

[MUSIC PLAYING]

My name is Maura Quinn Brewer. And I'm a COLA 2021 Visual Art Fellow. I have always been very creative. I probably could have gone-- I remember thinking when I was 18 that maybe I wanted to go to college for some more humanities type thing. But basically, I didn't want to take math classes. So I ended up at an art school. And then it took me a little while to start making video, probably not until right before I graduated.

I worked with Vanalyne Green, who is a really amazing video artist. And she was a huge reason that I started. She was basically the reason I started working in video, I think. And then, I went to graduate school. I did the thing. I studied with some other really amazing video artists and filmmakers, Bruce Yonemoto and Yvonne Rainer. And I studied critical theory. I've always been a little bit between disciplines. I'm an artist. But I studied critical theory and I teach critical theory alongside video art. And feminist theory and psychoanalytic theory and Marxism have been really important driving forces in my work.

And I am also very influenced when I think about my work. I'm very interested by the history of essay video and essay film. And so my work is probably a little bit between disciplines in that it involves a lot of writing and research that manifests as video at the end of the day. The two narratives in my piece are on the one hand, just the narrative of the original film, of Jess Manafort's film. So it's the story about this beautiful, glamorous young woman who is kidnapped by a man who's fallen in love with her.

And he walks her in the basement of his grandmother's mid-century modern house in a ploy to get her to fall in love with him. And so that's like the first narrative of my video. The second narrative is the one that I'm adding or interweaving into that original narrative, which is the real story of Jess Manafort's relationship with her ex-husband, Jeffrey Yohai, who is involved in a series of real estate scams around Los Angeles, for which he's currently serving a nine year prison sentence.

And so one of the things that I like to do is actually pattern my narrative on the narrative structure of the original film. So I'll summarize the plot of the film. And you'll get these little snippets of it. And as the action builds, the action in my sort of secondary, critical story is also building. So I often think of my work as having a parasitic relationship to the Hollywood narratives that I'm deconstructing.

One of the things that I was interested in. And the reason that I'm putting these two stories together is because when I was watching this film-- I have an interest in Jessica Manafort. She had just made this film. I was watching it over and over again. And thinking about the things that I knew about her. And I knew that she had been involved and sued for the various kind of like financial entanglements she's gotten into with her ex.

And one of the houses, the one that really received the most press, that had been this sort of a vehicle for fraud, in that he would take out these loans or get investments of several million dollars from people to purchase these properties. And then he would use-- the idea being that he was going to tear down these properties, and built spec houses, resell them, and everyone would make money on the investment.

But instead of tearing them down and reselling them, he would just use the property as collateral to get additional loans. And then he would spend money on god know what. So the house that received the most attention when he was being charged with these crimes is this house on 1550 Blue Jay Way. When I was watching this film and thinking about it, I realized that the house in her film, which she was making at the same time that these real estate frauds were going on. The house in her film strikingly resembles the house, this real house, at 1550 Blue Jay Way.

I think that films can be understood in two ways simultaneously. One, what are the things that the artist, the filmmaker, is intending to do? What is the plot of the film? Who are the characters, et cetera? And then on the other hand, I think films are full of things that artists do unintentionally. And I think that's true of any artist. There's certain things you know you're doing. And there's certain things you don't know that you're doing.

And so when I'm deconstructing these films to make my own films, I'm interested in reading them symptomatically. I don't think that Jessica Manafort picks that house because she was thinking about this real estate fraud. I think that we often make unconscious choices. That's a fundamental part of the art process. And that could be very revealing. Those choices can be very revealing. I think Jessica Manafort is just a really, really interesting character. I think she has this life in which she's benefited from some like really horrible things that her father did. She was thrust into the public when the Trump administration came to power.

But she's also like this emerging artist in LA. And I'm a working artist in LA. And she has frustrations around her lack of audience. And while I don't think anyone who becomes a feminist or video artist has illusions of huge mass audiences, I think most artists can relate to the feelings of frustration around their level of careers. That just comes with the territory. And so a lot of ways. I think of her as this sort of alt, bizarro version of myself.

And so, I guess, part of what I think is that this a story about a couple of scammers. But it's also a story about the way that money has hollowed out cities like Los Angeles. We're in the middle of this terrible housing crisis and these houses are empty. And so I think that there's a huge injustice in that. And I think that if anyone thinks about anything, that is the thing that's haunting me right now, just the emptiness of the city.