pages. Where a lot of, of, of books from all over are considered and written about. And that's been a really terrific thing and, and that, that kind of section is bigger than a lot of journals are able to do. So it's been really great to be a part of that. And, you know, recently for me, it's been... What I was really more interested in was writing longer, longer pieces and, and I'm being able to do that more. So it's really exciting.

00:59:56

SARAH MACLAY: But also what you were saying about LARB, I think, is exciting for L.A.

01:00:06

BRUCE BAUMAN: A couple of –

OFF CAMERA

01:00:10

BRUCE BAUMAN: I mean, a few things... Speaking of money, money is so... It, it, it's the elephant in every artistic room. I, I, I actually believe that and it's, it's not, you know, speaking as a fellow Jew and Nobel Prize laureate literature money, don't talk, it swears. And it swears really big time in the art world, in the literary world, it doesn't give a shit about the critical. That's really what, what I think is...

01:00:43

SUSAN SILTON: About what?

01:00:44

BRUCE BAUMAN: The critical world. They're, they're, you know, serious criticism is not money oriented thing. It's great that you've gotten all these grants but I'm kind of not surprised that you do well with the groups and individuals, little tougher. That doesn't surprise me. The other thing, the whole celebrity culture, you know, it's put on L.A. New York, last night or the night before, had their MET Gala, that was like the fucking red carpet at the Oscars. You know, who was there... So I, I don't like to hear about L.A. being so, you know, celebrity-centric and New York is not 'cause that's bullshit. And so from that but to, to get to the, the criticism thing is... Th-this is really tough for me because I used to write some art criticism and I've written music criticism, that's how I started.

01:01:36

BRUCE BAUMAN: But I don't anymore. I won't anymore because as a creative writer, that can really fuck me up. Because if I start thinking about that like, one of the first pieces I ever published was called A Newly Born Man, which is based Cixous' Newly Born Woman, where I wrote from the perspective of having a vagina for 24 hours, it was kind of a wild piece. But it was fun. But reading Cixous, if I start to look at Cixous and Blanchot and the people who I read when I was young and loved, that will mess me up as a fiction writer. That will get in my way 'cause I'll start thinking about that and I think there's an, there is a real contradiction between creating from your own conscious and being conscious about criti-criticality as a creative person.

01:02:28

BRUCE BAUMAN: And maybe you guys disagree but for me, I know, that's troubling. And, and like I've read, I've read Blanchot's books probably 15 times each but not in a while. So... I, I don't know. Just the, to put that, it's out there as, as, as something that I think is necessary, I mean I teach at CalArts in the Critical Studies program at the same time in my workshop. So I really try and stress on the idea that they think from their own

conscious and their creative mind and not worrying about how it's gonna be critiqued.
You're a teacher.

01:03:08

KATHARINE HAAKE: I am a teacher. And yeah, and I, I'm thinking like serious literary criticism in a publishing venture in Los Angeles, it doesn't, it hardly even computes. But I do, I, I talk a lot about criticism in theory in my creative writing classes because unlike, unlike artists who have to learn how to, how their, how to work with the medium, writers tend to think that language is like this natural thing that they don't have to think about. So we do talk a lot about critical studies and then we put it away. Right? And I just tell them not to think at all when they're writing because thinking is very bad for writing. But you have to have the framework within which not thinking can be productive.

01:04:09

BRUCE BAUMAN: No I, I completely agree, I mean with that it's, it's... I'm not saying you shouldn't read these books, I'm saying you should know these and then you have to almost like put it away in the attic while you're... It's a, it's a, it's a, it's, it's a really difficult thing... Yeah, I, I, I don't wanna... Langu-, you know that, this comes to me whether you can teach creative writing. And people have a facility with language or they don't and you can, you can either bring it out and make it better. You, you know, before I wanted to be a writer, I wanted to be a professional basketball player and then my junior high school coach told me, "I can't make you tall." And I think that translates to a certain amount of talent as well.

01:04:53

KATHARINE HAAKE: Well... No doubt. But if you also think, as I do, that there's value in writing, in just in people's lives, you know. One thing that is really help is just getting people to acknowledge that they don't... Or, or to accept the fact, I don't... To

acknowledge that they don't have to write the way they think that they're supposed to write. That they ha-, that they have to like and they need, they need theory for this to be able to see the boxes that they're inside in order to give themselves permission to get outside of them. So you know, I just... I, it's a facility with language that the culture, but the culture works very hard to screw up people's natural sensibilities in language.

01:05:46

SUSAN SILTON: I think that's true also in, certainly within art programs as well. I mean my issue with, with criticality is, is just these days about depth because I think criticality demands depth and I think it's, it's more challenging to find that i-, as a result of, of online internet based culture because by definition that is appealing to kind of sound bytes and briefer investigations. So I think in the end, publication is vital to the continuation of criticality. Because I think in that either whether they're publishing ventures or they're lar-larger more extensive exposes in the form of reviews or articles, that kind of depth can be, can be found and I think that's, that in itself is critical to...

01:06:55

SUSAN SILTON: And I, and I do think criticality is essential to, to combat the forces that of consumerism that might strike a blow to, to creativity, you know.

01:07:11

STEPHEN BERENS: I agree with Susan. I, I, I think it is really important and having taught for, for too long... I would say that, that, I would, I guess I, I would phrase it differently. I, I would say that you don't put that, that theory away. That, that theory, you're not the same person. So you, you may physically put it away but you don't look at things the same way as you did before you read all that stuff. So well you may actually... I mean that's the point, I mean you, that, that you don't put it away. That, that you don't consciously deal with it but you look at things in a different way than you did be-before. And, and, and that's why

you're able to really make things of interest because you, you move beyond just doing the, the simples thing.

01:08:09

STEPHEN BERENS: And, a-and, you know, the photography is not that different than language. I mean everybody comes in now to the classroom having made more photographs themselves than anybody in the 19th cen-, that the 19th century made together, right? So everybody thinks they know what they're doing, right? So but, so to get that to inherently look at things on their own differently without theory because they've read theory, I think you know. I guess that's what my goal was that that they would actually. You... That, that somebody at the end would say, "You're not talking just about art." Right?

01:08:55

KATHARINE HAAKE: Yeah, I mean you're, you're... No argument and of course, the point is do they... Change people. So that they see things differently so that when they stop thinking and start making art, it can be something surprising. You know, I always tell him that, I mean at the end that... And this is for me too that... And it goes back to the idea the sustainable literary practice, which depends upon knowing how to do what you don't know how to do. And so much of the art education, I don't know about art but creative writing education in the U.S. is sort of predicated upon the principle of teaching people to do what they're already good at.

01:09:40

KATHARINE HAAKE: And so that's the only thing they know how to do. And for me that's like the end of writing. Right? Because if you can't think beyond... I took my son once on a field trip to Vasa Studio and he told a bunch of eight year olds that art, art happens and

the mistakes you make when you're making something you don't know how to make and the eight year olds didn't quite get it. But it made sense to me. Right? So...

01:10:12

SARAH MACLAY: Yeah I'm, I'm just... I've been relating a lot to what, what all of you guys are saying about teaching of it and so, so often for me I feel like I'm, I'm, I'm talking about how... Especially people who have been trained to write essays a lot and under the gun, you know, that in my class it's about reverse engineering. So I'm kind of like, you know, it feels backwards to them sometimes. But I was also thinking about one of the things that online criticism affords and it ties back into the concerns about money, one of the difficulties of course in keeping a journal going on for, for a long time is, is the money for the, you know, the materiality of it.

01:10:54

SARAH MACLAY: And that's something with some of my, my friends who've had journals, print journalists that have gone online, it's partly because of money and actually, sometimes it is possible in online journals, to do longer pieces, to do more in depth pieces. You know, be-because you're not, you're not worried about page count. So for instance, I'm thinking of where to... Yeah, so you know, I'm thinking about there's a critic named Randy Marshall who writes for, for Blackbird, really, really wonderful meaty interesting criticism, very lengthy, very, very interesting fascinating.

01:11:41

SARAH MACLAY: And the constant critic, especially Karla Kelsey, I really enjoy her, her pieces. And so, you know, so, so there's that sort of quick, quick fix thing that we can get when we're going to the web all the time. The, the monetary, the relative monetary freedom can actually allow for some of those longer things too. So that's kinda cool.

01:12:10

BRUCE BAUMAN: I think there are actually some really great serious literary critic journals like Guernica. Full Stop. Slice. I mean and LARB does some really... And that Lang thing is big 'cause I remember I once wrote an ar-, this was a long time... Art review about a show called Amnesia, it was about Latin American artist that Christopher Grimes did and I had a word count and I sent it in and they said, "Hey, we just got a big ad from Absolute Vodka. You got to cu-, you, you've got to cut some words. Or..." And I said, "What if I don't?" And they said, "Well we're just ending it." That won't happen now. You know, they, they were just gonna cut my last 200 words. I'm like, "What the fuck?" And, and, and I...

01:12:52

BRUCE BAUMAN: So that there, that's, that, they're, the, the, the problem is there's so much lousy shit on the net, you know, not edited, not curated. But there are two things I want to say is as a creative writer, yeah, theory is important but and I'm not sure if this is apocryphal or not but it... And I'm not sure but I've heard it credit both to Hemingway and to Pound, talking to the novelist lobe who's the model for in, in *The Sun Also Rises*, for Robert Cohn. That they said to him, "Your problem is you don't know when to be conscious and you don't know when to be unconscious." And as a creative writer, that's a real challenge sometimes. And, and so that, there's that balance. If I were still writing criticism, it's not that it's not creative. It is.

01:13:46

BRUCE BAUMAN: I come from a different part of my brain. And that, and that, that, that's, I think that's true with poetry as well. The other thing is and it's a question I wanna ask is, you know, the net has done something and I'm not sure, it's, it's obviously not been good since we have illiterate president who thought Andrew Jackson was alive during the Civil War. Is that, I think, there's probably been more writing done in the last 10 years because

of the net and thousands of emails than maybe in the whole history of the world. But I'm not sure if it's good writing so I don't know if that's good or bad. I don't know if you guys agree or disagree or whatever. It's something I have been thinking a lot about. Anybody?

01:14:26

KATHARINE HAAKE: I guess I'm ambivalent. Let's star-, let's start with, let's start where we're at... Yeah. Start and where we begin, right, back to the beginning. I mean I think it's like incredibly important that... And, and that writing should move through the world freely and you know, and in an open-ended way and some of the stuff is gonna be good and so-, and some of it won't and I, I guess part of is... We just have to, you know, we have to train readers and we're not doing a good job training readers. And we're not doing a good job... And one of the, one of the kind of exciting the, the pros and cons of the proliferation of publishing in L.A. 'cause there's a lot going on, right?

01:15:21

KATHARINE HAAKE: Is that, is that the, the people, the publishers servicing around meters [SOUNDS LIKE] to a large extent and they need that in order to, for the writing to continue. I wish that we did a better job of like com-, of, of... I don't know, communicating with one another or crossing boundaries. And I don't feel... I, I... That's one of the... I started up by saying that I was confused by Los Angeles and that's part of it. I feel like there are many, many, many different conversations that are going on. And a lot of them have enormous value. But they're not going on together and that's probably the geography of the city, it's a really big place. But it's also... You know, it's also part of the potential of the city. So I... You know... Both end, I guess.

01:16:19

STEPHEN BERENS: Well I, I guess as we're closing up, I mean the thing that I think that X-TRA, the, the, the importance of X-TRA i-is that it... These records will be around 50 years

from now. So when people want to know what people thought about what was happening or what was being made in the city, it, it will be one of the sources. So that like when I got done with my inner guide [SOUNDS LIKE] education, I knew what we thought about Cézanne now. I knew what we thought about Manet now. But I had to go figure out, what, what I was really interested in what did people think about Manet in the 1880, 1870. So I went and read Zola.

01:17:10

STEPHEN BERENS: So what did, what did people think about Cézanne? Why was, why was Monet not shown basically for 30 years? Until the '50s? What happened but then you read Roger Fry and you understood what happened. You understood why he could be rolled up, 'cause there was a really solid argument against that kind of work as a, as a modernist. So it helped me understand that not what we thought now and that's what I think X-TRA, that's what interested me and that's why I, I... That's why I keep at it is that I want that record available for people in the future. Like people can actually look at this and see a, a really well thought out analysis of what that work is doing. Not is the work good or bad, who cares?

01:17:56

STEPHEN BERENS: But was is, how does the work actually function? And that's what we try to do. So...

01:18:03

SUSAN SILTON: I find hope, I think, in terms of publishing in the multiplicity of interests. It's also daunting but there, there's the group of, of very young practitioners who are interested as in photographic practice in analogue processes, letter pressing is, is flourishing right now. As is endeavors that are on risograph, etc. And then at the other end, there are all of these multiple platforms online. So I think, you know, for as long as

there are books, there will be print. I don't think that we'll have an end of print and I think that is, is key to the development and acceleration of other forms that can o-, exist simultaneously in positive ways.

01:19:08

SUSAN SILTON: And I guess getting back to Los Angeles that this city is a hot bed for those processes to come back to the, to the four [SOUNDS LIKE], you know. These people come here to, to immerse themselves in those kinds of analogue practices and, and others so anyway, that's my, my hope spiel, in the midst of the darkness.

01:19:45

ALEXANDRA GRANT: I'm hopeful, she says, because I'm about to launch a publishing company. Because I believe in the haptic, I believe in haptic experiences. I took a book to lunch recently and I sat at a restaurant, reading a book, and it was... I was transported, you know, for the entire meal, I had great company and in, and I think people are searching for a kind of intimacy that allows that kind of being transported into another's imagination. And so I don't know if we'll be able to convince everyone about the importance of these haptic experiences but I think that there will be the stalwarts who always believe in the sacred and profane importance of the continuation of the written word.

OFF CAMERA

01:20:42

SARAH MACLAY: Yeah, no, this one's fine. No, you know, I just wanted to say two things, yesterday I spent the afternoon at Book Arts L.A. watching a great letter press demonstration that was being by Johanna Drucker who is just great, really amazing, really knows her stuff and was really energized after a, a group of the anthology group,

I'm... We did a reading and it was kind of an exquisite corpse officer, operation where they were, the participants were using words from, from poems and making this broadside. And people were really interested in, you know, in going back to that technology and we all got to run one through.

01:21:27

SARAH MACLAY: And so kind of like how there's this, this interest, this renewed interest in the letter press and you know, vinyl and, and you know, the book as object. I think I, I also, overall, I kinda have faith in the kaleidoscopic nature of, of options, even though, you know, the array is kind of dizzying and you know, I think, I, I think we'll sort it out every time.

01:21:59

BRUCE BAUMAN: I want to say a few things; one, I want to thank COLA just for existing 'cause, 'cause when I got my grant, I was beginning this nine-year book and it really helped me. But I would also like you to give more COLA grants to writers, that's my shout out for that. And as far as Los Angeles, I think Los Angeles is an incredibly vibrant place for all kinds of creativity and I'm not talking about movies. I mean, you know, when we're exchanging we talk about Kate Galon [PHONETIC] red hand, Los Angeles Review, there's Santa Monica Review. And the Los Angeles Festival Books, which I've, I, I've done like eight times and I've done a lot of festivals, is the best book festival in the U.S. and it gets 200,000 people.

01:22:44

BRUCE BAUMAN: And the other thing is booksellers have told me that Los Angeles has more s-, sells more serious books than the Tri-State area. So I think there's, you know, by nature, I just think the world is gonna end in five minutes. But at the same time if you're an artist and I tell this to my students, you have to be an optimist or you can't make art. And I

think that's, that's part of the complete contradiction of me, is that I, I make art because I believe there is a future or I hope I make art because I believe there's a future and then 10 minutes later, I'm thinking, maybe not. Anyway, thank you all.

01:23:32

KATHARINE HAAKE: Or not, right? Vis a vis future. You know, I was actually thinking that one of the things that Joe asked us to talk about that we didn't really talk about was what our COLA grants meant to us. And so I wanted to say that it meant an amazing, you know, it was just an amazing thing. When I got it, you know, I spend a lot of time, I like being alone. I believe in writing as a primary experience and value and sometimes it's also very lonely and when a, it, when a, when an organization and institution like COLA acknowledges your work as having value, it goes well beyond the monetary support and, you know, I was working on a long book then too, it's about California and water and it's just the idea that somebody cares and believes in the value of art in this city was enormously important to me.

01:24:44

KATHARINE HAAKE: And yeah, I mean it's a, it's a great place. I always think of the, of the Bakhtin quote that the novelist only ever developed, only ever developing genre that takes place in the zone of context with the present in all its open-endedness, that's kind of how I think about Los Angeles, like the present in all of its open-endedness. So I guess I am hopeful too.

OFF CAMERA

01:25:20

STEPHEN BERENS: I think we're done here.

01:25:23

BRUCE BAUMAN: All right, good night Groucho. Say good night, Gracie.

OFF CAMERA

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]