

COCKTAILS WITH CREATIVE GROWTH TRANSCRIPT

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TOM DI MARIA (TDM) (00:01)

Welcome to Cocktails with Creative Growth! We're making whiskey sours. I'm going to do one part Triple Sec, we'll also add is an alcohol with an orange flavor, often used a margarita to be had that I'm putting that in there, my little my little thing, and then I prefer bourbon as the whiskey, you can use rye whiskey, you know, and I think any kind of decent. Whiskey is fine, you don't, in my opinion, you don't really want to use the \$100 bottle stuff in a in a mixed drink. So then I do one part and a touch more of the whiskey. And then you can, if you have a shaker, you can shake it with the ice. I've gotten a little ice in here and it makes you feel like a real professional bartender. That's good. And then you don't just put them in glass and stir it up. And you know, if you're in California, you know, this is my Martha Stewart moment, you know, these are lemons that I picked in my yard. And because that's true, and if I have I have the Meyer lemon, so they're a little sweeter. If you have a harder lemon, you want a little bit more sugar, and then a garnish of orange or a little orange squeeze if you use the simple syrup, put some orange juice in there. And cheers!

(01:18)

So I'm going to introduce my panelists. But first I'm going to offer a toast because I'm going to embarrass Sarah and Anton because I know they each have parents watching tonight. So we'll offer a toast to the parents of our panelists. And thank them I think any time anyone raises a child that ends up in the art world, they did a good job. So thank you. So joining me on the talk. We're going to go one hour exactly. And we're going to hear a little bit about Creative Growth and what our current plans are. My colleague Sarah Galender Meyer is joining me. Sarah joined Creative Growth like many people do by volunteering in our gallery. She has a background in art, but more in performing art and dance, and is now our Gallery Director and we've worked together for several years. And also joining us as our special guest is Anton Stuebner. Anton is the gallery director at Catharine Clark gallery in San Francisco. Anton was an intern to at Creative Growth back in the 2010s, and returned in 2020 to curate an exhibition at Creative Growth called *No More I Love Yous*. So we'll each take some time talking, we're going to start with Sarah, who's going to give us a little bit of background on the history of creative growth. One of the things that we're excited about in the 4x8-bridges part here is that hopefully, you'll learn Creative Growth's role in the art world, but we feel like we have greater connectivity to the San Francisco Bay Area and its collectors. And I know particularly Anton will talk about some of the issues in general about running a contemporary gallery in the Bay Area. And hopefully those things will all kind of come together in a nice way. So without further ado, Sarah, you do want to tell us a little bit about creative growth and and how we got to this point.

SARAH GALENDER MEYER (SGM)

Sure. Great. Thanks, Tom. Hi, Tom. And thank you, Hannah, who will be interpreting for us tonight, too. Okay, I'm going to share my screen here so that we can look at some images. So this is Florence and Elias Katz they founded Creative Growth in 1974. She was an artist and he was a psychologist. And they opened their garage in Berkeley to people with disabilities. At the time, the state had sort of cut services for adults with disabilities, and they wanted to open up their home really their garage based on this sort of radical idea at the time, that everyone and specifically people with disabilities deserves to have the tools for creative expression and exhibition. So they started this in their garage with a few artists. And, and it really grew pretty quickly from there. In 1980, so this is just six years after they bought cells auto body shop, which is our current home on 24th Street in downtown Oakland, and renovated it to become this incredibly large, beautiful lit space that you know, you'll see images of as it exists today. But it really was this great hub at the time. And it was an interesting time in general, you know, the NEA had they had their funding, it started about 10 years before and creative growth was a recipient of some very early grants of there's the art route movement had made its way to the US at that point. And in the art world in general. It was this time of great experimentation. You know, it was this very grueling time across all artistic disciplines where people were questioning, you know, what is art who can make art. And then on top of that the disability rights movement was really taking off. In fact, Berkeley was really sort of the birthplace of that. So it was this confluence of factors that made a really auspicious beginning for Creative Growth, sort of in the 70s and early 80s. And around that time, that's what the studio looks like today. Going back there a different angle, but same general spaces, we saw.

SGM

Creative Growth was really seen as this hotbed of creativity. And so a lot of local artists, you know, really came and got involved, they taught workshops. And this is a photo a great photo of Joan Brown, who created this print edition for a fundraiser that creative growth had in 1984. So it was actually very cool. Like it was really seen as this cool, funky place that great artwork was being made, and was starting to capture a lot of attention, particularly by artists who were around at the time. And this is this is really cool. On the top is a flyer for a show that Joan brown did with creative growth artists, Donald Patterson, who's no longer in our program, in 1984, where their artwork was exhibited side by side, which is super cool. And then down below is Squeak McGrath You know, who was teaching here at the time, and we I see three artists that are currently still in our program all the way on the left, there is John Martin. And the big smiley guy in the middle is Larry Randolph. And then all the way on the right is Raydell Early. So they we have a lot of artists who have been around since the early days, which is really awesome.

(06:45)

So all so this momentum was really building and then in the year 2000, the Board of Directors decided that, you know, they really saw the value of creative, both artists work and wanted to elevate it and take it into the contemporary art world. And so they made a strategic decision to hire Tom di Maria to sort of launched the artists careers into the contemporary art world, which was not familiar, and totally uncharted terrain. Tom was incredibly successful at launching the careers of some major Creative Growth artists, namely Judith Scott, Dan Miller, and William Scott. And incredible success happened from then on, you know, there were international exhibitions, there was a gallery in Paris, we started

participating in art fairs. We had symposiums, you know, and Creative Growth has really gained a lot of success and recognition. So I'm going to hand it over to Tom. And I do want to say, I want to bring this up, because it's kind of amazing, Creative Growth's, success, really, if you think about it. And I remember, one time when I was volunteering many years ago, Tom was telling me about some of the exhibitions that were happening at the time. And, you know, I was just amazed how did this happen? Like, how did you get that show? How did you get into the museum? And, and he was like, "well, this is Creative Growth: this little Engine That Could." So Tom, I'm gonna give it to you, if you could please talk about the early days and what it was like sort of forging that path to inclusivity in the art world. I think that would be really great.

TDM

Sure, I will, Sarah, thank you. And thanks for that nice introduction and introduction to Creative Growth. Do you remember how you stumbled into Creative Growth? Or your first impression, personally, how did you hear about us? Well, how did you come to volunteer?

SGM

Sure, um, I moved from New York in 2006, and moved to Oakland and my father in law used to give me his old paper magazines, not old, but after he was done with them. And so there was one issue right after he moved here with this beautiful spread of the of some of the textile garments that were made in the studio at Creative Growth that Kim Hastreiter, you know, had put together, and I thought it was very cool. And it and I read about it. It wasn't far from my house. So I came in one day, you know, just came into the gallery one day, and I was so blown away by Creative Growth. I mean, I didn't know that such a place had existed or could ever exist, you know, and I think, you know, sadly, and honestly, I don't think I'd ever been around people with disabilities that much. And the artwork was just so incredible, like, the integrity, the beauty, the what, you know, the artwork, it was just so wild and amazing. And I was totally hooked right away. Like many people who come to creative growth and who visit that was that's not a specific, Sarah magic moment. I think that happens with a lot of people that walk into Creative Growth.

TDM (09:57)

That's great. Thank you. And I think you know, when we reopen, if you haven't been to Creative Growth, we all hope that you will come, of course and have that same experience. It's not unlike the experience that I had, I was working as the assistant director of the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, and I was invited to come to Creative Growth, to apply for the position of executive director at that time in 1999. And I thought, you know, I went to art school, I was fine, they had a job in a museum, I was able to, you know, pay my rent, and I thought, I'm not looking for a job. But I went as a favorite of someone on the search committee and walked into Creative Growth. And it was this place that I felt like I couldn't leave. So the question is, how do you know, artists with disabilities come to be engaged in the contemporary art world, this isn't one of the earlier photographs of artists that creative growth, when we moved into the current buildings, early 80s, what we need to remember is how fundamentally different the idea of disability is now than it was then the idea that people with disabilities could be a part of society, or creative was a radical notion. And thankfully, we've evolved from that. So while this photograph looks institutional to us, it was, you know, a bunch of Berkeley hippies doing something crazy.

(11:25)

And that was the launching point. You know, the studio looks like this now, and hopefully much more contemporary. So as the programs become more contemporary, in our artists, or more contemporary, how does the artwork sort of move in that same path? How does it advance? How do we break down the stereotypes around disability and also around, often self-taught artists? This is the Creative Growth Gallery in Oakland, where you can come when we open.

TDM

But still, how do we move from a gallery and nonprofit gallery open to the world? Well, one of the ways so when the board hired me, an artist named Judith Scott was working at Creative Growth. And her work was starting to get some attention, particularly in the art food or outsider art field. And there was a feeling that it could sort of cross over become something more important. And she became an important part of how creative growth advance its artists, and their and their work in the world. So you start by, you know, making friends and doing knocking on doors and doing everything you can. This is Judith on the right, giving a kiss to her twin sister, Joyce. This is one of the first exhibitions of her work in San Francisco. And interestingly, it's at the Exploratorium because one of the first places that invited creative growth to exhibit was it the idea that the Exploratorium the idea of science, what does perception mean? What is expression? What can be art? How do we perceive objects? So they invited me to put together an exhibition of work there and I chose do Scott's work. And as you move through the exhibition first you'd see the work without any context. And as you move through a kind of labyrinth, you would get more information about the artist. And at the end, there were surveys stations, and you'd be asked how is what do you come into how you coming to understand this art as you have more information.

(13:32)

Another friend that we had is a quick art history is on Dubuffet, the French artist sort of came up with this word "Art Brut," which means raw art. And he was very interested in the self-taught artists and artists that grew and made work without the benefit of art school or connection to culture, or the Academy. And he collected this work for the people in France, a museum in France, no Museum in France accepted it, they didn't think it was cultural enough. So that collection was accepted by the city of Lausanne in Switzerland, and the collection resides there. And Creative Growth had early opportunities to exhibit work there. So we started with the self-taught in terms of how we presented this is Judith Scott's work in the Museum of Art Brut and you can see it as a kind of old school kind of style with the attic and this kind of thing which is in keeping with it, Outsider art feeling but the work started to catch on in the friends that we had for this started came from artists are responding to the work people in fashion started to respond to the work and people who had an open mind about who an artist could be and what an artwork could be. And here's a slightly later exhibition of our work in, looking you know, much more contemporary in the work starts to crawl over, outside of the little ghetto of self-taught or disability and into a more contemporary arena. And here, this is her (Judith Scott) pieces in between the left jumping way ahead, this is the first reinstall of MoMA in New York was that last year when they reopen the gallery so you know total advancement of her work.

(15:25)

One of the things that Creative Growth also did to make the work contemporary and to engage new collectors was opening a gallery in Paris, called Galerie Impaire. "Impaire" in French means odd just like English, even an odd and a little bit strange. And this was our gallery. The French embrace it because they love the idea of taking the Dubuffet notion of self-taught artists and bring it making it contemporary and bringing it back to Paris. And I think was a turning point for European collectors and other contemporary collectors to see the work in any way. Then we started to participate in art fairs. While art fairs are the rage now for galleries, it's in some ways the same 20-25 years ago, that wasn't so much the case. But self-taught art always had a fair, because self-taught art was often collected and driven by collectors who wanted to work not by galleries who presented it often wasn't expensive. So the fair was an annual coming together of collectors and presenters in Creative Growth became the first nonprofit, and artists space to bring its own artists into the fair, which was controversial with galleries because they felt like that's the role of the gallery. But it really broadened our approach and changed the field for many people. And now there are numerous nonprofits and art centers with people with disability artists with disabilities to participate in that fair.

(16:57)

And then you look for friends who support your work. This is a Dan Miller drawing. He's a Creative Growth artist that uses language as a drawing as a substitute for language. There were four drawings presented at MoMA in New York, and then Connie Butler and the museum purchased them for their drawing collection. So that was an important step forward. And then when important curators and collectors and then others start, and some notable galleries like an exhibition at the Fraenkel Gallery, in San Francisco a few years back curated by Katie Grannan. And it really starts little by little, advancing the understanding of the work and the attention that it's receiving. And the same with a touring exhibition of work that included Creative Growth artists and other sectors from the Bay Area.

(17:59)

So, with that first introduction to how we're kind of how the work sort of crossed over from this sort of independent self-taught work into galleries and museums in a more contemporary way. I think I'll pass the torch to Anton. And to talk more about how, as a gallerist, he, you know, comes to understand the work in as a collector as well.

ANTON STUEBNER (AS) (18:30)

Oh, thank you, Tom. Thank you, Sarah is, as you both know, so exciting for me to be here to talk about Creative Growth, which is a place that it says special to me, and as it is to many people who are tuning in tonight and to be here with to my favorite people. So thanks for hosting us. I think we need a drink to that.

(18:51)

Oh my God, that's tequila. Yeah. That works. So, so yeah. So thank you for the introduction, Tom. So in terms of and talking about my sort of understanding of Creative Growth and its sort of role in in a wider contemporary art scene, I want to talk a little bit about my own sort of journey to Creative Growth. And how an early introduction to the center to its artists not only shaped my understanding of how expansive contemporary arts practices could be, but also what my role in terms of supporting a place a Creative Growth could come through in terms of philanthropy, philanthropy, but also as a collector. So

as with all good things, some of us have the good fortune to fall in with good people early on in our lives. And in my case, when I was about 15, or 16, I had the very good fortune to fall in with Chris Ospital and Ben. So Chris and Ben are the brother and sister dynamic duo who own MAC, which is a wonderful store in San Francisco. And 40 years ago, when they found that the store they had the really kind of remarkable forethought to not just approach their job, their work as retailers as being as just selling objects selling clothes, they were very tapped into what it meant to be part of a creative community, and to look at art design philanthropy, as things that are very interrelated. So I met Chris and Ben when I was about 16. And well, and as I was completely dazzled by their space and their and their charm and their intellect, and their investment in their creative community, I also found that it was an education and contemporary arts. Their store was always filled with incredible work everything from sculptures by Dan Hamilton to photographs by Diane Arbus. But I always found that the work that I kept returning to where these structures by Carl Hendrickson, this isn't one of the ones that they own. But this is one that that is from what I understand in the archives of Creative Growth. And Carl was an alum of Creative Growth, who, despite his limited ability, created these extraordinary structures, some of which were everything, from houses that were like play houses, to chairs, to all sorts of things that, that melded the sort of the line between furniture and structures. And I remember being completely beguiled and amazed with not just how these works were fabricated, but how they raised questions about, say shelter about built environments, and even what kind of materials could constitute as sculptures. Here's a photo of Carl in the studio. And so shortly after I was 21 I wanted to deepen my own involvement with, with my community and with my creative community. And what I saw was the broader arts community. So I talked to Ben and Chris and said, You know, I want to volunteer someplace, I want to get involved in the organization. And I know that you're deeply involved with Creative Growth. At that time, they had been on the board of directors, I think, for maybe around 20 years, and then said, Okay let's find a day to go to Creative Growth, let's pick a weekday when the studio is in full swing, but I'm going to forewarn you, you're going to be overwhelmed. And anytime anyone says that to you, you have to take a pause and wonder, what do they mean by that. And sure enough, we went over on a Monday, we met with Tom, Tom was extraordinarily gracious, and showing us the space showing us the gallery showing us through the offices, and then you took us into the studio. And as you saw from Tom and from Sarah's presentations, if you haven't been you really can't prepare yourself for how extraordinary the spaces, you know, it's a former auto garage, 10,000 square feet, approximately. And the space is just incredible, gargantuan, filled with light, but most importantly, filled with, with artists who are making. And it was such a shock to my system, because you know, even though I came from come from a family of artists, I always had that perhaps misperception that art making and artists were these people who would make work in solitary confines without being surrounded by any other stimuli to other people, any of those sort of outside distractions. And there was this extraordinary thing of going into Creative Growth studios and seeing 40-50 artists a time working side by side, working collaboratively working across disciplines, working with, you know, kilns and textiles and painting, and materials for fabrication for fabricating sculpture sculptures, and realizing that there was such an expansiveness of not just the kind of materials to which the artist had access, but how they but how the artists were working collaboratively, side by side quite often. And I remember going to the studio and every time you would approach a table, the artists would feel motion you over show you what they were working on. And it felt like such a completely radical act of generosity to not only be able to be part of, to have you part of this moment where art is being made, but to be seeing art made all around you without any of the sort of restrictions or pressures that we often think about in terms of art making.

(24:31)

And so I was hooked. And as I recently shared with Tom and Sarah that day, I bought a print by Charles Esseltine. Charles Esseltine had created print where he would create origami and then unfold them. And the action was basically the unfold of origami that he redrawn by memory, and I remember was about \$125, which was way more than I could afford the time, I think I was making \$13 or \$14 an hour at my job. But it was not only so beautiful, but I recognized that by buying this piece of art, it was a way of feeling connected to this organization feeling connected to the artists and fostering a network of support. So quite a few years later, probably since that first visit, I would say I've probably collected two or three dozen works from Creative Growth. If the \$125 was at that time, the most money I've ever spent a few years later, I stepped up my game, and bought this piece by Gerone Spruill, which I don't think has a title but was internally known as "Peace Pope." And Gerone is another alum artists who, whose work often has this incredibly vibrant sensibility, often with nods to, to funk and early hip hop, which of course, I naturally love. And it's been but in this particular work, which I think was the lead work for the home show a few years back, you have Gerone with a flat top, hanging out flashing peace signs with the Pope. And I'm not Catholic, I'm not religious, but there was something so beautifully optimistic about this particular piece. And its sort of incredible optimism of in terms of the structures that we put our faiths in, to, to take care of us, provide us with enlightenment to provide us with enrichment. And this is one of my all-time favorite pieces and, and that and it was the piece that yet again, really taught me about how to be a collector. And so, over the course of however many years, I did slowly become a Creative Growth collector.

(26:42)

And the lessons that I took from that really did shape how I approached my, my collecting with galleries with other artists, you know, from those early lessons of what a mess to be involved with an expanded arts community. It shaped completely who I am, I think as an art citizen. And so when, for example, I went to graduate school, after looking at a number of schools and having a number of offers, I ended up going to California College of the Arts, in part because their graduate programs had such a commitment to inclusion, such a commitment to thinking expansively about arts practices. And I found another community there, including the really extraordinary dear Miss Leigh Markopoulos. Leigh was the chair of the graduate program in curatorial practice, which wasn't my graduate program, but was the program next door. And in getting to know Leigh, I was, like so many people completely beguiled by her intellect, charmed by her incredible sense of humor. And one of the things that made least such a fiercely brilliant curator is that she had, she'd had an extraordinary career in contemporary art galleries, having worked at the Serpentine Gallery, having served as director of Rena Bransten. And she'd had an incredible career, of course, as a scholar, as an academic, particularly as the chair of curatorial practice. But she was also a deep supporter of Creative Growth, and its artists champion. And one of the things that made Leigh's so completely extraordinary is that she could look at say, you know, a passive beam photograph, versus, you know, a Judith Scott sculpture versus Juan Aguilera drawing, versus a Dan Hamilton sculpture and see how they were all interrelated. See how they all brought questions about the base questions around form around material, how they all each of these works, each of these artists, our perceptions of what was possible, and there wasn't that hierarchy for her. She really saw all of this part of this interrelated conversation around contemporary practices. So Leigh was, you know, also a friend, and very beloved. And when Leigh passed in 2017, it was, of course, a big loss for our community.

(29:04)

Cut to a few years later, in 2020, I was invited by Tom and by Sarah, to guest curate a show at Creative Growth. And I'm thinking about what I wanted to actually what kind of show I wanted to mount. I wanted this to be a tribute in part to that visionary and expansiveness that Lee was really such an advocate for and so the show that I mounted a Creative Growth was called *No More I Love Yous*. This was in part response to the show that Leigh curated in 2010 and Creative Growth called *Love is a Stranger*. And that show which was another group exhibition, really looked at the sort of relationship between sex, intimacy, desire, and at that nexus of disability because of course, those conversations weren't necessarily always at the forefront when talking about disability or disability and art. And so I'm thinking about a tribute to Leigh and that and then honoring that community that had formed around us and around Creative Growth. I wanted to respond to her exhibition by curating a show that thought about intimacy, and sometimes the shortcomings that happened when we're trying to connect with another person. And we either succeed or we fail. The titles, you know, I think has that we've, the titles were also very interrelated. Love as a stranger was a song by Eurythmics *No More I Love Yous*, as a song popularized by Annie Lennox. And so it's very important to bring that circle together in terms of paying tribute to that community. And it was, I have to say, one of the most, I'm still at a loss for words to say what that should have meant to me. It's felt like the culmination of everything that I've ever wanted from our community, from being part of an arts community by being an art citizen.

(31:02)

And, and I can't think honestly, Tom and Sarah and Ellen and Ryan enough and Creative Growth, this was truly one of the most enriching experiences that I've ever had. And it was a great opportunity, of course, to revisit some of some artists whose work I knew quite well, who I loved, like durance role like Susan Janow, who is extraordinary video questions, you can see here on this back wall, as well as to really dive into the studio and become acquainted with some new artists like Casey Byrnes, who's one of my deep favorites. This piece is a ceramic planter with a with a functional drainage system that Casey handles. And of course, there's lots of delightful elements here, like the painted toenails. The anatomical correctness of the apertures, or the arbitrary is rather, both apertures and armatures. But one of the things that I also really loved about this work is that it was something that had this joy, and just complete celebratory quality that I often associate with work and Creative Growth. And yet it also raised some, some other questions around body positivity around how we look at the body, how do we think about, you know, our, you know, our most private selves and as, as being something that we either hide, or that we publicly reveal. And so there are so many things that came out of this particular work that I've just deeply loved. And I also love how contemporary it feels. If you were to put this in a gallery with a Carol Dunham painting and a Ruby ceramic, those three works would be completely in conversation. It was work that felt it feels completely have a moment and have a very contemporary moment.

(32:54)

And so I mean, as Tom said, you know, in terms of in terms of seeing how Creative Growth work has, disseminated in terms of contemporary art galleries. There have been, of course, extraordinary shows at places like Rena Bransten at all, where with solo shows and Creative Growth artists. There have also been some extraordinary group presentations like the one Katy Grannan and curated in 2015 Fraenkel Gallery, titled *Love is a Lonely Hunter* after Carson Mccullers novel in which I think we're seeing this

really interesting expansion of putting Creative Growth artists in a larger conversation around contemporary practices, which feels like a very needed next step in terms of expanded compensation. Now, some maybe some tough questions, and maybe I'd love to get Tom and Sarah's insights into this. One of the questions when we were talking about this panel was how, what are what are the stop gaps in terms of putting Creative Growth artists and their work in the sort of private conversation, particularly with galleries? And why are some galleries really, you know, excited about the possibility and what why are they sometimes hesitant, and I was been thinking about this all day, and, and what it really came down to me when I was thinking about this more were the reasons that a gallery may or may not work with artists from Creative Growth comes down to: intention, money, and vision, which is sort of interesting, which is maybe three interesting points which might be worth discussing. So in prepping for this panel, I talked to a number of my colleagues as well as some curators and had asked them "Do you know Creative Growth's work? Do you know their artists? And if you were presented with the opportunity, would you include, you know, their work in a gallery show?" And of course, you know, they're always fans and a lot of and a number of my colleagues who said, "Absolutely, we love the mission. We love the work. We absolutely see it as being part of this larger conversation." But there are a couple colleagues who had a little bit resistance to that and to question that, and there were their reasons where it said "we'd love the work formally. We're excited by it. But our question is about the intention behind the work for, you know, if an artist is, say, non verbal, how do you know his or her intention behind the work that they're creating."

(35:24)

Which was something that I found completely sort of anathema to how I even think about visual art. Because ultimately, I think the thing that any of us would respond to saying, well, visual artists, in particular, are artists who find their means of expression through their work, the work is the expression, you know, I can't think of how many artists I've worked with who create brilliant work. But when it comes to say, writing artist statements during grant applications, public speaking, find themselves at a loss for words, because their work, their visual means of expression, is the fullest expression of their intent, other ideas of them speaking their truth. The second thing that I kept thinking about is, is money, which is a weird thing to talk about in a panel like this, but I feel like it's relevant as well, which is that galleries are of course businesses, you know, most galleries not unlike not, unlike Creative Growth, which follows this model works work on 50/50 splits, the gallery is retained 50%, the artist makes 50% on a sale, there's always things that fluctuate with that. When you're a gallery, and you're working with another gallery, such as Creative Growth, there's always going to be contracts that go into place splits that happen, percentages go, you know, you fluctuate, contract, whatever it is. And a lot of galleries, I know are really are really afraid of that risk, they're really afraid of what happens, you know, of collaborating with other galleries, because they're so focused on the economics of it, and rightly so this is a really tough business to be in. So if you partner the gallery, and you say, well, you represent that artist, and that artist has to make their 50%. But if we're going to have a successful partnership, you have to make 25%, I make 25%, those margins sometimes can be really daunting for a gallery to think about.

(37:19)

And, and to try to make work in terms of representation. But the thing that we really get back to is, you know, how do you get contemporary gallerist, or even temporary curators or collectors to make them

that stuff to actually say, you know, what, there are things that are bigger than the money, what that really gets down to his vision. And I think that's something that Tom and Sarah keep getting back to, is that Creative Growth's success has really come from collectors and curators, and gallerists and leaders in our community, who are willing to have the vision to say, "you know what, it's not about the money. No, it's not about what the contemporary art discourse is. No, it's not about what you know about. This is a disabled artist. This is an artist who has this moniker, this is an artist, she has this qualifier, it's about the work, it's about the strength of the work, and how and how does it move you does, it doesn't inspire you."

(38:18)

And, and I think that's the thing that we keep getting back to is, what does it mean to be a visionary collector? What does it mean to be a visionary gallerist? What does it mean to be a visionary leader? And I mean, Tom, and Sarah, I think I would open this up to you. Your vision, when you hear that word? What does it mean to you?

TDM

Yeah, well, I want to address one point first, because you made several good points. And one in terms of we hear the question about intentionality a lot. Yes. And, you know, and I think in many ways that's an ableist statement, I think that our artists are have intention, and they communicate, and they have artists statements, but they're not in an academically presented way that many gallerists expect to see them. If you did, I remember a situation in art fair with Dan Miller painting on the wall, and a collector came up and said, "Well, what does the artist say about this drawing?" And I said, "Well, he doesn't speak about his work." He said, "Oh, those artists are all so elitist." And I said, "you know, he's nonverbal. And, you know, and his work is his statement." So I think part of that we have to look for accessing outward is difficult and accessing the art world when you're a person with a disability is even more difficult. So I think, I think we have to be open to what communication means. Money, I understand, but there are a lot of galleries now wanting to create a book art that we don't particularly want to sell because the prices have changed. And, you know, when people start to chase after you for the money that's not visionary, either. So it cuts in both directions. I think visionary is you know, and I really like to attribute to Leigh is so much about the idea of making and this.

(40:06)

There's this really pure part of the idea of Art Brut and Outsider art that is this human need to create, and to make something meaningful and beautiful. And I think that looking for that with open eyes is visionary and breathtaking. And I think the people that we see, embracing Creative Growth work often approaches that, you know, with, with eyes wide open that way point on process. And then Sarah, if you want to reply or go, we'd love to hear from the audience to please put your questions in the Q&A button, there's a Q&A button at the bottom of your screen. And we've got about 15 minutes left, where we're happy to take your questions as well. Sarah, did you want to comment on that or anything?

SGM

Well, I think I'm going back to the early days, you know, I'm just really I still want to hear more from you about sort of what it was like to talk with curators, you know, and getting those first shows, you know, um, you know, my experience of it now, you know, everybody's, you know, for the most part extremely

welcoming, very gracious. Well, you know, for the most part, a lot of the galleries we work with are great to work with. But I know that that wasn't always the case. You know, how and I'm curious, like, How hard did you have to fight?

TDM

Sure. I mean, I think one of the reasons I'm talking about ableism, is because there was a lot of response around disability, that it couldn't be valid, the work couldn't have meaning. Somehow, we were causing the artists, we were going to assign a price to it. That was arbitrary. That, you know, was meaningless. The early days at fairs, "oh, your artist has disabilities? What's wrong with him? What's wrong with her? What's wrong with this one? What's wrong?" You know, that, that, you know, that kind of really brazen, in your face, kind of, you know, abusive kind of language around what's wrong with your people, you know, or seen it as a charity project, you know? And do you have a potholder making studio, as well? Do you make Christmas cards, we'll buy those for the, you know, for the school. And so it just, it really comes back to the people who have the integrity to see it. You know, and I think, you know, people like Matthew Higgs, and people like Leigh Markopoulos, and Larry Rinder were very important, but collectors to so when the Folk Art Museum in New York was trying to consider acquiring Judith Scott sculptures for their collection.

(42:55)

The there was a huge pause. And because the gift was before the acquisitions committee, and the curators kind of didn't know what to do with it, because it was different than folk art. And it was really the collectors, who were trustees in the museum who said, this is important work, and we need to consider it. So the voices have come from other places like that. The three women that supported Judith Scott's work most in the beginning, were all women that worked in fashion. You know, in New York, in Hong Kong, and in Tokyo, women from fashion saw her work is being beautiful and aesthetic and fashionable and trendy, and aesthetically pleasing, and championed it. So it was really about, you know, one door closes, you open the next one. And, you know, there's also then this point where I appreciate your question, because then there's this, you know, point where do Scott is an overnight sensation. And it's really not an overnight sensation, it's 20 years of having doors slammed in your face. And, you know, as a leader, you have to believe in the artist. And I think and it's not always easy to say at Creative Growth, there are artists who can advance into that world and there are artists who can't. The same way there is with an MFA class or any group of artists and I think that you know, the art world has specific ways that that it works and you have to, you know, be stabbing and respect those as well and have integrity. You can't present the work if it's not good. If it doesn't have the voice. You have to understand it and then you have to continually champion.

SGM (44:51)

Great. I want to talk about the Bay Area for a second and Anton recognizing that you do not represent all San Francisco galleries or collectors. I'm wondering sort of, you know, Creative Growth has had a lot of success. You know, we've got a big following in New York, it's a very international organization. And we have had a few shows at galleries in San Francisco. But there seems to be sort of a limit as to where Creative Growth has gone with our local sort of constituencies. And I'm wondering if you could lend any insight to why that might be.

AS (45:38)

Well, I mean, I think, I think in thinking about my own sort of story with Creative Growth, Creative Growth was a place that I'd like to hope that it would have stumbled upon on my own or come to on my own. But I really did take someone who was deeply passionate about the organization, bringing me in driving me over to Oakland, making those introductions and saying this is a place that matters. And this is a place that you need to pay attention to. And I think we know this in terms of, of any sort of community is that you find your tribe, and, and San Francisco is, is very passionate, is very supportive, it's very small. And it is really one of those places where so much happens by word of mouth. So much happens by having that one event where you meet that one collector, who then becomes so excited about, about the work that an artist at Creative Growth is doing that they tell all their friends, they become a leader within their own community. And I know that we, you know, when, when we did *No More I Love Yous*. This was up, we had the great fortune to co-host a walkthrough for SECA, the Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art through SFMoMA. And it was a wonderful tour, it was wonderful to get a different audience in the door. And I think we had the good fortune of I know, I can think of two very particularly wonderful collectors who I think happened to be on the Zoom call as well who instantly connected with the organization, instantly connected with the work and have since become extraordinary champions for its mission for its work and for its artists. And that's really what it takes. It takes, as Tom said earlier, that banging down the door until someone finally opens that door and says, Okay, how, Tell me your story. Tell me what you're about.

(47:41)

I mean, Sarah, I think you have some extraordinary insight into this, because obviously, you are an extraordinary gallery director. But recently, one of Susan Janow's videos was acquired by the Brooklyn Museum, which is hugely exciting. And from what I understand it happened much, much that way that that we're talking about of you making a connection, and introducing the work and going from there. Can you talk about that a little bit more?

SGM (48:06)

Sure. Well, let's see. I think, you know, the seeds of that were really, we put her video questions in a show at Creative Growth, which I believe you saw, and I don't know, where we met. It was somewhere in San Francisco, and we were randomly talking. And you were saying, Oh, you really should edition the work. And I remember we met at a collector's house. Oh, yeah. Yes. At the time, he was on a collection for a collector's house. And the collectors are, are very, are very deep collectors of new media work. And, and the thought, and that's where the thoughts the thought paths cross. That's right.

(48:48)

So we did, you know, Creative Growth hadn't sort of editioned video work before there is a digital media lab and a lot of work. Great work has been produced there. But we hadn't sort of entered into that realm yet. So thanks to you for getting us started on that one. And I believe it was last year around this time. For Outsider Art Fair in New York. My friend Marianna threw a party for Creative Growth, sort of to celebrate there and we put Susan Janow's video on one of the monitors on one of the floors. And Catherine Morris was there. And she, so she's at the Brooklyn Museum, and she was totally captivated. She's like, "can you tell me about this?" And so we just started talking, and it really went from there. And, you know, she's, she's been a great advocate for Creative Growth in the past. And, you know,

right away, Catherine co-curated an exhibition to the Scott's work with Matthew Higgs that from the Brooklyn Museum that toured so this is like how you make friends and then they that continues to happen.

TDM (50:00)

I want to interrupt that we only have a few minutes. We're getting to all kinds of questions from the audience. And many of them are about the program, how it operates? Is there one in my hometown, those kinds of things. And I want to give a blanket answer to that because I know those get complicated. Creative Growth hosts an annual symposium for art and disability centers around the world that address a lot of the questions that are coming in around presentation, money, studio structures, all those kinds of things, we're getting ready to present. The webinars and transcripts and materials from recent symposiums. One is a day long program on how to start a center like Creative Growth in your community. And another is for people practicing in the field that wanted more information. And all that if you go to the credit growth website is www.creativegrowth.org and in a couple of weeks, you'll be able to get a lot of those questions answered. Because I know they're specific and in detail, as well.

SGM (51:07)

And Tom, I saw a question that came through which is related, which might be a good one to address. How do you develop the artists' work? Is there guidance from staffers that artwork all self-guided?

TDM

You know, that's a question we get a lot. And that's really important when we talk about the integrity of the work and its value and how it's understood. Do you want to? That's a great question. I mean, the studio practice is the core of Creative Growth. And, you know, we have a gallery, but we're really a studio. And we have a very specific sort of hands-off process that allows the artist to develop in his or her own way. And as they develop, you know, staff that we have a studio staff of, of artists, who are sort of mentors or partners or help engage the artist or help them find their own path and encourage them without directing them. So and we allow a lot of time, Creative Growth is over 40 years old. So a lot of the artists and the work that you're seeing now has been a result of a very serious, you know, decades long career, which I think people tend to dismiss that that we don't present work in a serious way until there's been a serious practice. So we allow for the practice to develop. And then I think it's in partnership with the gallery, and the staff and the artists to really know when they're ready. I mean, I think that there's been a great shift in the galleries recently, in our gallery to have the artists haven't been more of an artist one space and do site specific work. And I think we're learning how when the artists are ready to do that. And, you know, I think that's been really great. And I think, you know, Anton, your point about artists statements and intent goes hand in hand with a point I often hear about an artist evolution of self-taught artists or artists with disabilities, some can do one thing, and they do it again and again. That they don't evolve. And I don't think that's true. There is an evolution. And I think many people look at decades long careers of Creative Growth artists and see that evolution. And I think that's an interesting topic as well, for a show. I think we're almost we've got about a minute left, I want to thank everyone in the chat, you'll be seeing some links to Catharine Clark gallery. Thank you, Anton to Creative Growth. And if you go to the website, you'll get a lot more information. Mostly, we're just thankful that you're here. We can't wait to welcome you back. You haven't been to Creative Growth

when we reopen. It's open to the public. We're on 24th Street in Oakland. I can tell from the chat that not everyone is local. So it's great to have across the country audience as well. But for local people, when you travel back to the Bay Area and all that safe. It's a highlight and we'll welcome you back. So thank you, Anton. Thank you, Sarah. Thank you, Hannah. Thanks. Thank you, Ellen and Ryan are behind the scenes, fabulous gallery people and all the staff and artists at Creative Growth for the work that they do. Every day, particularly now. No one asked, but I think people know we're still closed. The artists are home everyone is safe so far. We have Zoom classes with delivering artist supplies to people's homes to continue to work. So you know, creativity finds its way. And very importantly, the webstore is open and fabulous. That's right. And we're also participants in the four by eight you can look there for to buy some work in the Outsider Art Fair in New York, which opens this week. We have worked there.