

LAMAG | Conversation with the Artists_April 24 2021

Welcome, everyone. My name is Jamie Costa. My pronouns are she/her/hers. And on behalf of the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, we are thrilled to welcome you to our last program in conjunction with our current four solo exhibitions by Panteha Abareshi, Alexandre Dorriz, Tristan Espinoza, and Maru Garcia. And just as a final plug, their shows are still available online at LAMAG.org through 5:00 PM today. And we're also really excited to be co-hosting today's program with the Los Angeles Public Library and are thrilled to have Mary McCoy be our moderator for today's conversation.

Before I officially introduce Mary, I have a few housekeeping bits that I'd like to go over. First, just please make sure your microphone is muted during the speaker's presentation. We'll also have a few minutes towards the end of the program for a Q&A. So if you have any questions, please feel free to enter them directly in the chat box. Or if you feel comfortable taking yourself off mute to ask your question directly, you may do so at that time.

We also have sign language interpreter services and live captioning available for today's program, which has been provided by the City of Los Angeles Department on Disability. If you do require or need those services, please click the link in the chat box for the captions. Or if you'd like to pin the Sign Language Interpreter window to your screen for easier access, we would recommend you do that as well.

And with that, I'm pleased to introduce Mary McCoy. Mary McCoy is the senior librarian in the Art, Music, and Recreation Department at the Los Angeles Public Library, where she oversees art collections, programming, research, and community resources. She is also an award winning author of novels for young adults, including the forthcoming *Indestructible Object*, which is about artists in love. And with that, Mary, I'll hand it over to you.

All right. Thank you so much for the introduction, Jamie. And I'm so glad that the Los Angeles Public Library has been able to partner with the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery for this series of exhibitions. Some of my librarian colleagues had the opportunity to conduct interviews with this group of artists and share their work with our audience, which was really a good treat for the library audience. So I'm delighted to be here today to speak to all of you in person.

I'm going to get right into things by introducing our panel. And I'm going to introduce them in the order that their solo exhibitions opened. Then I'll turn it over to the artists to spend just a couple of minutes each telling the audience about your work today.

Tristan Espinoza has exhibited internationally in the US in places such as Archer Beach Haus, Chicago; the Sullivan Gallery, Chicago; Supply Frame Design Lab, Pasadena; 187 Augusta, Medford, New York; and Human Resources, Los Angeles. Espinoza is a current MFA candidate at the University of California Los Angeles's Design Media Arts Program and holds a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Panteha Abareshi is currently completing their BFA at the University of Southern California's Roski School of Art and Design. Abareshi has performed and exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Human Resources, Los Angeles; and the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, among others.

Maru Garcia has participated in conferences and solo and group exhibitions in North America, Europe, and Asia. She was an artist in residence in the National Center of Genetic Resources in Mexico. She received awards from Los Angeles Sustainability Collaborative, Clifton Webb scholarship for the Arts, and Fundación Jumex. She's based in LA and holds an MFA in design and Media Arts from the University of California Los Angeles and an MS in biotechnology and BS in chemistry from Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico.

Alexandre Dorriz has previously exhibited at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Visitor Welcome Center, Human Resources, LTD Los Angeles, and the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles. Dorriz's writing has appeared in *Temporary Art Review*. And his work has been featured in the *Los Angeles Review of Books Quarterly* and reviewed in *Artforum*. He's an artist, gallerist, organizer, and co-founder of Crenshaw Dairy Mart and inaugural professor for the Social and Environmental Arts Practice MFA at Prescott College. Dorriz received his MFA at the University of Southern California and his BA at University of California Berkeley.

So we're going to get into depth later. But to start off, I'd like each of you to give us just a brief maybe 2 minute or so overview of the work that you created for the LAMAG exhibition. Tristan, your exhibition, *Index Interiors*, was the first to open back in January. And I loved getting to hear you speak about how you created the cyanotypes and how this work was a bit of a departure for you. Would you lead us off and tell us a bit more about your work for this exhibition?

Yeah. Hi, everybody. Thanks, Mary, for that wonderful introduction. I guess there were images that I was making last year that were responses to a certain kind of alienation that I was feeling in my own domestic space. And so at the time, I had also been organizing around the ethics of machine learning and the problematic history of statistical representation of history.

And so this project is a mapping of those anxieties over time, in the sense that I had started with the immediately material and nostalgic qualities of a cyanotype. And it introduced parallel the distance that I was feeling by using machine-generated pictures.

And then towards the end of the exhibition, I'd also produced a book by turning those machine-generated images into negatives that I made more cyanotypes out of. And so that book is installed at LAMAG right now. And I guess I was really trying to get at what the limits of this kind of representation is in our experience of images.

Over the last year, I feel like there has been this collective feeling of saturation over the consumption of-- because we live in such a visual culture. And so what does it mean to interrupt that experience and turn your attention to the artifice of how these images are produced on a daily scale?

So I made this book online and inserted some of the mix of the cyanotype images with text-based captions that I'd also generated from captions on the back of family photographs and tried to intervene what that relationship surfaced online. Yeah. And at this point, the machine-generated images started to show up in the work.

Thank you, Tristan. It's a very cool blend of what's machine-made and what's hand-made and bring those two things together. Panteha, I want to turn to you next. Your exhibition has a really wonderful title, *Tender Calamities*. And it opened in February. And I had the opportunity to view your pieces. I was really captivated by your use of obsolete science and technology, like the Carousel slide projector and the educational filmstrip style. Would you share with us a bit about the video work that you created for this exhibition?

Yeah. So my usual performative practice involves this really heavy and intensive body work. And in this series of work *Tender Calamities*, specifically I really wanted to think about what role disembodiment plays within embodiment and really weighing physicality and corporeality in depictions of the body, especially when talking about the decrepit body, the decaying body.

And so I also wanted there to be a great deal of reflexivity in the work. A lot of the pieces are about looking, and the relationships within the gays, power dynamics within the gays. So in *Methods of Care for the Precarious Body*, it's like a performance folded into another performance, where the sick and disabled body is giving a tutorial on its own care, like care that is simultaneously repression, oppression, and violence that is also intimacy, tenderness. So confronting the intersections between all of these things, and capturing that, but also being hyper aware of the fact that most people-- everyone is going to be viewing these works through a screen, most likely a computer screen, but a screen.

And being aware of the act of looking, that passivity, that many people engage with the body, especially the other body with, so putting the viewer in a position, a very distinct and intentional positionality, where there is this like triangle of looking happening, where the disabled body is looking, and showing, and all of these things. So again, also thinking about like spectacle, the body as spectacle is in this work as well.

And then *Unlearn the Body* is a more-- it's more of the sort of traditional body work that I do, but thinking about unlearning the body in a very methodical way, through these sort of six acts. And breaking down the barrier between the organic body and the inorganic appendage, revisualizing our relationship to what we define as anatomical and how those hierarchies play into how we privilege the body and how we privilege the able body.

Yeah. And that's shot on a Super 8 Millimeter. And then the *Methods of Care*-- yes, as you mentioned the performance that's being projected was shot on 35. And those frames were made into slides for the Kodak Carousel. So there's the analog playing with the idea of the defunct, the idea of the antiquated, and correlating the sick and disabled body with that directly.

Yeah. Thank you very much, Panteha. Maru, I wanted to talk to you next. Your exhibition is called *Membrane Tensions*, and it involved both some of what you called unpredictable collaborations, which I really liked, and also, in a way, turning the art gallery into a science lab. And could you tell us more about this work?

Sure. Thank you so much, Mary, for the introduction. I'm very honored to be here with you all, with this great panel. Yeah, for this work, I wanted to explore, as the title suggests, what is contained, merged, engulfed, and stretched. I wanted to go back to the origins of life to help understand better, in my case, what was this commonality at the origin of the waste.

Now, we, looking back, can start building a culture that can be able of remediation, of healing, and regeneration. So this going back, I wanted to see life, the origins, but also to explore the metaphors that are all around them. So for me, I started to think-- and the importance of the appearance of the membrane, for life to happen. And also, I was influenced by some ideas from the symbiogenesis theory that talks a little bit about evolution through associations. So I thought that that was very important to also notice and try to bring it to the present moment in which we need more of that, more evolution through associations.

So I was talking about the membrane. We can think of it as this order of movement that separates the cell from the surrounding environment. But for me, instead of thinking as this rigid thing, it's actually something that is permeable, fluid, active. And it's a responsive delimitation. So it contains. But it actually does not isolate.

And for me, it is what allows us to create relationships. It's actually a site for interaction. So I wanted to explore more of this. And this specific installation, I divided it into three sections. The first section would be some cultures that were in the gallery, as you mentioned, in the lab setup.

They were placed there. And they were alive during the whole time, from the isolation until now. Shout-out to John Weston, who was the one that was taking care of the cultures. So what is interesting about this type of culture-- and that's why I selected them-- was that they are in symbiotic relationship. So they work together.

Well, this is SCOBY. It's that's a culture that is used actually for producing kombucha. But in this case, I was not interested in the drink, but more in the cellulose or this material that it's producing in the top of the tank. So this is the material that is actually kind of a film.

And with that film, I wanted to intervene or use this as a membrane that can be an extension of the membrane. So we can think of a cellular scale. But to use it for intervening the windows in the gallery. So this would be like the second part of the installation, that it's actually the act of covering the windows with these films that were collected from the tanks. This harvesting happened every week. And the idea was to place them all on the windows. And for me, it was like a this invitation to stretch our membranes and be able to interact with the other in a way to extend our range of care.

And the third part of this installation includes some lightweight sculptures and drawings that are talking about our history of this same origin. Well, they're made with the same bacterial cellulose. And they have the intention to try to share this history and to make us think in that kinship that we have with the rest of the living organisms.

It also had some components that were mediated through cameras, and the possibility of forming a timelapse, and sharing one of the harvestings with the audience. That was how this piece was also able to be part of the audience on the screens. Yeah, that's about it.

Thank you, Maru. And it is very beautiful and hopeful. I was talking to one of my colleagues about it. And yeah, it's just very lovely to look at on top of everything else.

So Alexandre, your work, *Public Sculpture 001-C*, offers a critical look at institutions and bureaucracies, which is also interesting because, of course, this exhibition is part of one. And I think it's probably difficult for art not to interact with bureaucracy in some way. So could you say a little bit more about this piece?

Thank you, Mary. Thank you, everyone. It's very nice to be here amongst all the participating artists and seeing the lovely face of all the LAMAG team that was such a large part of this project.

Yeah, I think I started processing this work specifically around 2019. And I had a lovely studio visit with Steve Wong, the curator initially. And I was just processing it, working through parts of this project. But a large part of what I've been working through before coming to this project was negotiating and reconciling with the making of an art object in consideration of whatever harmful environments that a hosting institution may participate in.

So I think I've just been processing that, just very transparently, and just pulling those threads, and reconciling with it. I think that's a lot of negotiating as being an artist and trying to figure out why or what I'm making. And before coming to this project, a large part of my work was interpreting the art object and thinking of it through optical phenomena or using the allegory of mirages to address a parallax of patronage, if I'm talking about like a private museum, or a public museum, or the parallax of a public, and also just finding other ways to use that same language around the negotiating of an art object to evacuate the art object from an art space or evacuate its representation.

So that goes to a lot of this work and thinking of theoretical frameworks around what is hypothetical, and can grounding and imagining of the hypothesis or the hypothetical as an optical phenomena-- can the art object exist as a hypothetical? Can it exist as an optical phenomena within the gallery? Can it exist as a mirage ultimately?

And I think that was a large part of the processing of this. And a lot of that leads to the hypothesis can be a mirage because of its speculative nature, that things are not quite finite, that they're kind of like a game of mirrors. Some things are existing rhetorically, sometimes not but. I don't know if that explains the work. I have no idea. But that's kind of where I'm coming from.

I like that you said mirage because when I was trying to wrap my head around this piece, I would feel like I have it. And then I would think no, I don't. And then I would go back to it again and again. And it was very-- it was fascinating to engage with in that way. So thank you, everybody, for talking about your work.

My next question, I'd like to ask everyone about your process. You all had ways of working before the pandemic that were likely disrupted in some way. And I wanted to ask about your process of creating work for this exhibition. Was it different from what you've done pre-pandemic? Did you have any particular challenges or pleasant surprises even? And I wanted to ask Panteha if you would go first for this one.

It's interesting. I think that my practice itself wasn't as shaken by the pandemic, more just I really struggled at the beginning of the pandemic with-- I was in the hospital on bedrest when Los Angeles shut down. So I didn't experience it at all in the same way that other people did because I was already in a long-term isolation. I had been for weeks before. And I continued to be after that.

So I think it, in many ways, validated for me that me finding these ways to work from bed or from a studio that doesn't exist physically, is like upended and comes with me wherever I am, was OK to do and wasn't something that I should have as much anxiety about. And I think that it gave me a lot of space to really sit with some concepts that I just hadn't had the time to do, separating from the pressure of making or thinking about the process of making as one that then results in a physicalization of your concepts and your thoughts.

And completely separating myself from that and saying, it's OK to spend three weeks thinking, and then just make like a concept drawing that no one else is going to see. And it's like I've done that conceptual thinking. And that's what matters the most. That was very valuable to me. Obviously, I also felt so lucky to even be able to have that time in there to be able to do that within the pandemic.

And then when it came to actually keeping up creating work and talking about work, I think it was really, really interesting to see the way that in live time people were adjusting to art now being remote and what that means for accessibility. And people were really struggling with that. And there needed to be a discussion about that and saying, well, there's always needs to be a discussion around accessibility. But now, able-bodied people are struggling with it. So we can finally talk about it. And being just as eager to jump into the conversation with that.

So I think my practice wasn't upended. It wasn't shaken. It wasn't disrupted. But I think the pandemic proved to all of us that there needs to be different modes of thinking around productivity, around production, around interaction. And for, I think, everyone exhibiting-- I don't want to speak for all the artists here. But we were already all thinking about those things. So it provided for me an interesting context to just conceptually delve into it even more. Yeah.

Yeah, I've heard people say that, in some ways, the pandemic has revealed significant problems with all of our institutions and all of our ways of being that-- I don't know-- may force a reckoning. And I like a lot what you said about just having the time and the space without so much worrying that it has to turn into a thing, turn into a product. Would any of the other artists like to chime in on this question of process?

I think I can go. Well, I think the pandemic for sure made me think differently in the way that I would produce and deliver the piece. In this case, for LAMAG, I needed to start thinking of how to work around the restrictions that were imposed.

I don't know. In this case, it would be accessibility to spaces. I could not use my studio. They didn't have access to the gallery. And working with a living component, this is something very difficult, in my case, to really be able to have a sense of the conditions when to make the work thrive, in this case, for example, in the gallery from long distance.

And I don't know. In the past, I've used, as I was mentioning, mediated work, like the use of cameras, or sensors, or microscopes, or a way to really get into the piece. But in this case, everything had to be through this mediated way. So from the production to the delivery, it was from long distance.

And something that, of course, I would imagine-- but then experimenting, it's different-- is the difficulty of translation of part of the very important components of this type of thesis are the sensorial parts. How can you translate the smells, the materiality of the forms, the things are more related with the senses and, in this case, temperatures, the feelings of the materials, things like that?

There is, of course, a limitation to the image that these types of things cannot really-- well, this technology, even if it's advanced, it's not there yet. But I felt that there was also an opportunity to really all be sharing the same position-- the artist and the audience-- and to make myself be in the same level with the ones that are trying to see my work. It was also interesting to notice. So this is where I'm coming from, the pandemic experience.

Yeah, it's a good point, that it would have been a completely different experience if people had been able to be in the gallery, and just trying to find a way to replicate that experience. Tristan, you did that in a very interesting way, with creating the book. And going through that book, you really do have a sense that it's something you can touch. And that was a very good-- it's a very elegant solution to that question.

Yeah. That was actually-- I guess prior to the pandemic, my practice is mostly software-based and already working on screens. And so in terms of process, I didn't really experience as much of an interruption as a different media would entail. But at the same time, I also felt a repulsion towards my practice at the time, and really negotiating what it means to make art during a global pandemic, and also intensifying civil unrest.

And feeling this inadequacy in my own practice to respond to not only to these lived realities, but also to my own material experience of oppression. And so I had actually spent a lot of time away from my practice, my artistic practice, and developed my organizing practice more with this collective that my friends and I are in Tiny Tech Zines.

And we'd been organizing a series of workshops early in quarantine that were trying to respond to some of these anxieties. We had a speculative fiction workshop to imagine what this post-COVID cast collapse of capitalism society might look like.

And then we also did a series of meetings that were titled, "What Haven't You Been Working On," as an inverse to the expectation that you should be productive during the pandemic instead of kind of focusing on rest, and healing, and accountability.

And then I guess another kind of transformation that happened was that I actually had to move out of LA and back home with family and be involved in this process of care and maintenance for my parents and siblings during the pandemic. And this return to a, I guess, domestic space that had been developing along colonial manifestations of power was really alienating for me.

And so at the same time that there was this focus on this collective experience of domestic entrapment, I also needed to make work that also responded to my own interiority and the residues of trauma that I had been carrying instead of externalizing and abstracting those experiences to code-based systems. I hope that makes sense. There was a lot in there.

Yeah, thank you for speaking about that. I think that's a very powerful way to transform your process. Alex, did you want to speak about this question at all?

Yeah, sure. It's funny because I'm looking at the participants and I was like, there's a Steve W here. I wonder if that's Steven Wong. I wonder if that's you, Steve. But it's funny because I'm thinking a lot about-- when you say the process, a lot of this project existed in conversations with the curator, Steve, and just ongoing-- I mean, the project always existed even in its first manifestations.

When we had our first visit, I was thinking of-- the project was always going to be a body of writing. It was always going to be-- at one point, I think it was I going to be just an exhibition statement. And that was the project. And I was very excited about that. And then it eventually involved into the entire summary report.

But meandering through that, I remember I was bugging Jamie maybe closer to the few weeks. I was like, I might throw a JPEG in there. I don't know. I might withdraw, rescind that. But it's interesting because so much of even the work that I was making before this project-- and I was so-- I was so not interested in making other work until I made this work.

I remember, after a few sculptures I had made a few installations I'd done, I was just like, I can't wait to make this work because it just feels like the only thing I really want to make right now, which doesn't really involve really making anything. And then the pandemic happened. And I was like, great. There's less pressure for anyone asking me why there's no object because I was always reluctant about having an object present.

Yeah. So that's just part of the-- it's interesting that that's just become part of the vernacular, that we're in a pandemic. And this environment is fostering so much interesting work right now. And we're all reconciling with the kinds of work that we're all making. And for some, it's been deeply in the same vocabulary as what we have been making. And for others, it's absolutely not. But I have no idea if that answers anything.

But of course, you're going to go to an artist panel. And you're going to get asked about it because that's what we're talking about right now.

Totally.

It's just that-- yeah. It's hard to-- it's everywhere. I'm looking at the time. I think I was going to ask you all about research. But I think I'm going to skip that and jump ahead a bit. I wanted to ask-- I wanted to ask you all about the way that your work is interacting with systems of inequity and injustice, and also the harm that institutions can do and then, in some cases, paths forward to sustainability and inclusion.

And I wanted to ask you-- I don't know. There's a couple of ways you could answer this question. If you wanted to just say how is carrying out this kind of social justice work in your art, how has that become important? Or if you wanted to answer it-- what do you think art can say about social justice that other mediums can't? Oh, let's see. Maru, you would you go first?

Sure. Well, that's a very important questions for me. I think, if I see my work probably, it's not that evident for this particular one, *Membrane Tensions*. But I think of my work that has two ramifications. But they both have the same objective.

My objective is to try to research some ways of helping build this culture of regeneration that I was talking about. So I would say that one of the branches would be this more theoretical work that I do that wants to go through questions, wants to go to the origin of definitions, the use of language and, in this, case sometimes the use of biological references to help develop this. So this work can give a context of how we can build better this type of relationship with the rest of nature.

But on the other hand, I also have projects that deal more with the actual current situations that we are living, in the case of current social problems, but also environmental problems, at the intersection and environmental injustices have been happening. And in this case, I go towards researching sites that are experiencing some kind of violence related with environmental problems.

So one recent work that I've been doing is research on lead contamination in the Southeast LA area, where we can see this very particular case of environmental injustice. And with this type of work, I try to start by raising awareness. And I think art, it is a good way to start a conversation and to include people that probably are not aware of the things that are happening even if they're in their own city. So I thought that that's a good way.

But for me, art, specifically for social or environmental topics, is not just about raising awareness. We are now having this need to actually put ourselves into work. So I find myself trying to find more concrete ways of presenting solutions to work with the community and really try to make this space that's for healing, but also for coming up with solutions.

My idea is more trying to take ourselves off of this story that we have been exposed to of humans being just able of destruction, of exploitation, and even being a virus, but also more of humans as organisms that are capable of remediation. So I try, with my work, to bring some of that to call for our own possibility of transforming ourselves into healers and remediators. So that's how I try to introduce this type of work.

Yeah. That's very powerful to say. And I think, before you can be a healer-- as you said, your work does-- like you said, and what your work does call for people to do is to first have that reckoning and that acknowledgment, and then healing. Would other people like to speak on this, too?

I think it's interesting because I don't consider my work social justice-related. I wouldn't really ever use that language in describing it myself. But I would also say that, especially in the relationship between art about otherness within the institution, it's impossible for that not to be a connotation when you are being read as a person of color, when you're being female, when you are like opening openly discussing disability, and illness, and another form of otherness.

So it's, I think, the reason that a lot of the times I'm invited into that narrative is because the immediate connotations of work that have all of these signifiers of social justice is that there's also of an expectation on the artist to be able to speak on that. And it's interesting because I think a lot of my work-- most of my work, if not like concretely in its finished stage, certainly in its conception-- really dwells on futility or at least dwelling on this version of nihilistic futurity in which the body is destroyed, not empowered, or empowerment is found, heavy meditations on death, on mortality, on fragility, on impermanence.

I think that it's also-- on the other hand, it's so vitally important for me to speak about my work in the context of ableism, in the context of disability theory. So on the other hand, it's like, yes, I feel like the work itself is the springboard for my more advocacy practice that comes afterwards, where I'm like, we can look at this work that I've made. I'm willing to share my own experience.

And that part of my practice, the speaking, educational practice, exists, of course, hand in hand with my work, but isn't driven directly by the intentionality within the work. I'm not making the work to educate people on ableism, or to speak on ableism, or to even like make audiences aware of something about disability that could be contextualized within social justice. It's more about a collective acknowledgment of-- it's about more of a collective acknowledgment of an experience that has been labeled as disability, but is really about the fundamentally decrepit nature of human existence.

And then you can take that and be like, let's talk about why, architecturally, ableism is integrated into everything we design. Let's talk about illness as metaphor. Let's talk about these things. So I think that's how it functions with my practice. It's like I make the work. Then I talk about these things. And I'm like, here's the work to lay the foundation. Yeah.

I like that. That's a very important distinction, I think, that the advocacy and the conversations happen. And they happen in tandem with the art. But they aren't the art. They are the purpose of the art. Yeah, thank you. Tristan and Alexandre, did you want to talk about this?

Yeah, I guess I feel a certain resistance or tension towards this question because I feel as if there's a history of social responsibility being placed onto artists as opposed to actual systemic change. I see that as a tool of neoliberal capitalism, a way of controlling public funds, and being able to respond to these issues but offsetting the responsibility basically.

I also feel like, in many social movements, I guess I want to muddy the question a little bit. The way that I think about this relationship to my practice is, what are the limits of justice that are suggested by the work that I'm making? Not to imply that it is-- sorry, this is a difficult question.

I think it's even interesting to think about what prompted this question to be asked of us. None of us explicated social justice in anything that we wrote about our work. And so it's thinking about the connotation of the artist that is designated as of color, whether or not they're proposing that in their artwork or not, then to be able to like eloquently speak on that. And that being seen as an action, that is enough.

I think, Tristan, what you just said is so poignant because it's like feeling as though there is this sort of performative action as well to engaging with art that is asking these really difficult things of the viewer. So you do what? You do the labor of watching a difficult performance video, or reading a piece, experiencing a piece. And then you walk away from that feeling as though some change has happened, which is, I think, that neoliberal, capitalistically-driven fabrication of progress that is linked to art work. So it's complicated being caught up in that process and not really knowing how to articulate that.

Yeah, definitely. Sorry, you can go, Mary.

Oh, no, I'm sorry. I just wanted to-- yeah, please go ahead.

Yeah, so thank you for that framing. Yeah, I guess I feel like-- in literacy or this empathetic experience of trauma and oppression, when we're asking the question, what kind of word actually needs to be done to redress the violence of colonialism and racism in our society? What do you need to undo that trauma?

I start to locate my practice further and further away from that. And I guess what I was saying too about the models of organizing leadership and abolitionist and social movements is that there is also this de-centering and working to make yourself replaceable in this system of relations. And by that, I mean you're working towards a system of relating to one another where everyone can kind of start building autonomy in their own communities.

And I don't know if it's-- I guess I don't always think it's productive to place all of that pressure onto my artistic practice. And it can surface in other ways. And I think that's where it's useful.

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And yeah, I think you're right. The question does place too much attention on the individual, when what's most needed is large-scale institutional change, is what is needed. And it's too much responsibility to say that art has to be doing this and is responsible for doing this. Yeah.

So I want to leave us time for questions from the audience. But I'd like to wrap up by asking, what are you working on next? And what are the questions you are looking to answer now? Alexandre, would you like to go first on this one?

What am I working on next? Oh, that's fun. What am I working on next? So I co-founded and organized a collective with artists with whom I went to grad school with, Noe Olivas and Patrisse Cullors. We founded the Crenshaw Dairy Mart. And in a couple of weeks, we'll be implementing the first prototypes of what we're calling abolitionist pods, which are a sort of autonomous garden.

That's one of the iterations of it we're going to be working on, autonomous gardens that have an automatic self-drip system, and are solar powered, and involve organizers, and leaders, and folks from within the community to just come and access food on their own and just pull what they want, what they need, replant what they feel they need, what they want. And also instilling a language around community safety, we're going to be organizing a few workshops around that.

And concurrently, a project that was founded by Noe Olivas, one of the co-founders, Domingo, is a 1967 Chevy StepVan. And we're going to be organizing a series of food distribution projects across the city. So I'm very excited about that. That's coming up. And it's just nice working within my collective. So yeah.

That does sound great. That's very exciting. Panteha, what are you working on next?

I'm currently working on this series of sculptural work. Well, so coming out of this work, I was really thinking about again always dwelling on the object, body as object, and all these things. But after making *Unlearn Learn the Body*, I became very fascinated-- or in the process of making *Unlearn the Body*, I became fascinated with making my own objects to interface with in my performances because I'm appropriating medical and industrial materials and saying, OK, now this is the body as it interfaces with these, as it melds with these.

But now, I'm like, oh, I'm really interested suddenly in making what I'm calling new prosthetics, so these augmented prostheses and medical devices that I am taking, and deconstructing, and then putting back together and adding things to. There is horse bits. There is PVC pipe. So it's like these creating these like devices to then use within my performances, but also to exhibit a sculptures, thinking about again, the antiquity, thinking about artifacts of heritage.

So what is the heritage of illness? What is ethnography with an illness? And creating my own sort of artifacts within that, like the new artifacts in the show, but then also this idea of new prosthetics as well. So that's what I'm working on now. And I'm having a residency with the Los Angeles Nomadic Division at the Work Arts Space. So I'll be going heavy on fabrication for the next month on that.

Congratulations. That sounds very exciting. Is one of the pieces-- I think I had seen something that was maybe like a pelvic bone with a lot of like hardware?

Oh yeah, those are within *Unlearn the Body*. That's new artifacts. Those are my sculptural pieces within the show. So yeah, it's like these pelvises set with all these piercings. So those are at LAMAG right now, installed in the space. [? Rest ?] [? in ?] [? peace ?] physicality. But yeah, so.

That's great. That sounds fantastic. Tristan, what are you working on next?

I'm actually in my last quarter of my graduate program. A month from now, I'll have my thesis show. I've been producing a two-channel video. And this is kind of like CGI, the interpretation of home videos that my dad used to take of us.

And I guess I need to use this project doesn't work to say goodbye to being home with my family the way that I described things like Colonial, expressions of gender and labor and power in a domestic space, just saying goodbye to all of that and re-interpreting what the home videos mean and what their intentions were, as a response to the act of forgetting and wanting to preserve life in spaces.

But then also, these images and videos anticipate-- they're representations of life that also anticipate the death at the same time. And so I'm meditating on what that means in relation to, I guess, the experience of my everyday confinement over the last year in proximity to caregiving and maintenance that surfaced when I was at home.

My friends and I are also working on organizing our next Zine Fair. So I'd mention that we put on Zine Fairs in LA. And they explicitly deal with relationships to technology. Our first one was in 2019. And we did one last year. This year was contentious. But we're hoping to put something together for the following year.

Well, congratulations on finishing your program. And best of luck to you with everything that's coming up ahead. It sounds very powerful and very charged. And I think it sounds like it's also going to produce some really amazing work.

Yeah, thank you.

Thanks. And Maru, what are you working on next?

With the continuation of my research in this contaminated site, I'm collaborating right now with Self Help Graphics. This is a gallery that it's located in Boyle Heights. And it's part of the area that has this problem of contamination of the soil. So I'm working with them and also with the scientists from the Natural History Museum here in Los Angeles to find an alternative way of lead remediation.

Right now, what's been happening is the government is taking the soil from the contaminated properties, and transporting it, and dumping it into the landfill. So with this collaboration, what we're trying to do is to put in the hands of people the possibility of taking this in their own hands, specifically for people that don't have the access for remediation because of-- if they're outside of the cleaning area, they wouldn't have access for that. So we are wanting to put this as an alternative. And I'm very excited because this involves more work that can be directly working with communities. And that's part of what I'm doing right now.

That's wonderful. Well, thank you, everybody, for speaking with me today and for this conversation. It was really interesting to hear more from you. I've been engaging with all of your work for the past few months in that virtual space. So even though we are still in a virtual space, to get to see you and talk to you today has been really great. I want to see if there are any questions from the audience.

There is a question in the chat. It says here domestic entrapment is an interesting phrase. Could you expand on the context of that and its influence on an artist? Is that a question for Tristan?

Yeah, I can speak to that a little bit. I guess what I was trying to articulate in that phrase was this experience of, especially early in the pandemic, being home and not being able to leave for a number of different reasons. And for me, being in proximity to family in a way that I hadn't been in years, since high school even, because I've been living independently since graduating, was really, I guess, traumatic in ways I hadn't been prepared to deal with.

And so my parents were also involved in the foster care system. Being close to that infrastructure of social support on one end, but also a system of exploitation and abuse on the other was-- I don't know. Just trying to locate myself within that was difficult. And so that's why I felt like my practicing work needed to pivot in order to respond to those experiences in a way that felt-- I don't know. It's just something I had to do.

There's another question in the chat. It says, hello, Maru. How much of your work was based on trial and error? And how much was based on research?

I can say that my work-- the research is itself the work. And yeah, it involves trial and error. Well, maybe that's why I would like to work with living matter because it allows me to have this conversation with the unexpected. Even when we have an experiment running, there's always something that you cannot control. And that's what I really like about biological systems, that we have the possibility of embracing the reality that we cannot have control over things.

So for me, it's like building a relationship where you start. And you start a conversation. And it's like a back and forth. So yeah, I think that was, for me, working in this case with this type of cultures.

I think we have time for one or two more questions. There's one here in the chat. It says, Tristan Espinoza briefly mentioned the idea of residue of trauma. That stood out to me. I was wondering, how do you navigate or confront spaces that may be triggering to some of these traumas? And I think that's maybe something-- if other people wanted to respond to that as well, you could.

Yeah. Well, what was difficult about being home was that my family and I, we never had a chance to get to a point in our relationships where there were ways for us to resolve conflict or things that were unacknowledged or unsaid in the past. There were no systems for healing or accountability in our dynamics basically.

And so that was a shift for me because I had spent so much time building or wanting those kinds of relationships with other people and being really intentional about what it means to fall out of alignment and what reentry in a relationship or community would look like. And so those gestures of care were absent in these spaces. And for me, that was something I didn't know how to articulate and respond to.

And I guess, during the pandemic, there was just this process of learning to be OK with that because there are certain people, and systems, and infrastructure in your life that will just be enemies to you and not prioritize or care for the boundaries that you set. And I think coming to terms with that allows you to direct your energy in different ways. And so I don't know. That's just, I guess, a personal thing. But I also acknowledge that there's a multiplicity of approaches to navigating and moving through these spaces.

Yeah, thank you for speaking personally about that. I think that, even though everyone's situation is different, there's something very recognizable about what you're saying. I think this will be our last question. It says-- and I think this is a question for everyone. It says, I know it may always be evolving. But what is a newfound medium that each of you have loved working with at this moment? So are there any newfound mediums or practices that have come about lately?

I've been writing a lot. And it's not anything that I really intend to share. Who knows what will happen. But yeah, I've been writing much more than I usually do. Usually, I'll write a lot when I'm conceptualizing. But I've been writing a lot more.

And it's just been helping me iron out my thoughts. And especially handwriting, that's a medium, handwritten text as opposed to typed. And I mean, I go through I guess what I call obsessions. I get very like obsessed with a certain material or something. And right now, I'm very obsessed with hernia belts, making something out of those and with hospital ID bracelets. So yeah.

I can jump in. I've been doing a lot of DIY things. I don't know. I'm starting from growing food and working on the car, then producing my own almond milk or bread. All these are very tactile activities that are part of the research process and everyday life. So yeah, I think part of this reflection of being in this isolated form was going back to all this activity where you can be with yourself and use it as a source of meditation, even contemplation of the actual moment. So I've been enjoying that a lot.

I wish I should made more books. This book that I made for this show was actually my first one, which is hilarious because I organize a Zine Fair that revolves around publications related to technology. So more books. And for my project, I've been doing a lot of motion capture. And that's been a really different way for me to interface with these kinds of personal histories and apologies, where I'm performing the narratives instead of being a spectator to them or generating something for viewers, or something for others to interact with. So yeah, all of that feels [INAUDIBLE].

I appreciate the question because it's just something I feel like I've-- I focus on one medium at a time or something like that. And then I bring them all together. So a couple of years spend writing primarily. And I do this thing where I avoid a certain medium for some time.

But I did promise-- I made amends. I made a promise to myself that, after this project, I'll revisit-- I mean, I started working with textile-- I'll revisit working with textile again and working with photo again more intentionally. So nothing new, but just not suffocating myself with not working with one medium.

I like the idea of avoiding certain things, like avoiding certain media. Thank you everybody for speaking so deeply and so powerfully. And this was a really great conversation. Thank you very much. I'm going to turn it back over to Jamie to bring us home.

Yeah. Just first of all, thank you, Mary, for facilitating this terrific conversation. And I also want to thank Ana Campos with the Los Angeles Public Library for being really instrumental in helping to coordinate and organize this partnership. And we're looking forward to doing more fun, collaborative things in the future.

And most of all, just massive Thanks and congratulations to the artists-- Panteha, Alex, Maru, Tristan. Thank you, thank you, thank you for just being really open and just sharing your really, incredibly, powerful work. On behalf of the gallery, it's been a pleasure and an honor to work with each of you.

And just one last plug for everyone. If you have not seen their exhibitions yet, please do so. There's only a few more hours left to experience them online. Or if you want to visit them again, please do so. And I also just want to thank the Department on Disability. A special thank you to Nicole and Lizzie for providing today's services.

We really appreciate your efforts and just helping to make sure that this everything we do is accessible to all individuals. So thank you. And then also, a special thank you to Rick Pope for helping us to coordinate that. And yeah. And then also, I just want to thank the Department of Cultural Affairs, Gabriel Cifarelli, who I think is still here, yes, for marketing and promotion; and John Weston, who has been so instrumental in the four exhibitions here and everything at the gallery and Stephanie Sherwood and just the whole LAMAG team. So just thank you's all around. And just thank you for everyone who joined us today.

And we'll catch you again for our next show. And see you around virtually. So thank you. And take care.

Bye. Talk to you later.

Bye.

Thank you.