Audio Transcript: Pindell's Legacy: Firsthand
December 10, 2020

Emma Enderby:
I'm Emma Enderby, chief curator at The Shed. And welcome to our series of talks that look to the legacy and 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 at The Shed and organizer of the exhibition *Howardena Pindell: Rope/Fire/Water*, now on view at The Shed through this spring. Over her nearly 60-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 intersections 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:
Hi, good evening. It's nice to have you all here virtually in this space. Welcome and thank you for joining us. This series is a part of ongoing conversations that we will be having around the exhibition, *Howardena Pindell: Rope/Fire/Water*, which we hope that you've either had the chance to see or will see soon. Please check our website for more information on other conversations and programs that are coming up soon. We'll spend the first portion of today's program talking with our panelists, and then we'll move on to questions from all of you. For your ease of reference for tonight, there is a little button at the bottom of your screen in the lower right corner for you to put any questions to the group in and feel free to send them throughout the conversation. We'll compile them and get to as many as we can before the end of the program. We also have a CART service for online captioning during the conversation, feel free to turn that on by clicking the captioning button in the lower banner of your screen.

So let's start our conversation by introducing our speakers, and we're very excited to have you all. I'll read everyone's bios now. So joining us this evening is Ashley James. Ashley James joined the Solomon R. Guggenheim

Museum in 2019 as associate curator of contemporary art. Prior to joining the Guggenheim, James served as assistant curator of contemporary art at the Brooklyn Museum where she was lead curator for the museum's presentation of *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, 2018 and 2019, as well as where she organized *Eric N. Mack: Lemme walk across the room* and is cocurating the exhibition *John Edmonds: A Sidelong Glance*, which opened fairly recently.

James also served as a Mellon Curatorial Fellow in the drawings and prints department at the Museum of Modern Art, where her work focused on the groundbreaking retrospectives of Adrian Piper and Charles White. She has also held positions at the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Yale University Art Gallery. She's contributed to essays and research for books, magazines, and catalogues, including publications on Charles White, Palmer Hayden, and Howardena Pindell. James holds a BA from Columbia University and a PhD from Yale University in English literature and African American studies.

Howardena Pindell was born in 1943 and she studied painting at Boston University and at Yale University. She then worked from 1967 to 1979 at the Museum of Modern Art as an exhibition assistant, an 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 State University of New York, Stony Brook, where she is now a distinguished professor. In her work, she employs lengthy metaphorical processes of destruction and reconstruction, addressing social issues of homelessness, AIDS, war, genocide, sexism, xenophobia, and apartheid. Howardena's work has been featured in many landmark museum exhibitions and is in the permanent collections of major international museums.

Most recently, her work was a subject of a retrospective titled *Howardena Pindell: What Remains to be Seen* and is currently the subject of the exhibition *Rope/Fire/Water* at The Shed, with several new commissions, including the central video work, which gives the exhibition its title. So I'm incredibly grateful to have both of you here in conversation with us this evening. And so the first question I will ask Howardena. The centerpiece of *Rope/Fire/Water* is this new work that you've created. It's your first in 25 years. And it's an emotionally, politically intense work tracking, and at times visualizing, the histories of racial violence in the United States, specifically lynching in the Reconstruction period. Can you talk about why this work was important for you to make and present now?

Howardena Pindell:
[Coughs] Excuse me. It is important now, as we have just endured an authoritarian head of state. George Floyd's killing was the last straw. A huge diversity of people showed up to protest his death, including First Nation people. Our history of the abuse and killing of First Nation people has been hidden by the victors, the settlers who wrote the history. The media did not cover the First Nation protest of George Floyd. A friend, Athena LaTocha, sent me a video of their protest. These exhibitions could not be seen at a better time. More people of European descent are willing to hear about the true history of the country and ongoing abuse of people of color. We are also seeing the underbelly of the country float to the top under an increasingly authoritarian government. I am thrilled that Biden and Harris have won, and that we will have a new

government that will bring us back to our senses and will regain, rejoin rather, the world as well as deal with intelligence, science, and facts about the Covid virus.

Adeze Wilford:
Thank you for that answer, Howardena. I'm wondering how this new video for you is connected to an interest in activism that includes both your art practice, but other aspects of your life. And I wanted you to talk about the multiplicity in your approach to activism. You've used your artwork as well as writing to speak to these issues that matter to you. So what are some of the methods that you find most impactful?

Howardena Pindell:
I find that the published word and film reach more people than paintings, even if they're issue-related, unless they are in a public setting like the museum. In some cases, museums may own an issue-related painting, but they may hang it only during a blue moon. At the moment, my video film *Free, White and 21* and *Rope/Fire/Water* have reached more people than my writing or my paintings. The Shed exhibition gave me a wonderful opportunity to reach out to many people through film, as well as the paintings.

Adeze Wilford:
Thank you. And as you know, so much of this past year, especially the past summer, has been centered around a newly awakened and large-scale activism. And you spoke about how the multicultural protests of the past summer, especially have been a new and positive thing for you, and how you see that as a change to the activism of the 1960s. I'd like to know if you have advice for keeping motivated for a prolonged period of change. What are some of the things that keep you centered on your goals for a more just future?

Howardena Pindell:
I feel that the election of Biden and Harris is a huge step forward. Apparently, Trump is being told by some of his supporters not to concede. We have slid down into a muddy authoritarian swamp. I believe now they're trying to take it to the Supreme Court, to overturn the election. The fact that we can engage in the world again in a positive manner, gives me a great deal of hope, especially rejoining the Paris Peace Accord and the World Health Organization. We will no longer be out of the loop, if a vaccine is discovered here or overseas. Something has changed since this is earlier, there is a vaccine, but I'm waiting to see what the side effects are. We can share our knowledge; however, the fact that so many of our citizens are attacked, rather sorry, are attracted to an authoritarian form of government is alarming.

It will keep us on our toes. I wonder what they will do to seek revenge, following the lead of their authoritarian figurehead, who refuses to concede. I will continue to do my work. I love doing research and I'm interested in the history of slavery going back eons as there were Christian slaves, White Christian slaves. I wanted to find out about slavery in Europe. I know that the church had slaves and gave them to bishops as gifts. Leonardo da Vinci was the child of an enslaved woman in Italy of Arab heritage, according to *Time* magazine. The Vikings were very big slave traders and also enslaved their own people at home. One of their favorite destinations was the British Isles, other European countries. And then they'd enslave them even for a crime or a debt. There were slave markets in Venice and slave markets in Florence.

Ashley James:
Thank you to The Shed, Adeze, Justin, Solana and everyone else for inviting me. And of course, Ms. Howardena Pindell, I can't just say your first name, who I admire so much as an artist, and researcher, and activist. And it's such a pleasure to be here and to have been asked to contribute to the catalogue, which was a really just once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me. And speaking of my admiration for you, which largely can be imparted to how consistent you've been over many years, and how long you've been dedicated to both the practice and its intersections with an activist practice. And with that in mind, one of the things that I know you spoke to Adeze, especially when it came to the show, is this question of the personal, emotional toll that this kind of work takes on you over the course of decades.

And even today I have on my mind Casey Goodson Jr., who was just killed in Ohio. And I also just want to call up Brandon Bernard scheduled to be executed tonight in a federal execution by the state. So all of these kinds of injustices and with this exhibition, you've spoken about how abstract painting has served in part as a counterweight or salve for you. Could you talk a little bit about that function of abstraction, which often gets underwritten in modernist histories of how the function of abstraction is somehow separated from social reality? Could you talk about that?

Howardena Pindell:
Yeah, sure. My abstract painting at this point is about beauty, the soothing balm of seeing something beautiful and intricate. I need to create them to balance the sadness and the dread that the issue-related work on covers. The Shed is the perfect place for the work to be seen. It is a gigantic space and can exhibit a lot of large work and has a large area to show the film. After the car accident as a passenger in 1979, and the head and hip injury, I found that doing my work helped me to heal. My personality became a little cantankerous, which apparently is a side effect of a head injury. One also has memory and balance issues.

Adeze Wilford:
Well, thank you, Howardena, and thank you, Ashley. I really value you bringing up the issues that we're having even to this day. It's something that has been top of mind for me, as we were putting together the list of names that are at the end of the film that Howardena would send names over to me, and one of the conversations that we had was how we could... Unfortunately, due to this country, continue to add names to that list, even long after the exhibition is closed to the public, and what that means as a state of our nation, what that indicts to how we operate as a society. I want to continue on speaking about abstraction because I think it's such an important part of this exhibition and I'd want to discuss abstraction as a medium for you historically, because it's been the site of occasional disagreement among Black artists in particular. And Howardena, I'd love for you to speak to some of the ways that you've encountered this throughout your long and storied career, and what motivated you to keep working in this way.

Howardena Pindell:
I was not from New York, so there was some hostility from the African American community based on my being an outsider, as well as an abstract artist. My work after graduate school gradually became abstract. I took my

work to the director of the Studio Museum. He told me, and he told other abstract African American artists, to go downtown and show with the white boys. He said that as well, as I previously mentioned, to other African American artists. To this day, he is still angry at me. He has no idea what my work is about now. I followed my own intuition plus working during the day at the museum meant that I had very little daylight. I gradually moved to abstraction in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I followed my own intuitive path, no matter what. It was a lonely way but followed my own views and not the threats and condemnation of others.

Ashley James:
Hear, hear on that. And you can see actually in this slide that's up right now that continuing that thread of your work with abstraction, you've made these new Black paintings, which themselves have roots in abstraction and conceptual art, with an addition of these textual and sculptural elements. How could you describe this new direction? And yes, here is one of them, *Columbus*. This new direction in your practice, what excites you about these new Black works?

Howardena Pindell:
I have used texts in the past. With these two pieces *Columbus* and the *Four Little Girls* have more texts than any of my past paintings. Another painting also that I created before about *Columbus*, combined both beauty and horror. It is beautiful when you see it and horrible when you read it. As far as the two black paintings, I felt a sense of urgency under our current leadership and did not want it to be an ambiguity. My earlier *Columbus* painting got me into a lot of trouble in the 1990s during my traveling exhibition. It was on view in Atlanta and whites' reaction was that the show should be shut down because they said it was hostile to whites. They also complained, I believe, about the video *Free, White and 21*. In Atlanta, there was a brief newspaper article about the protest in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

The exhibition was at Georgia State University. Around the same time, in a suburb near Atlanta, there was a play with homosexual themes. Whites asked that the money for the arts be given to the police department instead. In another venue for this show, at an art school in Ohio, there was a hostile reaction to the show by white art students and possibly faculty. My *Free, White and 21* was stolen from the show the first week it opened. I received heckling calls at home from art students. The art school refused to follow up on the theft. The director of the gallery was threatened and his camera equipment was stolen.

Ashley James:
A very hostile exhibition environment and space that I think, obviously in this case, Adeze has done some great work to contextualize your work. And that's actually something that I really admire about the way that the show is actually laid out. It's among many things. And there was actually an earlier image that showed the kind of... Yes, thank you. The floor print of the show where the abstract paintings live alongside the video, which you walk into along that pathway and enter into that darkened space. So it becomes this... You have the video and then a radial design where the abstract paintings form these concentric circles around this centerpiece, that is the *Rope/Fire/Water* video. And I'm just curious Adeze, if you could talk about your curatorial choices here, which seem so deliberate, and so related to this question of abstraction versus the heaviness that the video imparts.

Adeze Wilford:
Yes. And thank you for your kind words about the show's installation. One of the things that I felt was really important was to actually take a note from the way that Howardena actually uses her own practice. For me, I knew that the film was going to be this really fraught exchange of ideas for the public to encounter. And I wanted to be sensitive to that and sensitive to the location of The Shed and the types of visitors that were coming in. Even before the pandemic occurred, the plan was always to have the exhibition open at the time, a month before the presidential election. And that was a deliberate choice that Howardena had asked when we began having conversations about the show. And I knew that there were going to be a lot of tensions in the country, but also it was just going to be this emotional time for everyone.

And so I really wanted there to be this balance between the more issues-based and thematic works and the abstract works, which are made to be intentionally beautiful and made to be this all-consuming, absorbing textual experience that you have in the space. And I wanted that balance to happen for the viewer, because I know that's how Howardena's practice works. So she'll be working and thinking and researching these issues-based paintings or projects like the film at the same time that she's working on these abstract canvases. And so I felt like it was a necessary step to have that in conversation together in the same room.

Ashley James:
That's great. And I'm also curious about decisions you made around the inclusion of earlier works. There are some works that date back to the '70s. What was the guiding ethos around the chronological framework considering what we've already said about how these ideas are at once current but also immemorial at the same time?

Adeze Wilford:
Yes. So I thought it was important to have works from the '70s in the exhibition for two reasons. I think, one, so many of the works that are in the gallery are actually from the late 2010s and we commissioned five new paintings and I thought that it was important to show the breadth of Howardena's practice, but also how those works interrelate with each other. So there's a wall in the show that is three works from the mid-'70s, and at the very end is a work from 2015. That's in a very similar color palette, but the addition of these foam blocks and just texturally in shape and form, it's just a radically different work. And I've been excited going through all of the paintings and researching for the show and seeing all of the different drawings that Howardena has done, just the breadth and variance in her practice has always been something that I've been incredibly intrigued by.

And I wanted to show that in the exhibition. And also, I'm just in a more sentimental way, one of the first encounters that I had with Howardena's paintings were these large-scale white paintings from the '70s. And I felt a really strong connection to them as a young art historical student. And I wanted to have that in the show as well. I want to shift us a little bit, if we can go to the next slide that has the spread from the publication in it. Thank you. I'm incredibly excited about this exhibition and that it's up for as long as it will be, but one thing that is important as a curator and as an art historian is the legacy of a publication, which we are in the process of printing and it'll be stateside very soon. And it was important for me to have something that lived on after the

exhibition. And I'm thrilled that Ashley's here joining us in conversation because she contributed to the text and it's a really wonderful interview.

And Howardena, because of the conversation that you had, I wanted to ask this question. It was important for me to have the two of you in conversation, because both of you are actually the first Black women who are full-time curators at important institutions, both in New York City, but also internationally. And I want to know how you feel the industry has changed since your time at MoMA and what have been some of the markers of progress for you.

Howardena Pindell:
The largest actually recent pioneer for change is Ann Temkin, chief curator at the Museum of Modern Art. She has installed Mel Edwards, an African American sculptor in the same gallery as Jackie Winsor, a white woman artist originally from Canada. Both African American curators, two African American curators rather, curated my traveling exhibition along with my gallery, the Garth Greenan Gallery. They produced a rather amazing catalog that won the George Wittenborn Award for the best art book of 2019. It was given by ARLIS, the library association. The curators names were Naomi Beckwith, of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and Valerie Cassel Oliver of the Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, Virginia. I also want to mention Lowery Sims, who was a curator more or less during the same time I was but she was at the Met.

Adeze Wilford:
Okay. Did you want to expand any more on that question or I can move on to asking Ashley a question?

Howardena Pindell:
Whatever. Yeah. Why don't you move on to Ashley.

Adeze Wilford:
Okay. That sounds great.

Howardena Pindell:
Okay.

Adeze Wilford:
Ashley, I wanted to talk shop a little bit with you as well. And one of the questions that I had is as you've been building your curatorial practice, and several of the shows that you've organized have been championing early-career artists, what has been a productive lens for you to building exhibitions and being an exhibition maker?

Ashley James:
Yeah. Thank you. I think that's an interesting question because the shows that I've done have happened in very specific kinds of ways. Even if in hindsight, a pattern emerges. With Eric Mack's show... So I did *Soul of a Nation* at the Brooklyn Museum, which was, again, a kind of opportunity of a lifetime. I have found that if my career is marked by anything, it's by I don't know, these conspiracies of luck that allow me to be involved and really, like, top of my mind ever projects. I mean, Adrian Piper would be my number one solo exhibition artist alongside Howardena Pindell. And then I get to work on that show.

And then shortly thereafter, I get to work on *Soul of a Nation* that included her amongst so many others. And for Eric's show, this came about because I had an opportunity to curate a space, around the same time, a slight overlap with *Soul of a Nation*.

And one of the main draws conceptually that I got from *Soul of a Nation* was that I was really just interested in, especially if anyone saw that show on the second floor, it was really comprised tons of sculptural performance-leaning painting. What happens with performance and the after— Excuse me, what happens with painting and the aftermath of performance was the guiding question I had for that exhibit, that part of the exhibition and Howardena Pindell's work, certainly brought that forward as well. So when I had this opportunity, Eric's work really came to mind as someone who was taking those precepts of an expanded, painting practice, but making it really fresh and contemporary and new. And his work with fabric sculptural practices became top of mind. And then there was an architectural component that played off of the architecture of the museum.

And then with John Edmonds, he was the winner of the inaugural UOVO Emerging Artists prize. And in that case, he, eventually, as part of that show was able to work with Brooklyn Museum's collection of African art. Actually a body of work that the Ralph Ellison Estate gave to the Brooklyn Museum some years back. So that shows up right now and yeah, so in both cases, I mean, I look back on both of those and I think, Oh, there... Well, one's still up. They have this really strong art historical component that's baked into the concept. And I guess in some ways I am drawn to artists who are very clearly working in certain kinds of art historical traditions and doing something just really conceptually fresh. I guess, that is what draws me to any artist. And yeah, I think those were two early-career artists working on other projects that incorporate mid- and senior career or whatever the words might be. But yeah, I do see a conceptual thread when I think back to it as a whole.

Adeze Wilford:
You touched on it a little bit when you were answering the question, but I'm curious about the way your process was maybe formed or inspired through working at an encyclopedic institution and you mentioned how it influenced John's practice, but I'm just curious about considerations you made towards placement of objects, especially, I'm thinking about where the exhibition for Eric was located and situated in the rooms that you had to walk through in order to get to that installation.

Ashley James:
Yeah, that's a really great question. And I don't know how to answer it other than saying, it's like a chicken and the egg thing, because I do feel like once I have a project in mind is it then I'm thinking about things like architecture, historical context, all of these things, and then that arises, or is it the opposite? And I'm naturally drawn to artists who are already having those contextual questions at the top of minds. But I mean, in the case of John's show, which I co-curated with Drew Sawyer, curator of photography at the Brooklyn Museum, the historical angle was really a group-think scenario where so many people at the institution had been thinking about A) The African collection, B) the Ralph Ellison collection in particular. So it was like this kismet where so many people were interested in bringing the contemporary and historical together. And John was a perfect gathering of those various desires and excitements over that.

Adeze Wilford:
Thank you. I'm going to shift back to Howardena really quickly. We discussed your career as an artist and as a curator, and something that I think is really foundational to the work that you've done is your career as a professor. And I'd like to talk about some of the ways that you found your own artistic practice shifting over the years, as you've spent time shaping this next generation of young artists.

Howardena Pindell:
Well, I'd like to answer about what it was like to work with the Modern between the '60s and '70s. Then I'll answer the question about teaching.

Adeze Wilford:
Of course, please.

Howardena Pindell:
Okay, alrighty. While I was working at the Modern, this is in the '60s and '70s, I started in '67 and I left in '79. I quit. Anyway, it could be at times like walking into a brick wall, the white curators would pass through the brick wall by way of a revolving door. In a number of ways, it was impossible to get to the other side because of the social emissions. I felt pretty much alone. My boss was a type of person who made you sign up to go to the bathroom. She would promote me, but she herself was a brick wall. She would not invite me to her professional social gatherings, even if I was the associate curator, helping her with a major exhibition. She also refused to invite me to her museum white retirement party, and even invited people who she had fired. They were all white.

When I called to find out if I was invited, she told her secretary to tell me, not even on the door list. The secretary that relayed the message was the same one who when I borrowed her pen, wiped it off with a tissue, she did not want to touch it. She was from England. I challenged them about not being invited to the retirement party, and was told by the museum director's assistant that it was a private institution and they could invite anyone they wanted. I spoke with an attorney and he said that MoMA was not a private club. It was a fiduciary trust, holding the art and trust for the people. On the other side, when I go to the restroom, the white women would grab their purses out of fear I would steal it.

In terms of some of the flack I got from the outside, one particular African American woman artist would heckle me even call me at home and warn me and blame me for the museum not collecting her work while I was employed there. A white woman artist would end gatherings of A.I.R., it's a women's cooperative gallery. After I left, she would constantly at different gatherings say that I did not know I was Black. I have a list of things over the years, but museum related and even quite recently, I will save for my memoir. One positive side was that I visited Ana Mendieta in her studio, on a day at the museum called Gallery Day. As a result, we became friends. I visited one of her earthworks in progress in Iowa. I also met Lowery Sims who was at the Metropolitan Museum.

We traveled together for a month and a half to Africa representing our two museums. I was sent to see art activities and also represented the Museum of Modern Art's library overseas program. My teaching is separate from my studio practice. At the same time, one informs the other. I teach figurative art basically to undergraduates. The graduate students work covers a wide range

of expression. They explore installation and digital art besides painting and sculpture. I am grateful to have had a wide-ranging education. I also learned from my students. I had a flip phone for 14 years. One of my undergraduate students used a smartphone to see the details on a copper base with an inscribed design. The idea caught on, the paintings that use this method were exquisite. It's perfect also teaching online, although it takes a lot of time, as you get high definition images that you cannot get on Zoom. I called them and we discussed the work.

I'm also thrilled that on the undergraduate level, my students are more diverse. They are Latino, African American, Haitian, Asian, and white. Sadly, I have not had any First Nation students. I have taught at Stony Brook for about 42 years. Way back in the beginning, the students were mainly white working class and some were extremely hostile. I got the most hostility from the white women students who acted like there was nothing I knew that could teach them anything. I had an older white woman student from South Africa, after the accident, I could not stand for long periods of time. She asked me with great hostility why I had to sit down. The white male students would walk in with a racist swagger, which basically said we are white and male. And we are in charge here. I could tell that the Black male students were afraid of them. Recently, I ran into this with one white female graduate student. We really though have a diverse body of undergraduate students. In general, the graduate students are however respectful. I have run into a much worse in New York City.

Adeze Wilford:
Thank you, Howardena. I think the care and attention that you have for your students is really remarkable. As we've been talking, over the past several months, as you had to move onto a digital platform, your adaptability to that, I think it's a really great one. And I'm sure they're very appreciative.

Howardena Pindell:
Thank you

Adeze Wilford:
Ashley, I wanted to talk to you a bit about some of the upcoming projects that you're working on. There've been some exciting announcements and I'd love for you to talk about some things that are coming up for you since we last spoke.

Ashley James:
Yeah. Thank you. Quickly before that, I just wanted to reiterate this point in case it got lost because Ms. Pindell is so modest about her curatorial career in particular. I mean, I think that's a wonderful research project for a young art historian to take on in the future. But I do think that, and the catalog, I think goes some ways in describing this. But your resume as it pertains to all that you did at MoMA is so vast. And I'm looking at it right here and I won't read everything, but I do think it's important that we recognize Ms. Pindell as the artist that she is, but also the curatorial practices so clearly impactful. And when we had our interview, I asked, "Oh, well, what do you think characterizes your approach to curating and do you think in hindsight that you see any kind of thread that carries through?" And you said, "That's a question for somebody else to answer."

And so I want to pose that out to anyone watching that, that is a question to be answered by a historian. And yeah, so for me, I was in drawings and prints at MoMA, which further connects me to Ms. Pindell. And I realized that I also have an English literature background. I have a very textual mind, that's always been the way that I think, and I think I learned to just go with it and see it through. So I am working on two exhibitions next year at the Guggenheim. One has been announced already, and that's the Hugo Boss Prize, which I'm so excited to be co-curating with Catherine Brinson. And the winner this year is Deana Lawson, an artist who is both so formally and conceptually rigorous, but also just very much a humanitarian. I guess I'll say is a through line. I've never worked with artists who are mean people, but somehow see themselves connected to a social world that matters.

And then my other project that I'm working on is a collection show, which I'm so excited that will be announced soon. So I'll say one word about it, but it features artists who look to the document which I define as text-based document and the photograph. Thinking about the document as both physical and metaphorical container of history. So artists who are intervening upon the document in some way, as a way of speaking back to this history, surfacing, unknown histories, or I'm just taking up the question of record keeping and historization itself. And so this is Sadie Barnette's *My Father's FBI File*, which is a great example of some of the work in that exhibition. And when I think about an artist like Sadie Barnette, who uses spray paint and glitter and intervenes upon the pristine space, in this case, the paper document, but I'm also thinking about Howardena Pindell's work on the canvas. And that's certainly an artist who I see within her lineage as well. Thank you.

Adeze Wilford:
Thanks, Ashley. And before we open up to some questions from the audience this evening, I just wanted to thank you both for talking through all of these ideas this evening, and also for working with each other over the course of this past year, for the publication, it's been a real delight to listen to you both talk about your practices. And then it was a really important thing for me to have you both in conversation, especially given the state of the industry that we are working in and have having watched through Howardena's recollections of her time at MoMA, both of us Ashley and I were actually at MoMA overlapping. And then to see Ashley go off into these other institutions, it was really important and urgent for me to have the two of you in conversations. I so appreciate your time both this evening, but over many months in many conversations that we've had for the publication.

So I just wanted to say that before I turn to the audience, and we do have quite a few questions this evening, so I'll ask a couple of them and then we'll answer them as best as we can. So one of the questions is more about form, Howardena's, and it's about the way that the works, the canvases, are stitched together and pieced together, and this person wants to know what the significance behind the stitching is.

Howardena Pindell:
Well, it's interesting. I always talk about how I have battle scars. I have a scar in my head, I call it my Harry Potter scar. I had a breast operation, so I have a scar, but like a keloid. So the sewn surface actually looks like a keloid scar, this stitching. If I didn't have keloiding, I would heal perfectly smoothly. So for me, it's odd, almost a reverse scarification, where someone has welts. Welts is not

in reverse. Welts where they been cut to form various designs on the body. It's an African, but I don't know which particular nation in Africa that this is done. So I also enjoy sewing. When I was a child, my parents sent me to the Singer sewing machine classes for children and granted we were using a machine, but it introduced me to using thread.

And also when I started the museum, the first salary for the first year was 5,000 a year. And you were expected to attend the formal opening. So I had to make my own clothes. So I was stitching my own clothing. So it's both scarification in a way is from my real scars. And also the necessity of having to make my own clothes is likely that I used a machine for that, but it kept me engaged with the act of sewing. I also love the way it looks. So I read it more as beauty marks, like in scarification.

Adeze Wilford:
Thank you. The next question is from an audience member who said that they had the opportunity of seeing the show before it officially opened. We did a member's preview day and she met... this person, sorry, I gendered them, but I don't actually know what their gender is. So this person mentioned that they were one of the few Black people in the space at the time and spent quite a long time in the exhibition. And as she watched the film, they watched it more than once. But they noticed that they were the only Black person in the room and that they were also the only one expressing emotion. And they had a very visceral response to the film. It is an emotional work. And I think, if you haven't seen it, it's worthwhile to spend time with it. I definitely spent a lot of time in that room since we've opened. And the question that they have is what is the response overall from attendees? And what did you... Howardena, you can answer this, but I'll also answer what I hoped people would take from seeing the film.

Howardena Pindell:
Well, I feel that there's so much history that's hidden. And lynching in particular, I think has been brought upfront. But it has to do... I think it was the Michigan Gretchen governor where some militia men or vigilantes, were going to try her for advocating, wearing a mask. They were going to kill her. So in a sense, there was an attempted lynching of someone White. So even though lynching was considered something that would happen to African Americans or non-whites, when you look on the film, the statistics, the numbers show that Whites, as well as Blacks were lynched. I had an emotional reaction to hearing about Whites being lynched. I think partly because I was, I don't know, it has to do with white supremacy and how white supremacy seems to want to protect whiteness. But if whiteness doesn't make them happy, in other words, if you don't do what you're expected to do is like a cult. White supremacy is like a cult, then they can turn on you.

It reminds me of a woman. She was somewhere, I don't know whether she was from Michigan wherever, during the civil rights movement, wanted to come down and help with some of the protest about voting whatever. And the white man shot her to death. They shot her in the face. So in a sense, white supremacy is like its own cult, but if you're in the culture you're safe, but for white, if you're not in a cult, then you can be treated as badly as a person of color. I don't know if that answers the question.

Adeze Wilford:
I think it does. I'll answer from my perspective, from a organizational standpoint. For me, I think a lot of the conversation around The Shed exhibition has been around the timeliness of the body of work. And I think it's interesting because you have had this idea since the 1970s, and it's been something that isn't a continuum of thought for you. And it's not something that you just decided to put on view in reaction to the current administration. It's something that you've been thinking about and working through for a really long time. And for me, what I want audiences to take from this exhibition is an understanding of the legacy of hatred in this country, and what it's done to populations and to desire to not continue on in the way that we have in the past.

And I know that's a very lofty, hopeful position to have, but I do believe in the power of art as a force of social change. And so that's what I would like for people to take away from the show that art can be a place where you can learn the history of a nation, but also be involved in a really beautiful aesthetically pleasing room, full of paintings that are joyous, even though sometimes the subject of... I'm thinking about *Plankton Lace #1* and *#2*, how they're very closely related to climate change. But there's still a really beautiful works. And so that for me is what I hope audiences walk away with. And I think we have time for one more question. And this question is for Ashley. And someone asked, do you think you would have been drawn to Howardena's early work, like you've been drawn to Eric and John's?

Ashley James:
By early work, do you mean... What are we talking about? Like straight out of grad school, out of Yale?

Adeze Wilford:
Let's situate it like early '70s because that's a body of work that weren't familiar with.

Ashley James:
Yes. Would and I'm. In fact, I think that, that earlier work is what, I like Adeze, first saw Howardena Pindell's practice. I love minimalism and all of Howardena Pindell's experiments within the constrictions of these muted palates, her interventions on the surface of the canvas, all of that stuff. In many ways, what I've appreciated about Ms. Pindell's practices, the way that painting lives alongside with the subject of this show, lives alongside this historically specific and really ethically driven research practice that also informs the work. And that has been there from the beginning in many ways, too. So the answer definitely, it's a resounding yes. And it's been great to continuously see those earlier works, an exhibition context, like *Soul of the Nation* and the show, while also getting to understand a longer trajectory of the practice. So, yes.

Adeze Wilford:
Thank you. Okay. So we are coming up to time and I am so appreciative of both of your time. I'm also appreciative of all of our participants. There were some really great questions. I have to close out by saying thank you to the Howard Gilman Foundation for providing the Zoom 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 we are continuing on with this series of conversations into the new year. So

please be on the lookout for information about those upcoming programs from The Shed. It will be posted on our website. You'll likely also get an email about things that are coming and the book will be here soon. So please be ready for that once it arrives. I am so thankful for your time and I really appreciate it. So have a good evening, everyone.