

## **[VIRTUAL SUMMIT 2020] A PANEL ON COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS & COMMUNITY BUILDING IN A DIGITAL WORLD**

This is a video transcript from the Fresh Arts Virtual Summit, Session 2: "Introduction to Digital Collaborations: A Panel on Collaborative Projects & Community Building in a Digital World" with Claire Drennan, Josh Inocencio, Matt Manalo, and Shayna Schlosberg which was live streamed on August 8, 2020.

<https://fresharts.org/summit-2020-collaborative-projects-digital-world/>

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### **Shayna:**

Hello and welcome to our panel on Collaborative Projects and Community Building in a Digital World. My name is Shayna Schlosberg, and I will be moderating the discussion with our amazing panelists. I am so excited and honored to be in conversation with these artists. So I think we're going to start letting them. Let's start with, yes, Claire Drennan. Josh Inocencio and Matt Manalo. And me. So let's go ahead and do some quick intros if you could just talk about who you are and what your work is, I can go ahead and start. So I am the managing director the Catastrophic Theater, which is an experimental avant-garde theater that's been operating in Houston for about 15 years, and in addition to that work I'm also a community organizer, and with my good friend Josh Inocencio, we started a media collective called The Space Milk Collective, which independent artists run. And we launched that in March right around the time that the pandemic was exploding, but I'll let him talk a bit more about that. Let's go ahead and start with Claire.

### **Claire:**

Hi, very happy to be here, my name is Claire Drennan, and I am a fiber artist. So I make installations and work using textiles, usually working with found materials, sustainable materials. And then most recently coming off of a project that was a collaboration with

another artist, Eepi Chaad, and we received funding from the Houston Arts Alliance to do a digital installation which is called "We Are Friends". Which was all about celebrating togetherness in the time when we can't be together.

**Shayna:**

And I think we're gonna take a look at a video of that right now. Super fun.

**Claire:**

Thank you.

**Shayna:**

Thank you. Oh, and we have a time-lapse.

**Claire:**

Yeah this is behind the scenes, this is me and Eepi, making it all happen with some grabbers doing stop motion photography to accomplish this. And we actually made all of the friends. And we did a series. We did three videos, or four videos total, we invited people to name our friends, tell us what they wanted the friends to do. We created a series of videos to celebrate togetherness, so there was a video that was a dance party. There is a video that's life of the party, where we name the friends. There's a video that's a garden party, and then we culminated the whole thing with a birthday party which actually coincided with my real birthday, where we released a video, the birthday party video, and we did similar to what we're doing right now, a live feed where we interacted with the audience and wore funny hats and it was a lot of fun.

**Shayna:**

That's great. Thank you so much. Let's go to Matt.

**Matt:**

Hi, my name as Matt Manalo, I'm an artist, and a community organizer. In 2019, last year I founded the Filipinx Artists of Houston, along with Bridget Bray, and I also run an art alternative, alternative art space called the Alief Arthouse.

**Shayna:**

I think **Matt**, you're gonna show your video, right?

**Matt:**

Yeah.

Okay, cool. My name is Matt Manalo, I'm an artist and a community organizer. I was born in the Philippines and received my bachelors of fine arts in painting. At the University of Houston in 2011. I make work which involves elements of painting, drawing, sculpture, Photography and printmaking. Using raw materials, found, collected, or oftentimes donated, I'm making a practice environmentally conscious, as well as understanding the idea of scarcity and abundance. My use of grit tackles geography, photography, borders and the idea of displacement. While having a constant conversation of how homes should be defined. Being a first-generation immigrant, I discuss experiences of navigating around physical and social structures. My work explores and exposes topics involving colonial mentality, erasure and colorism. In 2019 co-founded Filipinx Artists of Houston, and I run an alternative art space called the Alief Arthouse. There you go.

**Shayna:**

You are an inspiration, man.

**Matt:**

Oh, thank you.

**Shayna:**

Thank you. Shall we move over to Josh?

**Josh:**

My name is Josh Inocencio, and I'm a writer here Houston. I primarily work in a theater, so as a playwright. I've toured my play, "Purple Eyes", a solo play around Texas,

but more recently I've gotten into fiction and I'm just finishing up some drafts of a novel that I wrote this past year. Along with Shayna this year, I started the media collective. This is called the Space Milk Collective, which we're at the end of our rollout period for right now, but it's an artist run collective where we feature and connect artists, and uplift local artists around here in the city and share their work. We've also found other ways to engage with the community, this is our logo designed by architectural designer David Richmond, who is also part of our collective. And that includes him and film programmer Michael Robinson. You can find us on Instagram, Space Milk Collective. We want to show the other things now or wait?

**Shayna:**

Maybe later.

**Josh:**

Yeah, okay, we're gonna show them in the conversation.

**Shayna:**

Yeah, sure.

**Josh:**

Yeah so that's what I do here in the city.

**Shayna:**

Awesome. So thank you all for sharing the work that you're doing right now, and let's go ahead and dive into some questions. So the first question I have for you is, was your project and or practice a result of this crisis, or was it something that you started before. Regardless, what adjustments and considerations had to be made to pull it off in this context? And if you just want to jump in and answer when you feel ready, go ahead.

**Josh:**

So with Space Milk Collective we did start just a hair before COVID started going out of control, we started the quarantine. We envisioned it as an arts collective that would use

small spaces like people's homes or other small community gatherings when we would showcase works of art that are interdisciplinary, Anything from cuisine to fashion to architecture, to visual arts and theater. We're going to roll out in the summer with events like that, and then we started quarantining in March. And so Shayna and I and our other collective members had to reimagine how we would do it in a digital space, and that led to our artists roll out, where we showcased artists, including Matt here, on our Instagram and on our website. And so we have definitely adapted as a result of that. And then in the wake of George Floyd's death, we've also tried to create a series where we can call out instances of racism in our institutions across the city as well. And so we share-

**Shayna:**

I think we can share the photos, do you want to share the photos of those now? Okay. Let's see the artist series, and then the, yeah.

**Josh:**

These are the artist series, these are three of the artists you can see on our website. The full list on our Instagram page has them all as well. But Sarah Sudhoff is a visual artist here who just recently had an exhibition in Austin. Nick and Jake are doing, they are visual artists during their 50 States project. And so they have done a piece on Texas, they're currently based in Houston, and so we have some of their work. And then Candice D'Meza is a theater artist and activist here in Houston, and so we have some of her work up there as well, but that's what page looks like and then there's being featured artist at the top. If you want to go to the next photo. So we created the #changetheartshtx, it's inspired by the Change The Museum and BCU campaigns that are going on nationally. Because we have a hyper-local focus, we wanted to focus just on Houston institutions. This is a quote from visual artist Ronald Llewellyn Jones here in town, and we have a full story on the website, so we always put a little snippet on Instagram on our story and in our post, and then we have the full essay or memoir piece that they have written their narrative on our blog space, so you can check that out. And we're encouraging people to use the hashtag, it's only going, so if anyone watching wants

to share a story, feel free to email us, our information is on the website. Or to message us on Space Milk on that Instagram account.

**Shayna:**

So lots of adaptation and responsiveness, just kind of how we roll this out. Anyone else want to answer that question?

**Matt:**

Yeah I would love too. You know originally because Alief Arthouse was able to get a fellowship grant, with the Art League, HAA, and the Houston City Mayor's Office for Cultural Affairs, along with artists, Antonius Belem, here we're collaborating with. We originally have a lot of big plans for this year, and that was including a lot of engaging activities for whoever wanted to view the art from the space. But because the whole pandemic happened and we can't really have any people over, I had to shift the whole programming to, to something virtual. So I had to learn a lot of video editing and all that. Learn some tips and tricks on how to really be able to show the work properly in a virtual setting. So because we weren't doing any more of the physical activities at the space, Antonius and I decided to allocate some of the funds for that, and do an open call for artists who are suffering from the pandemic. And you give them a sum of money, and then be able to also practice their art in the space. And then for my personal work, it's been hard. I wasn't really in the right mind to make work. Especially because a lot of the shows that I was part of and I was even planning to have a solo show, it was all canceled. So it was just in a weird kind of thing for me to be able to, I guess not really think about myself, and then come out like the community at large, because I have a space so that still a privilege, and I'll still be able to, you know. And then my plan was really to still go through the programming, even with the pandemic happening. So I'm having to really shift my work, and kind of like dabbling into digital work as well. And be able to really have the knowledge even to edit the videos and stuff like that. Because with Alief Arthouse we have like our YouTube channel, and that's where we showcase all of the artists that we've shown so far. And we're still working on some of the videos and editing them so we can fully showcase ours, as if they were physically in the space. But then also, it's also viewable by appointment.

**Shayna:**

Okay, one person.

**Matt:**

One person, yeah.

**Shayna:**

Have a lot of people been utilizing that?

**Matt:**

Not so much, but there are people who have asked and have shown interest and been in the space. And then even for Filipinx Artists of Houston, for us social media was just kind of like a thing, as a tool to help organize and all that. Because we really like being in the community and really gathering as a community, so that was put on hold. Like what we're doing right now, we've used Zoom and streamed art as well for meeting purposes and stuff. Most of our plans or programming was also put into a halt, but then we're also still being active in other things, like activism and organizing, or co-organizing film viewings and stuff like that. So it's really interesting what we're in right now.

**Shayna:**

And Claire, I'm guessing "We Are Friends" came directly out of this time?

**Claire:**

Actually no, originally "We Are Friends" was supposed to be an installation at the Tate Space at Spring Street, so we had pitched the concept was called "We Are Friends", but it was originally going to be an installation that was gonna be with contact cells, and we were gonna create these forms that people could touch and hug and move around. And then we were like, well first, the installation was canceled, we were not able to access the space and then we obviously had to turn on the concept, but it grew into that original idea, it grew into something else that was just very specific to the time. So we really just asked ourselves, what do we miss right now, what do we want to see right now. And we

scaled way down, so these were supposed to be human-sized installations figures that we were gonna be creating, but then some of the smallest ones fit into the palm of your hand, we scaled way down because that was actually one of the benefits of working digitally, is that you can create a big impact. In fact until we showed, we held back the process videos for a while, and people thought that the friends were really big. Only to find out that they were actually pretty small. So it adapted really well, and originally there wasn't going to be any stop motion photography, we didn't actually know how to do that before this started. So we learned how to do the live streaming, we learned how to do this stop motion photography. And we really just went into a digital space. And I mean for me it was such a balm, because we really just went pure escapism, and also an excuse to hang out with another human. And the structure. So you mentioned, Matt, not feeling in the space to create, and there's just so much going on and so much to pay attention to. And other things that you have to do that on your plate, so having the structure, this was the specific grant that the Arts Alliance did, that was the Let Creativity Happen Digital Grant, and they had a really tight turnaround on it. So we had this really punishing schedule when we were making a video every week. But it was a great. It was such a great thing to have on your schedule. So yeah.

**Matt:**

Would you continue, Claire?

**Claire:**

Oh yeah, we're taking a little break right now, just 'cause it was a lot in a short period of time. But now we want to give it some more space, all of the friends have names, and we're just getting to know them, so.

**Shayna:**

I like that you mention scaling down, I think this is something that is happening in many different ways, whether it's focusing on just becoming a hyper-localized as a result of this, and then Catastrophic has had to scale down dramatically, but that's also offered us kind of exciting challenges and opportunities in doing that. And it's just challenging



our notions of the scale that we have to work at, which I think is something hopefully we can retain.

**Claire:**

Sure, but you're scaling down physically, but then also you have this opportunity. So I'm not originally from Houston, I've been here for almost seven years. But I have friends and family that are not here, and what fun to be able to share with them the exact thing that people locally can experience and to reinvigorate those ties and make it really interactive. So that was another fun opportunity that came out of the situation.

**Shayna:**

Definitely.

**Matt:**

Speaking of scaling down, I also bought a second shipping container. But it's like this big.

**Shayna:**

Oh my god. Great, I love it.

**Josh:**

Are you going to put little art pieces in your ship and pose it? Amazing.

**Shayna:**

Does it say Alief Arthouse on it?

**Matt:**

Yeah, I'm still gonna paint it. But yeah.

**Shayna:**

How awesome, that's awesome.

So another question I have for you, with social distancing being the norm during this crisis, what made collaboration enticing or necessary for your project or your practice?

**Matt:**

It's gotten a lot more interesting to say the least. Because for me in my personal collaboration, I'm always open for collaboration, but then that means being around with that same person as well, being there physically and doing the work at the same time, we'll be doing an exchange of the work. But now it's a collaboration in terms of like, it's like, you know like the digital work. One of the videos that I was editing for a performance, the drag performance by Kumquat. A couple of my friends who was part of a film, I'm part of a film group as well, called Joy Luck Club. And so they edited the film for me, so it's in that realm where I made something and then I handed over to somebody else, but in a digital environment, and then that's how collaborations have been so far.

**Josh:**

I think with us it was like only to witness what other artists were doing during this time. The first month, there was a kind of we're all in this together, but I think during April especially, because our Instagram went live in May, and I think for some artists too, there was this despairing of, oh, we're in such hyper-isolation, and some artists felt bad because they weren't doing anything. Others going through these hyper-creative periods. And so on our call, on our invite to participate, we said you can share stuff that you have made during COVID, or before that, it doesn't matter. But it's up to you. But I think there was a need for many of us to see but there were still creative projects going on right.

And it was even in a digital sphere there's been a way of having community, and other artists learning about each other, and our city sometimes can be very sprawling, especially in an interdisciplinary level, we don't always know what's going on in other fields. So part of that was to bring all creatives together through Space Milk to see what everyone is doing across the board. And I feel like a lot of joy has come out of that in bearing witness to what other artists are doing. And I don't want to say that it's taken us

to normalcy, but it's definitely, there's a camaraderie to seeing other people create and be active, or at least reflecting on past pieces that they've done. I don't know, it's motivated me as a writer for sure.

**Claire:**

For me it was just such a welcome outlet, it was almost like structured playtime, but there were times when we had to actually physically be in the same space, but since we were just two people keeping that circle very, very tight, during the month and 1/2 that we were collaborating on this particular project, we both had a COVID scare when we were in contact with someone who had been, like we had to get tested and we had to put the project on hold and do what we could remotely and digitally. Where one person would go and work on this. So we didn't have to be flexible in that way, so that was certainly challenging. And really just for myself, I've been averaging I guess one collaboration a year. Like one intense collaboration with another artist. And it's so important for me to get out of myself and to relinquish self-control, I want everything to be a certain way I see it in my head and working with another person really forces you to accept other points of view, have a conversation, pick up new skills, delegate, it's just really I think a helpful reset, and it can only make you stronger as an artist.

**Shayna:**

Definitely. And I can share from a producer's perspective. There are now monthly meetings happening with leadership of theaters of all sizes, and that has never happened before. And we've never collectively faced the same set of challenges like this. There is such a drastic difference between my organization, which is very small for a staff organization, unlike the Ally Theater which is a multi-million dollar organization with 130 employees. And yet we are equally impacted in many ways by this and having to figure out and solve a lot of the same challenges. So our community has come together and collaborated in ways that we've talked about needing to do, and are finally doing, so it's absolutely been a necessity in that way.

**Claire:**

What were some of the things that kept that from having before? Just people having too much on their plate not making enough space for that?

**Shayna:**

I think it was that, I think it was this perception that we just had such drastically different problems. That there weren't enough points of intersection or connection I guess. Mostly it just had to do with, it wasn't a dire necessity in the way that it is now, and so it was easy to just talk about and kind of dream about, but it didn't really have to happen, now than it really is happening, it's great but it's also revealing some gaps too. And yeah, also I just want to mention, please do drop some questions for us, we're gonna have about 10 or 15 minutes at the end to answer your questions, so don't be shy and we definitely want to hear from you. So let's move on. So what was the most difficult aspect of this collaborative process, and how did you adjust to it?

**Josh:**

I think ours have mostly been technical in the digital space, and because we imagined these small group meetings in people's homes that we would have put on social media stuff eventually. We had to be imaginative with like, I think the four of us are not like, some of our collective members are very tech savvy, but none of us, that's not the primary medium that any of us work in. And so sharing videos and stuff that were good for Instagram, these little details of when Instagram becomes the only outlet, rather than an in-person one, we really had to become like these Instagram connoisseurs, which we all thought we were good at already, because we use it personally. But then it was like oh, okay, I'm sorry, your whole image does not fit into this little square, or your video has to be 59 seconds. Or it cannot be this kind of file, and artists have had to learn with us along the way, because we've got some things, like all kinds of wild files and things that I won't have sent through as an artist that was like okay. So we kept having to move our deadline earlier so that we could troubleshoot for a bit, and do a test post to see if it will actually work. So just the tiny little things have probably been our biggest challenge, other than, because it's, yeah, I would say that, we haven't had a big challenge, other than just the yearning of wanting to like, again, be with people, but

again, the big paradox is that social distancing has brought many of us closer actually, so there's been that that's come out of it. Yet, little tech kinks have been the biggest thing.

**Matt:**

I think I'm gonna have to agree with Josh. But also the pacing of things. Because some things have a quick turnaround, and then some things take longer than usual, but then you can't really think, because people are having their own pandemic experiences. So yeah, like there were some projects that are taking longer than usual, and there are projects that are with the snap of a finger it's like done, and then people are surprised like what?

**Josh:**

Deadlines are a little nebulous right now, for sure.

**Matt:**

And I think it's interesting that we're, what you mentioned, Josh, the idea of existing in the digital world is in a way the most human thing that we can do at the moment.

**Josh:**

Yeah.

**Shayna:**

Weird.

**Claire:**

I agree, it's all those little unglamorous details like formatting issues and making sure that everything is in the right order, and figuring out there was some performance, I guess in our collaboration, because we did have some live events. So just relinquishing control in that moment a little bit, because of course things are gonna come out a little differently than how you initially planned, and you just have to open up yourself to that process.

**Josh:**

Yeah and I would say as an artist too, that I don't mind being filmed but I always hate having to make a video of any kind, and it always takes a thousand tries. And so the idea of sharing my own work, doing a reading, I love doing that in a live space with people there. But having to think about how to make a video of my reading, where the audience in that moment is just the camera. That's not something that I've done much in the past, it's not something that I have ever really adapted, as far as enjoying doing it. That's been a challenge as well, is just rethinking that sort of format.

**Claire:**

It's a totally different medium, and a totally different way of-

**Matt:**

Two halves, yeah.

**Claire:**

And it's like more, I don't know like voluntarily in a way, there's a lot of sitting in front of the computer editing.

**Josh:**

Messing with lights a lot.

**Claire:**

That you want to convey you have to go into this quiet room and poke around with some files for a lifetime, which is funny because I used to be a history teacher, and you'd read your research papers, and be locked in a library, and I was like never again.

**Matt:**

Yeah, I was never confident about being filmed with cameras to begin with. Having all Zoom calls, especially like-

**Shayna:**

Here you are.

**Matt:**

Yeah and here we are, we were getting Zoom calls like almost every week, and I would get so burnt out, but now it's just like I guess-

**Josh:**

It's just life.

**Shayna:**

I don't know, I still find it exhausting to sit in front of the computer for hours. But yeah. So Claire, you touched on this a little bit, what this next question is about. So wondering if this collaborative process has changed or affected you as an artist at all?

**Claire:**

Me?

**Shayna:**

Well you started to hint out why collaborations and how those challenge you. So if you want to maybe elaborate, and if anyone else wants to chime in on that?

**Claire:**

I've done a number of collaborations over the years, and usually very productive to my personal practice, because I'll get pushed in a different way, or learn some new skills. I did a collaboration with the jewelry designer, Adrian Wiltse, last year I believe it was. And that was typical because I got to learn from her, and she got to learn from me in our practice, and then we also had to collaborate on how to produce the think that we talked about, the collaboration. Or I needed a knitted pinata one year with an artist who was an architecture student at the time, and so learned more about creating sculptures and armatures, and just it's a great way to learn new things. And also I don't know, I feel like at this stage in life going through a collaboration with another person is one of the few ways that's left to cut through all of the life of noise to actually make a really deep

connection with another human. And it's such a sacred opportunity in that way to be able to share your practice with someone and be forced to interact them, like consistently. And for me it's just been very, very, very enriching.

**Shayna:**

Thank you. And does anyone else want to chime in about how collaborating at this time has changed you and changed you as an artist?

**Matt:**

Yeah, I totally agree with Claire too. But even before the pandemic, I had already been cooperating, but now it just feels, because we're so social distanced and can't really convene, and it's the only way to really connect with other folks. And then if it becomes successful, then you kind of like have that bond already. So at the time we get to see each other again, then we already feel that kind of relationship. It's almost like a long distance relationship almost.

**Shayna:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Matt:**

Which I wouldn't recommend. But yeah, like what Claire said, learning to be a person, and it's also acknowledging that we as beings don't know everything, and just being humble with that thought and thinking that. There's so many movements to learn that other let people know, no matter what how talented we are, or what our status in life is or society or whatever. But yeah, I totally agree with Claire on that, it's the same thing for me.

**Josh:**

For me writing can be very, writing is a very solitary act, and so in some ways the pandemic, it was conducive to craft in that I had a lot of time. I had a lot of time to just sit and think. And especially in the first couple of months of it I was very productive and was able to get the draft out, and have some colleagues read it and stuff like that. I will



say as far as collaboration goes, what has been unique with the pandemic, our collective itself, the model that its run on is that the four of us are pretty much have equal power. We have our titles, mine is editor-in-chief, Shayna is producing curator here, but all our opinions and decisions are really forged together in common. And that's been a model that I've enjoyed, it's been one that I've always wanted to try, was always wondering how it would actually work right. Sometimes it can be very idealized, but it's one that worked for us in our set of four personalities. So operating as a collective, and even inviting other artists into work with us, because we do see anybody we feature as a kind of community collaborator in some way. Every collective artist is like someone who is part of the Space Milk Collective. But yeah, so in that sense that has made us collaborate, the pandemic circumstances have made us probably even more. And we have disagreements at times, but it's always very productive in the end.

**Shayna:**

Great so I'm gonna move to questions from people watching. This is exciting. Question number one, Claire and Matt, how challenging was it to figure out how to shoot space in a way where someone watching could feel like they were there?

**Claire:**

For us as I said we scaled down, and so we built out the shot. I have a bit of a background in fashion design, so it really used some of the skills from the styling and stuff that I had done back in the day. So it was really just you create for the camera, instead of creating for the physical space. So we would set up the camera and actually just see the frame and build around that, and that helped a lot.

**Matt:**

And me, I had to take advice from a lot of folks who actually do film and documenting things. But I was told to just film in everything, like just fill in whatever you can and then just edit from there. So it would be like the sounds they could hear from the environment, or like how the piece interacts with the space. So I was capturing all those tiny details. Just so I can also ask myself, if I was viewing this online, what are the things

that I would see, or I would be curious about as if I was there in person. Especially different encounters in the piece.

**Claire:**

I think you did a beautiful job, I feel like I fit into Alief Arthouse, it looks focused, it looks cool, I want to be a part of it, I want to see more. I think some of the shots you did, like panning over the space. You just have a really beautiful eye when it comes to presenting your work.

**Matt:**

Thank you, thank you Claire. That means a lot. And I'm just an amateur, so I just started so, that means a lot to me.

**Shayna:**

Yeah, that's inspiring for all of us.

**Claire:**

And I think that's the lesson here is like, you just gotta do it. You'll take these new skills, you put them through your filter, through your eye. And you'll be able to make it come together. The way things are changing so quickly, you'll learn something now but then you're gonna have to learn something tomorrow, there's no such thing as an expert any more, because you can also be an expert again tomorrow, you just have to be constantly willing to adapt and learn new skills and new platforms. And that means, it's very equalizing. Anyone can be a part of the conversation.

**Josh:**

Here, and I think a lot of great art really comes out of adaptation. When I read about artists in the past, it seems a lot of them across disciplines, because of a certain moment or event in their life. And for us it's the pandemic, but usually that can be such a motivating factor, learning on the fly that way.

**Claire:**

Sure, I think Matisse switching to cutouts.

**Josh:**

Right.

**Shayna:**

Now I love this idea of challenging the notion of who can make art, which is something that we've been talking about for a while. But I think in this context it's really being blown apart in a really visible way, so that's exciting. Another question, I'm now following each of you on Instagram, but please repeat the organizations you are each part of that are also on Instagram?

**Claire:**

Sure, I'll go first. So you can follow me @ClaireDrennan. And then you can also follow "We Are Friends" @wearefriendshou.

**Matt:**

You can follow me @MattManalo M-A-T-T-M-A-N-A-L-O, and the organization that I founded is Filipinx Artists of Houston. It's all one word. And then there's Alief Arthouse as well.

**Josh:**

And ours is Space Milk Collective, and website information is in our bio. I post personal writing updates and stuff on my own Instagram, which is Josh\_Inocencio. So you can follow me there.

**Shayna:**

Thanks y'all. Question number three, do you find yourself being overwhelmed with creating the online content constantly being churned out, and how have you dealt with that, found ways to remain connected with your craft and community despite it? Yeah Matt, you were really starting to hit on that.

**Matt:**

Yeah, oh gosh.

**Shayna:**

That tension.

**Matt:**

Because before the pandemic I'm not really the type of person that goes on the computer every day, and now I'm having to do that. So that alone I've been overwhelmed with. But I've also found enjoyment in editing all these videos for this space. Trying to figure it all out, what music works. And in my presentation I kind of did that myself. So yeah, I guess it's finding enjoyment in these things. And then also to get away from being in front of the computer a lot, I also do gardening. So it's a good break, just balancing it out.

**Claire:**

I mean I think you just love to appreciate that it is something that takes a lot of time, not only time but mental energy to curate and present, and I take lots of breaks. I will actually, a lot of people are creating and sharing while they're creating, I don't use that as much. I tend to hold onto my thoughts and then I release it after I know where I'm going with it. And that gives me some time to create the mental energy for the sharing, which is just as much work as the creating. And elected being in that moment of creating and then later share.

**Shayna:**

Nice, Josh?

**Josh:**

Yeah, I would say, for Space Milk I felt like we have gone at a good pace, mostly because we're featuring other people's stuff. So that's sort of like half the work is them sending us stuff. But finding events and stuff that's online and stuff, we have to be fairly investigated throughout the week. As a writer I would say that, I haven't shared too

much content online of my writing, yet at least, I've thought about maybe I should do readings, just to get some more, some of my stuff out there a bit more with the novel that I'm working on. I would say it's more been the isolation that's come with quarantine that has got me too in my head at times, and I just very dramatically drove 30 hours and took a road trip to Glacier National Park in Montana to think through my writing. And I'm in a hotel on the way back right now. So that's kind of my thing, it's actually been so inward, I was just overthinking these final drafts that I'm in, and I was like I've just got to get out. And I did a 14 mile hike up a mountain to look at a glacier, and I think I know what I to do when I come back, that's all I can say, is when I come back I'm ready to be at the computer and wrestle with the ending of my novel.

**Claire:**

Wow, great story.

**Shayna:**

Find a glacier to stare at.

**Josh:**

Yes, the space of the air, so I could relate to commune with nature and spirits.

**Claire:**

Very dramatically, excellent.

**Shayna:**

Okay wow, time is flying, so we've got about 11 minutes left. And we still have some questions in the chat, so I definitely want to get to all of these. Can you all speak more to how you are distributing your work, and how you are making it profitable? Ah, profitable.

**Josh:**

We might all have different definitions of that one right now.

**Matt:**

For me distributing my work mostly has been social media, profitable, I'm so grateful to be included in the show with Foltz Fine Art. So it's actually installing this real work in a real space and having people come in by appointment only. So in that way there's still art that's being shown and that's being available for people that wants to see them. I guess for an artist that's huge. And profitable, I think that also goes into how you present your work. So if you're a visual artist like myself, having the work being photographed while, well lit, sharp, and not where I'm also able to sell my work online for people who are interested in getting work. So I guess, yeah.

**Claire:**

So distribution streams, all the social media, mailing list, the lives. I found you know I mean something that took me a couple of years I think to learn, is you think that you make this slick marketing campaign are you put everything out there and you're spending your effort on that. Whereas actually it's the personal connections to people in real life that are more likely to lead to something. So when ever we were doing our events, a bunch of last-minute text messages to your actual people that you know in your life are more valuable than all of the notifications. There's so much noise out there, so at the end of the day those actual real relationships are way more important in my experience. So that's something to say. And then I mean for "We Are Friends" in terms of, we were lucky enough to be able to get a grant to be able to fund that project, so that was important. And for that reason it was just purely a fun thing, since it was funded it did not need to be profitable in and of itself. Of course I do sell my work, and I do sell items that are more wearable and practical, I make pom-pom hearings and stuff like that that's available on my website, I do some classes locally. So personally my personal decision has been to focus on the work I want to make, and I'm not as much focused on profitability right now, and that's just because I have a job during the day, and that's the decision you trade one kind of freedom for another.

**Josh:**

Yeah, and that's pretty much been the same with me, I've used this time to try to turn out as much work as I can. So like I said to finish a big writing project, and it's

profitability right now is that I'm just trying to, I'm submitting excerpts from the novel to literary journals so that hopefully I can get published and start that journey of get the whole thing published. So that's where I'm I'm at with it with Space Milk, we're not as concerned with profit right now, as we are with just creating and sharing content that we think is utilitarian, especially with the change to the Arts HDX, sharing stuff that's meaningful, and trying to as best as we can in this digital space share stuff that makes sure, that we can invite people in and share their work and they can trust us, even as we invited them in at a distance. So that we can have more profitable relationships going forward into the future.

**Shayna:**

Next question. Depending on the audience does the process of art making or the message prevail within the context of COVID?

**Josh:**

You know I can say that finishing up the book I'm writing, I feel like I'm writing something that takes place in the old world now, it's like the kinds of things that the characters do, it's like stuff we can't do and probably can't do for a very long time. So there is a sort of, maybe sweetness, maybe nostalgia to that that was not present in a moment of writing it until I got to the other end. So I've often wondered about that, as people read it, how it reads, since we've all collectively gone through the pandemic now. Especially because I don't mention the pandemic or anything in the novel, it takes place in the late 2010s. So I didn't try to reorient it or anything. But as I'm reading other literature, especially stuff that's come out in 2020 by novelists, I'm always like, that seems like at times from a different era, you know?

**Claire:**

I think for us this was an opportunity to hold space towards some really simple concepts that we took for granted and hadn't really been considered. Like something so simple as a birthday party, we made a whole video about a birthday party. That's a supernormal fear of everyday life, but because we can't have that right now, it's an opportunity to sit

with that simple concept celebrate it, hold it up and remember the nice times, remember the future times, and so I think for us it was really kind of an opportunity that way.

**Shayna:**

I really wanna get to this question. So as someone who wants to collaborate with other artists, but is often too intimidated to ask, impostor syndrome is real y'all. What advice do you have for reaching out to other artists?

**Matt:**

Just do it.

**Josh:**

Yeah, just do it. You just gotta bulldoze, you're always going to lack the confidence I think, you're always gonna feel modest. You just gotta trust your instincts and you'll figure it out.

**Claire:**

It's just like dating, it's so if it's not the right fit for that person at that time. Rejection is fine. It'll get you what you want to go. We can all just be grown-ups about. I think the people I've collaborated with in the past or I did have a previous relationship to, so I could know what their work style would be like, they could know what mine would be like, and we knew we would get along. I think that's helpful for me.

**Shayna:**

Any other final thoughts, advice you might want to share to artists watching who are trying to produce and collaborate out there? Anything you want to plug? We can take some time to go around and share now that we have a few minutes left.

**Claire:**

Sure, well I'm gonna be having an installation at Box 13 in early September. Happily in their window space, which turned out to be the very best space right now. So that's



gonna be the second week of September. And I'm gonna be building out kind of like a beautiful sky box with my textiles.

**Shayna:**

Wonderful.

**Claire:**

And also you should go to "We Are Friends" and watch if you like, there's the performances that we did, especially the birthday party I think is pretty fun, I'm really happy with the silly hat I made, so. And shout out of course to Eepi Chaad who was my collaborator on this project, so much work to do, she helped me do, so.

**Shayna:**

Big love to Eepi.

**Josh:**

With Space Milk, just check out our Instagram, check out the stories we post on the website. We will be having more new kinds of content in the fall. we're a media collective, so we will, we will have a roll-out process for writing that our collective members will write and publish as well. Personally, my novel is called "Milk Bread", so just be on the look out in the far-off future when it does get published and when I have readings for it. I will be part of the October grown-up story time that Shayna is actually producing, and so I will have other content that will be part of that, so just be on the lookout, but everything is on my personal Instagram, as well as my website

**Josh**Inocencio.com.

**Claire:**

What's with the milk?

**Josh:**

They are actually completely unrelated. They are two projects that I guess have just had a genesis at an interesting moment of my life, but they both have very different

meanings and contexts. For the novel "Milk Bread", it follows two guys as they fall in love over their mutual obsession with sci-fi and alternative milks. With Space Milk, our title actually comes from riffing on Space City, Houston, but also our city is very spaced out, it functions to me like an interstellar or intergalactic system, and I want to bring us together. And I do what us at our in-person meetings to always have food there for us that someone has made as part of the group, and I think it would be cool to have different alternative milk-based drinks, alcoholic or otherwise so that was just a creative insight into the collective process.

**Claire:**

You guys are the milk, you're the alternative milk.

**Josh:**

What was that?

**Claire:**

I said you guys are the alternative milk.

**Josh:**

Yes.

**Claire:**

Different kind of nourishment.

**Josh:**

Yes, exactly.

**Shayna:**

**Matt**, what do you have to be done?

**Matt:**

For me I have a show that's up which I mentioned, it's that Foltz Fine Art, it's about

Texas Emerging Volume 1. With my favorite artists, Teresa Escobedo, Ronald Jones. It's curated by Fine Art, and Bob Jackson. It will be up till, wait, let me see, it will be up till the ninth I believe. But you should email them if you want to see or view the art, and then ask the Alief Arthouse, we have Micaela Cadungog, who is an amazing artist as well, just send me a DM or an email if you want to view the work in person.

**Shayna:**

All right, thanks so much everybody for your time, and your creativity and your projects and your generosity, and your dogs. What is this dogs name?

**Claire:**

This is Leila, she just walked over, so I thought-

**Josh:**

A last minute cameo.

**Shayna:**

We missed this whole conversation with her, oh my gosh, we have to start over again.

**Matt:**

The collaborator.

**Claire:**

Totally, she makes lots of cameos in the "We Are Friends" videos.

**Shayna:**

Well I think that's it from us, and thanks again for joining. Scene.

**Josh:**

Have a good day everyone.

**Matt:**

See you all.

Good luck.