Audio Transcript: Pindell's Legacy: Curators/Critics
February 4, 2021

Emma Enderby:
I'm Emma Enderby, chief curator at The Shed, and welcome to our series of talks that look to the legacy in the ideas of artist Howardena Pindell and her exhibition at The Shed, *Rope/Fire/Water,* curated by Adeze Wilford. We are so grateful to be able to be open and continue our work supporting artists at this time. Our mission at The Shed is to produce and welcome innovative art and ideas across all forms of creativity to build a shared understanding of our rapidly changing world and a more equitable society. I'd like to thank the Ford Foundation and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs for their generous support of this exhibition and our public programs. I would also like to thank the Howard Gilman foundation for providing the zoom platform that we will all be using for this evening's conversation.

Adeze Wilford:
My name is Adeze Wilford and I'm an assistant curator of the exhibition Howardena Pindell, *Rope/Fire/Water* now on view at The Shed through this spring. Over her nearly 16-year career, Howardena Pindell has been a trailblazing artist, curator, and activist. The exhibition features her well-known, richly textured abstract paintings that critically engage with the politics and social issues of her time, while also demonstrating the healing power of art. The exhibition is centered on Pindell's new film, *Rope/Fire/Water,* the artist's first video work in 25 years. The conversation is part of an ongoing series of programs that contextualize and celebrate the way that artists, curators, educators, policymakers, and so many more have felt the deep impact of Pindell's inspiring career. Experts from a wide range of fields come together to explore the intersection of art and policy, culture and community. Thank you again for joining us this evening. And if it's safe for you to do so, we invite you to attend *Howardena Pindell: Rope/Fire/Water* in person at The Shed open until the spring of 2021. Thank you and I hope you enjoy the conversation.

Adeze Wilford:
Okay, well, thank you, everyone for joining us this evening. I have to say this is such a special conversation for me joining women in this field who I deeply admire and respect and having this conversation with Howardena. It's always a pleasure to speak to you when we have when we organize this exhibition; it was just such an honor. And so to be able to have you speak about your career, and the field, is just a really incredible opportunity. And I'm so glad that you're here with us this evening. Before we jump into the conversation, I'd like to introduce everyone and to read everyone's bios. So first, Howardena Pindell. Born in 1943 Howardena Pindell studied painting at Boston University and Yale University. She then worked for 12 years at the Museum of Modern Art as an exhibition assistant and assistant curator in the department of national and international traveling exhibitions. And finally as an associate curator and acting director in the department of prints and illustrated books. In 1979, she began teaching at the State University of New York Stony Brook, where she is now a distinguished professor. In her work, Pindell often employs lengthy metaphorical processes of destruction and reconstruction, addressing social issues of homelessness, AIDS war, genocide, sexism, xenophobia and apartheid. Pindell's work has been featured in many landmark exhibitions and is

in the permanent collections of major international museums. Most recently, Pindell's work was the subject of a retrospective *Howardena Pindell: What Remains To Be Seen*. Naima Keith is the vice president of education and public programs at LACMA. Within her role, she oversees all aspects and sets the vision for LACMA's innovative exhibition driven educational programming that serves more than 60, sorry a bigger number, 650,000 community members annually. Under her purview, LACMA has constructed strategic goals and launched initiatives to successfully pivot to virtual programming throughout the 2020 pandemic. Keith leads 20 staff members, freelance educators, interns, and a myriad of volunteer docents. Prior to her position at LACMA, Keith was the deputy director and chief curator at the California African American Museum, where she guided curatorial and education departments as well as marketing and communications. Previously, she was associate curator at the Studio Museum in Harlem and held a curatorial position at the Hammer Museum. Keith holds degrees from Spelman College and UCLA and is a proud native of Los Angeles. Courtney J. Martin became the director of the Yale Center for British Art in 2019, a decade after earning a PhD in art history from Yale University. A curator, art historian, and professor, Martin began working with the New York-based Dia Art Foundation in 2015 and was appointed deputy director and chief curator in 2017. Previously, she was an assistant professor at Brown University and Vanderbilt University, a Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow in the history of art at the University of California Berkeley, a fellow at Getty Research Institute, and a Henry Moore Institute research fellow. She also worked in the media arts and culture unit of the Ford Foundation in New York. In 2015, she received an Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant. And finally, Legacy Russell is a curator and writer. Born and raised in New York City. She is the associate curator of exhibitions at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Russell holds an MRes with distinction in art history from Goldsmiths, University of London with a focus in visual culture. Her academic, curatorial, and creative work focuses on gender performance, digital selfdom, internet idolatry, and new media ritual. Russell's written work, interviews, and essays have been published internationally. She is a recipient of the Thoma Foundation 2019 Arts Writing award in digital art and a 2020 Rauschenberg residency fellow, and a 2021 Creative Capital grantee. Her first book is *Glitch Feminism*, a manifesto published by Verso Books. So that was a lot to get through because you are so incredibly well rounded and awarded and it's just really a privilege to be in conversation with you this evening. So thank you for joining us. The first question I'd like to open up actually with Howardena. And so, Howardena, thinking about your curatorial résumé. It can be read as a who's who of modern art and I'm wondering if you can share some insights about your time working at MoMA and how exhibition making influenced your practice.

Howardena Pindell:
All right, learning from my current work, can you hear me?

Adeze Wilford:
You're fine.

Howardena Pindell:
Ok, learning from my curatorial experience was a heads up in terms of worrying about my legacy issues and my studio practice, I became very aware

of conservation issues and the longevity of materials. I saw how it works on paper deteriorated over time. If the paper was not 100% that it would deteriorate. I saw how oil on the skin left yellow stains on paper. I realized that video and film can deteriorate in about 20 years. One needs to transfer it to a new technologies as new technologies evolve. When needs to avoid hanging work, or it gets direct sunlight or even over a working fireplace. The new ways of working they have their limitations. You can actually call a museum and ask them for the conservation department. Tell them you're an artist and what your concerns are. Years ago they welcomed to call. It is worth trying. If you go to a conservator to have a piece prepared, it's very pricey. There now is a wide range of rooms that answers, that the answers to conservation problems are evolving with the flow. Some work is ephemeral and involves performance; one needs to document it and yet some artists do not document their work. Working at MoMA mainly exposed me to white male artists. One African American artist Romare Bearden was hung outside the collection in the fall. This was in the 1960s and 70s. Recently Ann Temkin became chief curator and totally integrated the MoMA collection, hanging African American male and female artists with white male and female artists. Mel Edwards has about five pieces hung in the same room as sculptor, a white woman, Jackie Windsor. This was unheard of when I worked there. Back then they had their head, I'll start again. Back then they had the buyers' committee to address the inequities in the collection. It led to two shows. One was of Bearden's work and the other was of Richard Hunt's sculpture. After the two shows happened, things went back to normal. I served on the committee with Betty Blayton-Taylor, an artist who ran the museum's children's art Carnival in Harlem. The head of the committee was a wealthy, young white man who after the committee's work was done committed suicide. We do not know if he was harassed or had his own problems. Just general suggestions for the artists and this is from working inside the museum, document your work. Keep a list of your work with all the details including title date materials, where it had been exhibited, also, if so, who was it that you sold it to and their contact information. Photograph it before you lend it, so if there's a damage, you can prove that you did not do it. Some of the cameras on cell phones are excellent for general documentation, museum quality photographs of your work needs to be done professionally, always have a document, if you lend work, be sure to list the name of the person borrowing it, and all the contact information about it, if it is sold, the length of the loan and make a note of the conditions it's worth both sign and dated.

Adeze Wilford:
I think that information that you gave is really crucial for artists, especially emerging ones that are entering in the field and are starting to get their first institutional exhibitions. And one of the things that I talk about when I give tours of your show, is how you know you are such an institutional artist. And I mean that in the sense of your thinking about the heritage of your work as you're making it. You know, when we installed the, when we installed the exhibition, each painting is hung up with a set of nails. And each of those holes are actually reinforced with archival material. And that's something that I think, you know, most artists I've had artists show up at things that I've organized with their work and garbage bags, like they're not necessarily thinking about the care and safety of their work. But I think the fact, on so much time dealing with artwork that was degraded or artwork that needed special care within the institution, it really does inform the way that you think about making work to this day. So thank you for sharing all that.

Howardena Pindell:
Sure

Adeze Wilford:
I want to open up a couple of questions to the group. Now, you know, one of the reasons why this was such a special moment for me, not only have I taken inspiration from the work that all of you have done, but we all share this common thread of operating at the intersection of race and gender within the art world. And I wanted to talk about how that particular work. If it does mean anything within your practice and how you found ways to push out the constraints of those silos?

Naima J. Keith:
It looks like you're about to say something. So, I didn't want to—

Legacy Russell:
On the edge of it. But just so excited to be in the room with all of you. And thank you Adeze and Howardena for making this space for us. I mean, I guess, I loved hearing about, you know, the kind of top tips, best practices already known because I think that that speaks so deeply to some of the work obviously, that is ongoing at Studio Museum as we begin working often with artists who are just beginning their journey, right. So with me in terms of you know, thinking about this intersection between race and gender, is something that I'm you know, sort of deeply embedded in in terms of my ongoing research. And you know, very much so thinking about the ways in which to choose institutional space, just as you said, can be quite alienating for Black artists. And so for me, I think, you know, when I consider what it means the intersection of race and gender, where we stand at that place where, you know, female identified artists, where queer artist,s where black artists, are entering into institutional spaces. It's about trying to enact a methodology that can make that space, you know, secure, and make them feel seen and heard within the practice of their work, but also as well within its maintenance within the lessons that we teach about how they can continue to grow towards a sustainable career.

Naima J. Keith:
I want to echo that same thank you to Adeze and Howardena for inviting us to be a part of that conversation, this conversation. I think, just to piggyback off of what Legacy was saying about care, I think, of course, yes, I think it's our primary responsibility to care for artists of color within these spaces. But I think as curators Honestly, I don't necessarily see it as a silo as something to push against, like, I honestly see it as a position of power or a position of great honor, to be honest, I see it as, sure, I mean, you know, that institutions are slow to, you know, change the, you know, change their collections, change their exhibitions, I mean, those kinds of things. But I honestly think that while it's something that, you know, we're still striving for many, many terms of equity. I do see it as a position that I'm honored to have, right, that I'm honored to be able to be this champion for artists that I'm excited about and are working at this intersection. So at one level, I do see something as we're pushing against, but I also see it from a position of strength as well.

Adeze Wilford:
Yeah, I love that. Courtney, do you have anything to add to that question?

Courtney J. Martin:
I have to say I, you know, it took me a long time to realize that apparently, I was working on artists that were marginal because I saw their work first and was attracted to it and inspired by it and interested in it. And it was only when I came into either, you know, school or into institutions and was told that they didn't know them, that you know that I was doing something different. And I have to say, I'm not belittling this in any way. But I was really surprised. It surprised me that they couldn't see the art first. And I think that is, you know, it isn't an issue, I think that we still have to work with and against in different ways. Because, you know, most artists that I know, are working and making and, you know, trying to survive and have their work seen. And I think that it becomes, you know, the institution that wants to, you know, sort of put them in a very precise box. And I think that, in fact that if you sit in between the institution and the artist, that you should be working to unleash the box, as opposed to trying to build that up again.

Adeze Wilford:
This is a more general question about the actual act of curating an exhibition. And I think a lot of it is really based in storytelling, and, you know, using the artist's work as a jumping off point, to enhance a conversation about their work. And I'd love for you each to talk about the methodology that you use to extract a story from an artist's practice.

Legacy Russell:
You, like it's tricky to talk about, you know, sort of formulaic, I mean, I guess, with everyone's practice tutorial, either always different entry points to how that works. And Adeze, I appreciated when you say that, you know, sometimes artists will just show up with their work in a bag, great, but like, actually, part of the work is trying to, you know, actively listen and participate in the ways in which artists guide us. And so, for me, I think that there's not as much of a set sort of methodology because it changes and that also is what is so exciting about this work. And so necessary, I think about, you know, the spaces that we, you know, engage with artists collaborate with artists is allowing for those spaces to always be dynamic and volatile, and, you know, intersectional, and so, for me, you know, there have been a wide range of different parts of that process, you know, allowing for phone calls at all different times of the day, you know, like having moments where I've literally sat down and listened to music with artists, because that's their primary touch point. And they're kind of, you know, answering to that as a first language, you know, there have been times where, you know, it is required, you know, extensive travel where, you know, I'm kind of going to the places where, you know, that artist has been time and you know, where that kind of Route lies, and beginning to get a better sense and understanding of the context around the work so as to, you know, speak to it, represent it, celebrate it, write about it, right. So, you know, the methodology is this elastic thing. And that, for me, is something that I really try to maintain within my work with artists, and as well too to encourage, because I think it then allows for different types of transformations as we make exhibitions.

Naima J. Keith:
I totally agree, I think, you know, try and start by, of course, you know, doing as much research as I can, doing as much reading as I can about the artists practice. But I also allow myself to be surprised. And I really do kind of walk into those initial visits, with kind of an open mind. And just to say, you know, what, do you think about this? Or can you tell me about this or recognizing that especially for artists I've been working for for a long time that they may not have had as much control of how their work was discussed early on in their career. And so oftentimes, and this is even actually how I lead even studio visits, or even conversations now, where I come from a perspective of like, not that I don't know anything about your work, of course, but just an openness to learning, or to understand the work in a different way, right? Because I don't want to assume because I read this catalogue from 20 years ago, that's how you think about the work today. Right? So I definitely try and approach I think, learning about the artists' practice, through a series of conversations through a series like this, like, as he was saying, all times the day, whether it's music, or whether it's going out to dinner, you know, all kinds of different ways, ways, but I do try and kind of approach it with this a sense of openness and a sense of, I'm coming in prepared, but I'm also ready to learn.

Courtney J. Martin:
I was just going add that one of the best things I ever learned about an artist I learned from Howardena, which is that I did an MA at Stony Brook while Howardena, you know, obviously, she was esteemed faculty, but on the studio side, and I happened to go to a crit that she was running with MFA students. Watching Howardena teach was one of the most instructive things I've ever seen in my entire life. You know, there was a way in which she approached that situation with such generosity, but also structure and you know, I just it felt as if she were guiding that student, you know, towards real knowledge about their work, but there was, there was a light touch. And it dawned on me that I had never taken that, you know, watching how someone interacts with other artists to be, you know, a research focus. And that was really that was—thank you, Howardena—because that was actually a real breakthrough and sort of understanding fully. It taught me perhaps a way to go back and look at your work after I saw you in process.

Howardena Pindell:
Thank you.

Adeze Wilford:
That was a really lovely sentiment. I appreciate you sharing that story, Courtney. I'd like to talk a little bit about institutional history, because I think, you know, the Studio Museum in Harlem is such an important institution. For me, it was, you know, the first place where I had a real museum internship that turned into a job that turned into a fellowship that I was able to do. There's such a history and legacy of curators who are working in the field now that kind of cut their teeth at the Studio. And it really is seen as this incubator space. And I'd love, you know, Naima, since you were at the Studio Museum for a while, and we our time overlapped and then Legacy you're you're currently in that space. And Howardena you've had exhibitions there. I think that it is a really formative institution. And I'd love for you to talk a little bit about some of the learnings that you had there and how that kind of shaped and informed your practice.

Naima J. Keith:
I feel like I can go on and I think like all of us, I think, have a deep connection to Studio in so many different ways, right? Like, even if you didn't work there necessarily. Like in Courtney's case, she's written for catalogues, she spoke. I mean, there's so many differences you know, we owe, I think so many parts of our career and so many parts of ourselves as curators to the Studio Museum, but I will say, so I joined the team—

Courtney J. Martin:
Hold on a second, Naima,I did work at the Studio Museum, too. Yeah I was a research associate for Valerie Mercer in a date that I won't name but.

Naima J. Keith:
Well, since we are all have deep connections to Studio, so I apologize Courtney, actually I did not know that. So, lesson learned. But I, you know, I joined the Studio Museum in 2011, already being well versed in the history and importance of the institution, my great aunt actually was a very early board member of the museum. And so she'd been bringing us to the museum and including my mom, for many, many years. And so when I joined the team, I was very aware of just the, not just the importance I think that the museum plays within African American art, but just globally, right, the larger global conversation around artists of color, and so I was honored to join a team with you know, Thomas Lax and Lauren Haynes, from 2011 to 2015, is when I was there. And I would say, like I said, I can really think of a million different stories, but, and Tom was probably gonna kill me for sharing this one. But I remember, you know, pitching my, what I originally wanted to be was a retrospective of Charles Gaines's work. When I joined the team, I was like, I know exactly what I want to do. I really want to do Charles Gaines's retrospective, and you know, Thelma in her way, and Legacy will probably chuckle at this, Thelma in her way didn't say no, she was just kind of like, it was more like a not yet, which I took as encouragement I took as I just kept pitching it, like I just kept. And not to say she didn't believe in it. Of course, she believes in Charles's work and recognizing the significance of doing it. But I think also recognizing that maybe I wasn't ready as a little Junior Whopper, you know, to take on that level of exhibition. And so I just keep putting, you know, kept pitching it, kept pitching it. And so we just would engage a number of conversations about timing for artists, and what role the Studio Museum plays in an artist's career. And so she really encouraged me to think very specifically about an aspect of Charles's practice, rather than the entire retrospective, because she said, you know what, Charles deserves a retrospective at MoMA, he deserves a retrospective at the Whitney or LACMA, and he does. And so we talked— not to say, again, that Studio Museum doesn't occupy that space. But the idea that, you know, if we did the, if we, I still count myself as a Studio Museum person, but if we did the retrospective, that would mean that it would kind of let other institutions off the hook from having to do it sooner, right? So if I just focus, which I ended up doing on *'74 to '89*, that would then say, you know, give institution kind of like, Oh, it's been done, and they can kind of check it off their list, rather than saying, like, Oh, you know, an aspect of his career and so that, you know, now we now kind of see the early work, but really, another institution should really take on that responsibility because he deserves it. And so it just it I think it was a pivotal one of the many life lessons I learned in thinking about what's best for an artist, right? That you may have your own kind of like, goals and desires and

hopes and dreams, you know, in terms of exhibitions, but really thinking about what's best for the artist, what really fits with an institution, and what will best serve, you know, an artist long term. I think it's just kind of one at the end, just kind of recognizing that while Studio is larger life larger than life in terms of institution, it does serve a very specific role in terms of advancing, you know, an artist's career, kind of opening up a different perspective, allowing people to think about an artist's practice differently, which are all great, but it still does not necessarily relieve, other institutions from doing that work too.

Adeze Wilford:
Legacy, I wanted to throw a question at you, since you're operating within the institution right now. And I'm thinking about how change has occurred in the space. You know, when I was there, we were just—and I still use the institutional "we," too, it's something that I have been at The Shed almost three years, but I'm still we at the Studio Museum—but I think one of the things that I'm interested in, especially coming to The Shed, where when I got hired, we were still having the building under construction, and thinking about how you can program a space that doesn't exist in and using your imagination in that way, and asking artists to really trust you and give, you know, Howardena was engaged in 2017 by The Shed, at first. And so what does it mean to build a level of trust with an artist, when you're talking about a space that isn't necessarily the traditional space? You know, I'm thinking about all the wonderful works that you do with the parks project. But also, when you're talking about a space that right now is in the abstract?

Legacy Russell:
I mean, absolutely, I think we all first of all the "we" of it in terms of talking about Studio Museum still and having that be possible, I think speaks to the history, you know, it's deeply intersectional. And embedded, and you know, people are still living in it, even if they have gone on to other places. And so, you know, at this moment, we've had these amazing, kind of, you know, really complex discussions about how to do this work, kind of through and beyond this present moment, and recognizing, of course, that well, people may be new to our mission, right, kind of waking up newly to it, that our mission, different work isn't new. And so some of the discussions that we've been having right now are recognizing that that arc is, really long, but it goes back to our founding in the 1960s and brings us present, but as well predates 1968, right, when the museum first opened, and you know, I think for me, and Naima I so appreciated when you speak to your early memories of to the museum, because as a born and raised New Yorker whose dad was from Harlem, this is a place my dad was a photographer, right? So you talk about where people have their shows, this is the place that was part of my father's kind of creative imagination, always. And so we spend so much time kind of thinking about, as we visited family in Harlem, as well, like, what it meant to be in that space. And so, with this idea of this moment of change, Adeze, it's this incredible period, because like Blackness itself, right? Harlem is both very specific, and it's also ontological, you know, it's local and global. And so I think we've had to really step into that kind of elasticity and try to navigate what it means to be without walls. And so that, of course, has taken all these different forms, we've got, this amazing traveling exhibition, Black Refractions, which allows, you know, even to its title, right, you know, allows for the kind of refractions of blackness to exist in the world. And, currently, it just opened in Utah, is just phenomenal, and has had these different lives in this period, and allows you to

museum almost to kind of expand and kind of take over in the United States. And then, we of course, are in close partnership with MoMA and MoMA PS1, and, I love the discussion about, the sort of presence of these different spaces and institutions as their histories have collided, and the work that the museum has done, to kind of expand and really push further some of our mission as it exists out in the world. So, it's been really phenomenal to see Garrett Bradley, at MoMA, or, as well recognizing E. Jane and Naudline Pierre and Elliott Reed at MoMA PS1. And so for this reason, there's this kind of incredible dispersion of our mission. And so, it's been this period of time of trying to navigate what it means to kind of exist in both, the present and the future, and as well on our past, and to make it possible to have, you know, the kind of mission be embedded in the ambassadorship of the institution to and this is where we go back to the "we," because, I see that so deeply, obviously, with all the folks who are in this room, but as well to that, in this moment where we are without walls, or we're planning towards this next chapter of the museum, and we're going to have this incredible building, designed by David Adjaye that, we're kind of looking towards this future where not only Studio Museum will continue to exist in Harlem and expand and kind of dazzle in that way in terms of honoring this incredible history, but Also as well, looking out into the world, and really being able to see Studio Museum and each of the institutions, not only that each of you are in presently, right, but as well, you know, so many of our esteemed colleagues.

Adeze Wilford:
Thank you. I'm going to jump back to Howardena really quickly. And I wanted to talk about the research that you did in the '80s, and then you continued to do and, you know, you just emailed me about something related to you these recent appointments. So I know that you're still thinking about this. When you did this, you conducted this research about the state of the art world, and you used empirical data and a statistical approach to kind of confront what's going on in the industry in the '80s, honestly, it's still happening today, along racial lines and the disparities between appointments, and between who was getting exhibitions. And something that I was really struck by that I want to quote you here is, "We must evolve a new language which empowers us and does not cause us to participate in our own disenfranchisement." And I think that that, you know, you said that, I have the text here, it's *The Heart of the Question*. And it's a series of your writings that you thought through in this text that is a collection of it, but I'm thinking about 40 years later, what are some of the positive change, I'm always looking especially in this moment, I find myself trying to find positivity. And I think we've been, we've gone through a year that's kind of been mired in stress and trauma and a lot of ways and I'm constantly trying to find the positive. We tried to do that with this exhibition, too. You know, we were talking about really heavy subject matter, but then we tried to find ways of imbuing the space with beauty and, and you do that so seamlessly in your practice, and I'd love for you to talk about some of the positive changes that you've seen in the field.

Howardena Pindell:
Okay, as mentioned earlier, Ann Temkin, the chief curator of painting and sculpture at the Modern, has moved the collection forward to include artists of color and women. This is an amazing change. Unfortunately, Covid not put a stop, but there's a pause. I feel that some of the changes that are evolving have

to do with the death of George Floyd. Suddenly, out of the shadows, whites and African Americans were protesting together and the protest went around the world. First Nation people joined the protest. A friend, a First Nation Lakota, sent me a video of this protest. In terms of language I feel that my own vocabulary is evolving mainly because I'm becoming more aware. The person who helped me to gain my voice is First Nation Matinecoc artist and educator Asiba Tupahache; her website is spiritofjanuary.com. She mainly explores issues of oppression. In looking into the past, I have had white male critics call my work shrill, if it dealt with issues. One white critic actually said my work was a light show and that he wanted to have sex under my paintings. That makes me laugh, but I do not know if they could have gotten away with that now. One was a reviewer for the *New York Times* and the other was a reviewer for the *New Art Examiner* and dealing with issues helps to fuel my own use of statistics to review and reveal the art world's lack of diversity and insensitivity. My father's degree was in mathematics and science, so I was exposed to the use of statistics when I was a child. Statistics became my language of revealing the truth, of the true nature of the art world closed system. *Art in America* published a late summer issue that listed galleries as well as listed the artists they represented. Things have changed as the Jack Shainman Gallery represents over 13 African and African American artists galleries here in New York City. If you go to the gallery website, you can see their work. I'm looking forward to Asians being brought forward. I'm also concerned about First Nation artists. My gallery, the Garth Greenan Gallery, has eight First Nation artists. Antwaun Sargent is now one of the directors for the Gagosian Gallery. Things are definitely changing with Ann Temkin, again, leading, being a leader to help major museums change their attitude or point of view.

Adeze Wilford:
Thank you, Howardena. And, Courtney, I want to turn to you for a little bit. I'm thinking about recent appointments. And Howardena mentioned a few of them. But to me, I think that there. It's an exciting moment. And I think all of these new appointments, especially those that are not just in entry or mid-level, but actually directorships and at the chief level, are really important. And I'm, I'm curious to, to know what your perspective is about how we can sustain change. That's not just a reactionary conversation, but something that will really shift the industry? And it's a big question. I know.

Courtney J. Martin:
it is a big question. And it's a big challenge, I think, actually. And, you know, I think the first thing that we have to do is assume that those appointments were not reactionary, like, what would they be reacting to? Exactly? Because I don't I don't know a single person who's been appointed to what I would call a big job. You know, I look at Naima, you know, people who have gotten big jobs recently. And I think to myself, I know the path that a lot of those wonderful people have taken to get there. And you know, in many cases, I would say, Well, finally. As opposed to how did that happen? And I think that, there is the perhaps are, you know, there's a parallel conversation going on. And maybe instead of a parallel conversation we need to have a single conversation about it. But I would say something that I think I've said before, which is that, you know, if you are already in a position of power, no matter who you are, if you take the moment to actually speak to someone else that is not just like you and mentor that person. There could be real change. I don't think that takes a lot. Actually.

And I don't think that it is, you know, this isn't, this isn't a big ask, and the way that these jobs, you know, these are big jobs that are happening to important people, though, that is not a big ask to reach down and work with someone. You know. I look at the moments in my own career where people have just said, Hi, and spoken to me and like given me some sort of piece of that. And I think that there's actually real value in that. And, early conversations with Howardena, when I was still just trying to figure out what it meant to be an art historian, were important conversations to me, likely they, you know, were throwaway conversations for her. But being able to talk to somebody who had had such a pivotal role at MoMA at such an incredible moment, meant so much and I learned so much, even just from the example that I think that if we all took the time to do that. But I think in fact, it is even more important for those of us who don't necessarily feel connected to a specific group to do that work.

Naima J. Keith:
Courtney, if I'm allowed, sorry, Adeze, am I allowed to ask questions? Okay. I think I agree, I think, you know, simply, mentoring someone else, especially someone that doesn't look like you or someone who's a bit more junior is very important, and I think could certainly lead to growth on both ends, right, growth for you as the mentor and then grow for the mentee. But we're being called upon to do so much more than that, right, like we're being called upon to enter into conversations that either we don't have the training for or we're not prepared to enter into. And so, just to piggyback off of these eight questions, especially as a director, how are you navigating that where you're kind of being asked, I'm assuming, I'm assumed, I'm going to assume that you're being asked to engage in very high-level, bigger conversations that go beyond kind of a mentorship role.

Courtney J. Martin:
You're right. And that does happen. And I think, you know, and we've talked about this very, very briefly, but I but you know. It's not my job alone. And I, I, there is a long conversation about the work that somebody who looks like me, and sounds like me, and acts like me is expected to do versus what other people are expected to do. And I think, as I tell, and it's this, you know, this is a real message that I want to impart is that when I look out at my peer directors, this is as much your work as it is anybody else's, you know, this is, this is not something that we can all sort of sit around and fret and make, sort of very superficial statements about, you actually have to do that work. But at the same time, I am not going to, I'm not going to pretend that that we are past the superficial space at this point, either in doing that work, and I think this is, there's a way in which, I think all of our phones started to ring in July, but I already had a job to do. And so I think everyone has to be very clear about where they stand and what they're willing to do but also not be scared about putting that work out for others. This is, you know, when we, if you want to talk about collaboration, this is collaboration at this point.

Adeze Wilford:
It's really a crucial thing to consider when we're discussing what it means to actually enact institutional change. Because it's one thing to acquire new work. And it's one thing to do a show every five years, but it's another thing to have people working across all different levels within your institution, it's another thing to have different people sitting on your board. And so it really is

work that needs to be done. And it's not your, I think you're 100% correct, but it's not work that can be done alone, and it shouldn't be resting on the shoulders of one person. And it can be, it can sometimes feel like that when you're in these different institutions.

Legacy Russell:
Adeze, I love that you're talking about the kind of collective work there because I was going say to that, being very much aware of what it means to exist with an institution that has visionary leadership, right, it's touched us all, as we've already said, but also recognizing that part of the work, I think of the kind of leaders that I turned to, and have continued to be really inspired by and mentored by, arre folks who are also willing, as Courtney, you're saying, to like, not to shoulder that alone, right? To kind of open up the process to allow things to perhaps be at points more participatory, and to engage the body of the institution, you know, to be equally responsible for some of that work, as well as the work that kind of happens at a leadership level. And so, you know, Adeze, I felt like really amazed and excited as well to see moments across different institutions where the folks at different department levels, across kind of surprising intersections of solidarity and those expressions, kind of continue to do that work, right, that kind of allyship work, that advocacy work, but also like the kind of like deep tissue work of what it means to reshape a vision of an institution, which really does have to be something that kind of happens not necessarily at the leadership level alone, but rather across the different striations of an institutional space.

Naima J. Keith:
And just to say, into the collective work, I mean, also just not to encourage our colleagues to not burden artists with that work either, right? I can only imagine if our phones are ringing that you know, artists were called upon in many different ways, whether or not it's exhibitions, public programs, speaking engagements, come talk to my board. I mean, all those kinds of requests, you know, to, to help, you know, institutions appear as if they are make— doing this work, right. And so, there's just as much obviously, responsibility on us, as I'm sure double on artists to, to respond to this moment.

Adeze Wilford:
And I think that's a really great segue into this next question that I have, which we were talking a little bit more broader strokes, and I want to get a little bit more specific in terms of the work that we do. And I'm really curious about what you consider the responsibilities of curating Black art to be and I know that that's, it, to me, it feels very specific, but I can see how it could be a little bit broad, but I do want to talk about that. Because I think that while the reality is that people are entering into these spaces, there does need to be a level of care and consideration for all artists, yes. But I do think that, you know, when you're bringing someone into a space that could be harmful to them, as a curator, what are some of the things that you think are really imperatives for you, as you're organizing these shows?

Legacy Russell:
I mean, I was talking to a dear friend and colleague and amazing curator recently, who, you know, we were kind of going back and forth about the various politics of A/V, right, like literally like audio/visual kind of production within the context of hosting black artists and specific and it just intersection with work

that I'm deeply invested in, which is kind of live work like performance work, new media work, work that engages technologies. And so, this is something that I feel is really important, because I feel like A/V sometimes is kind of the unsung hero within some of the institutional practices of doing this work. And I loved Howardena, when you mentioned how technologies turnover, even right, being aware of that, and doing the kind of mindful work to best support walk artists who are working with different types of technologies as they're coming into institutional space. And being mindful that you know how that works. And the language around it often, you know, comes with many tripwires and can be a very vulnerable process. And I also recognize too, that there are so many parts of curating that require care so like, you know, thinking about who is copy editing text, you know, as well as who's kind of doing some of this programmatic work, and what are the conversations we're doing to actively bring the artist into the center of that, right not to necessarily tax them with additional labor. Right. But to make sure that what we are kind of engaging with, and the questions that we're asking are not alienating the artist who should see themselves in this work. So, this is a kind of complicated thing too, because institutional spaces can be really triggering. And they can be very challenging, but they also are amazing spaces, I think that, you know, offer so much in terms of allowing for a different type of collaboration, and setting a different kind of standard or bar for the ways in which we can kind of bring Black art and artists into institutional spaces and have, you know, folks really feel like that these spaces are theirs. And so for me, thinking back to my, you know, early times of going to the Studio Museum, being able to see yourself in the actual kind of architecture of the space being able to really understand the history and as well intersect with the creative program there is really meaningful, because it really is a reminder that nothing within these spaces is neutral, and the ways in which we're kind of doing some of that work actively allows for that sort of assumption of neutrality, which I think can be problematic within institutional settings, like, Who is that for? And kind of how do we define that, to be disrupted, and to allow for Black art and artists to, you know, have a different type of space held for them to feel like they have a sense of ownership over the exhibitions that are theirss really.

Naima J. Keith:
I mean, I think you know, a bit about what I shared a little bit earlier, in terms of the story with Charles is just to say that thinking in terms of care for Black artists, just thinking about producing exhibitions that are going to, they're going to advance their practice, advance their work in some way to scholarship on their work, showing a new perspective. But also thinking about it or just being mindful that I'm giving a lot of attention to the actual work, right and not, you know, allowing, oftentimes, the kind of more superficial readings, I think, to what Courtney was saying, and just really being astute to the work itself, and, and being a student of that work. And so, you know, you start with this communication, and you're starting with this dialogue, right, with an artist, and then just kind of understanding why do they produce the work? How do they produce the work? I mean, all these kinds of questions to really pay as much attention to the work and the care that went into producing the work as possible.

Adeze Wilford:
Well, we are actually coming up much faster than I anticipated on our time. And so I wanted to ask just one final question. And this is something that I like to ask when I'm thinking and talking to people who have been in the field longer than I have been, but also, in general, something that I'm curious about is what you think would be helpful preparation for the next generation of art historians, because Naima, you mentioned and it's something that I'm constantly thinking about, because I feel like I'm finally at a place where I can, I'm in the next jump in my career, and I'm very much looking forward to talking to people and bringing people into the field where they might have felt alienated or felt like this wasn't something that they could do. And so I'm curious, what is some advice that you all have for the next generation of art historians, the next generation of caretakers of artwork and artists? What's something that you'd like to impart to them?

Howardena Pindell:
I had an idea, just if I ever went back to be a curator, but at 77, that's not likely. But an idea I had, it came out of working on an interview with Valerie Maynard for her show. They asked me to interview her for the catalogue so the artist's words would be there. And I kept thinking, you know, it'd be wonderful if I were back in the museum. You know, again, I'm too old, to have something I call lifelong oral history. So as artists of color come into the collection, they are interviewed, and then re-interviewed every 10 years to update us on their work, and what's happening in their life. Then just to continue this thread all the way until the end, that that would be an amazing resource for art historians and for other artists. But you would need to be in an institution that either maybe had a library or had space on archives to build that kind of information. And of course, technology is tricky, because if we interview them with one kind of technology then by the 10-year period and new technology has taken over and maybe there's no real mechanical support for the early ones. So it's kind of complex, but there's just an artist, just an idea I had as an artist, to know that every so many years I did an interview. And so people would know the kind of full thread of my work.

Adeze Wilford:
I love that idea. I was actually in preparation for this show very early on, I went to MoMA because they have the Skowhegan archives, and I listened to a lecture that you gave to listen to it on a discman. And I think the last time I saw a discman I was in middle school, so it was just like that, that, you know, technology becoming antiquated, but still figuring out a way to use it, it is a resource. But I think one thing that's important to note about it is I knew about it, because I worked at MoMA, and I knew how to get access to that archive, after I had left, because I had maintained connections with people who worked in the library. But for younger scholars who maybe don't have those resources, I think, yes, it should be tied to an institution, because I think that the care should come from a space that will be able to continue to have the resources to take care of it. But making sure that it's an equitable pursuit for everyone is an important thing. So yes, I love that idea. I hope that it happens. But I do want it to be something that everyone can take part in and listen to and be exalted by, so.

Legacy Russell:
Yeah, I guess I mean, Howardena, actually I went back to an amazing catalogue, Oh, my god! Yes. Which was your exhibition at the Studio Museum in 1986, I believe. But, and there was a quote that you kind of, was folded into the essay there that said, you as a Black artist, you were not seen as an artist first, but a political entity. And I was just kind of turning that over, because at the same time, I've been going back and reading some of the late and great Maurice Berger's writing, and thinking very much so about, some of what was written, there was an *Art in America* in the '90s, where he was kind of talking about what it needs to happen for this next generation as well, right, sort of Black art in institutional spaces. And it was just, it felt like, of course, that it really echoes all that we're talking about here, in addition to everything that's going on in the world. And of course, that was some time ago. So, with that in mind, I was kind of intrigued by the fact that Maurice Berger puts forward this proposition that, kind of relinquishment of white privilege was required in order for a presence of Blackness within institutions, that actually, it was a part of the negotiation, and I was kind of turning it over, because, of course, too, I feel like that, while that may be one spoke within this larger wheel, there also is something that feels really important about what it means to, kind of ensure that Black people are able to see themselves within this work right, within this work intergenerationally, within the kind of intersections across artists and curator, being able to have those conversations and have that kind of institutional memory, but also, the way that that discourse can operate across the community. And so I feel very much so that that happens, you know, across a plane of mentorship. But you know, as well to Adeze, I was appreciating your discussion on social media earlier, where you kind of mentioned this language of liberation, and that there feels like, so much of a moment now, where the possibility of museum space and its future can be emancipatory, and can work towards liberation work, and that, that, you know, kind of having that those threads deeply embedded within what this next step could look like. And I do feel that we're seeing it all around us, right, that these are things that are becoming part of the muscle, of what institutions and this new chapter of the future of art should look like is responsible for, so for this next generation of art historians, my hope is that is going to be part of the language of this work. And as well, but you know, that is what will keep things kind of opening up, blossoming becoming kind of more amplified in terms of presence, but also transparency and collaboration.

Naima J. Ketih:
I would also say, I mean, I think Legacy put it perfectly, but just to say that, for younger artists, and especially of color, is that, you're a part of a network, that you're entering into a longer legacy. And please do not be shy to reach out to folks who you think may be out of reach. Because we all, we've all been there, and we've all and we want to support one another. I mean, just hearing Courtney talk about the importance of mentorship, I think is something that we all recognize as being very important. So just to say that there may not be a lot of us, I mean, in comparison to other ethnicities, I do think that it's a very rich legacy in history. And it's just to say that, reach out to colleagues and, you know, understand that you're a part of another bigger network of people that are here to support you and are here to help galvanize your work and to help give you that voice, whether or not it's allowing you to write for a catalogue or, you know, being a part of a larger panel discussion, whatever it is. It's just

to say that what may feel isolating at times, because in some of these institutions, you may be the only one or and certainly, in some of these grad programs, you may be one of few, but just to say that you are entering a very rich network that is here to support you. And you should totally utilize that network.

Howardena Pindell:
To make a suggestion, when I first joined MoMA, the curators went directly to artists' studios, the galleries are not a middle person. And now it's like the galleries are determining who will be collected. The artists are not necessarily being visited in their studio. So I would really encourage people to not depend solely on the galleries. Because there are a number, especially the youngest folks that are coming out now that we don't know anything about. I also suggest that people go and visit the residency program at the Studio Museum in Harlem. I did that when they were having an open house, and I try to donate to that residency program being shall we say an elder artist, and I have enough sales that I can donate. So I'd like to encourage everyone to try to get into the artist studios, not necessarily depending on art galleries, to have access to the world.

Legacy Russell:
Well, Howardena, your visit to the studios last year was like, or I guess it was 2019, actually, but yeah, like legendary visit, just because it was so special to see the cohort of artists of this current moment, right, being able to, of course, see the ongoing successes of your work, right. And, see as well, that that career is a long and you know, ecstatic arc. So I so appreciate that too, because I really agree that it's a special experience being able to go into artists' studios. And in this moment, of course, I've been doing lots of studio visits via Zoom. But I look forward to the moments where we're able to do some of that more active convening and safely so, because it is a really important part of kind of developing Adeze back to, you know, kind of your early question, that methodology.

Howardena Pindell:
Yes.

Courtney J. Martin:
I'm just gonna say that, that the only thing that I would really advise anyone to do, if they are interested in, in art and artists, is to actually look at art and artists. Living artists are available. I mean, you know, Howardena, straight from the mouth of an artist. But in terms of, you know, if you study historical periods of art, let go of some of the theory and look at the art. Because I think that that is, in the same way that, you know, it's interesting to hear Howardena say that, you know, don't let the dealer be in the way, don't let the theory be in the way either. Because the work itself speaks across time, if you're willing to listen to it.

Adeze Wilford
I think that that is a perfect note to end on. I am so so appreciative of all of your time. And all of your thoughts for this panel. It's, you know, it's always great to be in communion with colleagues, but especially those who I've had relationships with for quite a long time. And it just feels very reifying to me to even be able to moderate this. So I'm really, really appreciative of all of your time. Thank

you, Howardena. Thank you, Courtney. Thank you, Legacy. Thank you, Naima. And then I have to do as we're closing out some housekeeping. So I'd love to, again, say thank you to the Howard Gilman Foundation for providing the Zoom video platform for tonight's conversation, as well as the Ford Foundation and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs for their support of both the exhibition and our public programs. And I'd like to say thank you to all of the supporters, including Howardena's galleries, but also thank you again to our panelists for being so willing to come and speak with us this evening. And thank you to the civic programs and IT teams for helping to put together this event and have it run fairly smoothly. I also have to just plug, we have a catalogue for the exhibition that just arrived stateside this week. It was a moment with Covid and shipping and everything but it's here. It's beautiful. It's very, very worth spending some time with Howard. He now has an incredible series of writings. There's an interview with Ashley James and it's just a really beautiful text and I'm so grateful that it's in the world. So I hope that you can spend some time with it and the show is open. You know if you can go to The Shed safely, I encourage you to spend some time with the works in person and I really appreciate everyone's time this evening. So, thank you.

Naima J. Keith:
Thank you so much, Adeze. Thank you, Howardena

Legacy Russell:
Thank you, Howardena and Adeze. Such a pleasure.