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Oral history interview with Lia Gangitano, 2017 February 5-6

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Lia Gangitano on February 5 and 6, 2017. The interview took place at the home of Lia Gangitano in Manhattan, NY, and was conducted by Alex Fialho for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

Lia Gangitano and Alex Fialho have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Lia Gangitano at Lia's home in Manhattan, New York on February 5, 2017 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one.

So, Lia, let's start at the beginning, where and when were you born and tell me a little bit about growing up?

LIA GANGITANO: Okay, I was born in 1968 in New London, Connecticut. My parents are both from Brooklyn: Canarsie and Bensonhurst. They moved from Brooklyn right before I was born. And I have an older sister who was born here, um but, my parents had this idea that they were moving to the country [laughs], but they were really moving to like, kind of crappy suburban Connecticut. And, I always joke they are like generation and a half, because even though both my parents were born here in Brooklyn, um, they were living in pretty much, Italian neighborhoods, even more specifically Sicilian speaking immediate surroundings.

ALEX FIALHO: In Brooklyn?

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Yeah I didn't fully understand all of that when I was growing up, but we did spend a ton of time in Canarsie, Bensonhurst, Bay Ridge, Staten Island so I had a pretty good idea um, you know, what our family was all about even though I think my parents really were like trying to Americanize and like, I don't have a Brooklyn accent like everyone in my family. And like a lot of my relatives are bilingual spoke Italian, or Sicilian dialect which it took me until high school when I was taking Italian in school that—like my parents couldn't even like help me with my homework [laughs] so, it took a while for me to see what they were like deeply invested in, but also were trying to like to have like a sort of different life for their kids, which of course they sorely regretted once we became like rebellious high school kids [laughs] and were not interested in like religion or sort of traditional family structures, and it didn't quite work out the way they hoped, but—yeah, so I guess I feel like growing up was like two worlds of like my family here in New York, and my sort of much more isolated suburban, silent rebellious life you know as a kid or teenager, so.

ALEX FIALHO: When you say that, what were some of the things they were deeply invested in?

LIA GANGITANO: You know, they were, my father is deceased now. But I would say my parents and the rest of my family, they were pretty devout Roman Catholic, definitely not Republicans, which is great, like staunch Democrats, but there was a sense of like conservatism, or some kind of um, how can I describe it, rigid kind of ideas about the family. I mean the weird thing is that I realized as I got older my dad always like really gravitated toward the sort of artistic um, side of things. Like if he would look at my stuff that he would always be drawn to the most like racy stuff. You know, he would go right to like *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency,* or Vag Davis like *Shrimp Magazine*. I'm like how did you find like the toe sucking magazine Dad? You know, this is—

ALEX FIALHO: When he looks at your stuff, like the projects you're working on?

LIA GANGITANO: No, more just like always at my apartment—

ALEX FIALHO: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

LIA GANGITANO: —and goes through the magazines. It's like you don't just pick up like some, you know, fashion mag [laughs], he goes right for the good stuff. So, but that was much later in life. Like definitely high school and college, you know, it was a battle of uh, will. But I do remember like some of my earliest art experiences as a child, I mean I think I must have been like five years old, like before my grandparents who lived with us passed away, we took like a family trip to Italy to, you know, meet some of our relatives, yes and my sister and I were just little kids. But the rigorous tour of churches, reliquaries, Sistine Chapel, all of the stuff, you know, it was sort of under the auspices of sort of a religious pilgrimage for my father, but really it was like this great art tour and also just seeing, "Oh my God it's the entire body of uh Saint Lucy," it's not like a digit or eyeball, it's like her

whole body is there.

So, for me like art and this kind of almost Paul Thek, Peter Hujar, you know those things are totally intertwined for me.

ALEX FIALHO: Paul Thek, Peter Hujar?

LIA GANGITANO: Meaning like later in life when I saw all those images from their trips to the Capuchin Chapels, I was like, "Oh yeah, we did that when I was like a small child, and it wasn't considered weird, or gross, or inappropriate for a little kid, it was just like that's life, like you want to see dried up saint's larynx's and you know crypts made of skeletons." So, their religious devotion translated into my interest, or you know not really seeing these sorts of reliquaries and like religious objects as that different—like I remember looking as a child at the Sistine Chapel I said, I really thought my parents were explaining that the paintings were real skin. Because they were saying like doesn't it look so real, but I had seen all these shriveled up saint parts, so I was like "oh that's really made of skin," like I just didn't know the difference. So, I did have these kind of formative experiences because of their religious interests and, you know, that definitely formed a lot of like how I understood art I guess. And it wouldn't be until much later in life, like I would say there was a long period where anything like anything religious, or spiritual I like rejected almost as a rejection of my upbringing. But I would definitely attribute to someone like Ron Athey like redelivering that to me at a certain point in my adult life where I was like, "Okay if you can make me interested in sacraments again it must be pretty good." [Laughs.] So, I don't know

ALEX FIALHO: Were they born in Italy?

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-mm [Negative]. They were both born here but into these very, I mean I guess where my mom grew up in Canarsie was almost like a just Jewish and Italian.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

LIA GANGITANO: Like my grandfather who was Italian, her dad spoke Yiddish because he was like a bread delivery man and so that neighborhood at that time was Jewish and Italian. Which, in a way are exactly the same thing in Canarsie anyway. So, um, you know, their experience was in like Italian-speaking kind of familial homes, you know. It's very different once you like go out into the suburbs and you're not in that like, "Oh my grandparents live on one floor and my mom's brother and his family live on the second floor," and, you know, that was how everyone we visited like on the weekends you know, they had a very different life.

ALEX FIALHO: Why did you think your parents had the interest in moving to Connecticut?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, I think they wanted us to Americanize, you know. I mean it sort of backfired for them. But um, yeah, I think they wanted us to have more of a white suburban existence.

ALEX FIALHO: And did you all go back to Italy often?

LIA GANGITANO: Nope.

ALEX FIALHO: Or were these major trips?

LIA GANGITANO: No that was just once.

ALEX FIALHO: Just your one trip?

LIA GANGITANO: With them yeah. And I mean it was strange also.

ALEX FIALHO: Almost a pilgrimage in a sense?

LIA GANGITANO: I didn't—I didn't understand because we have a lot of relatives who are, you know, from you know more Northern parts of Italy, like it makes sense to me now when—I mean obviously most countries are pretty similar in their sort of North South kind of differentiations, but I mean it wasn't until—I mean this was Sicily in the '70s and I was just a kid, but I had this idea because we had visited other places in the country before we got to where most of our relatives are from, which are like these little mountain villages in Sicily and, you know, I thought it would be warm and kind of fancy and beautifully. And it was like, "Wow your floors are dirt, and we're sitting around a fire because it's freezing," and "why is everyone missing a part of their body," and it's like, "oh because they were trapped in an earthquake and a rat ate their face and something."

So, it was like as a child realizing like, "Oh wow," so the sort of advancement economically of Italy, like it had not caught on down South at that particular time, and you know it felt like failed agriculture society and people where, you know, this changed like probably pretty quickly after that, but I was like "oh my God we're

pheasants, I had no idea." And, you know, we speak this language that nobody likes and they think it's like really low class and, you know, I think my parents like tried to like almost shelter us from that. And my dad had black hair and dark skin, and as children we're driving across to go to like Disneyland or Disney World, I mean I explicitly remember like the first time I saw my father express fear was at a gas station in Georgia where as he got out of the car to get gas, like the person at the gas station pulled out like a shotgun because I think they perceived him to be black, which of course was like, "What?" You know. But I had never seen him be afraid before.

So, he had always told us about instances of discrimination, like for example he had passed the bar in New York, but when he moved his family to Connecticut to be a lawyer he was told when he signed up for the test, like as the person couldn't pronounce his last name, Gangitano, like someone with this name is never going to pass the bar here. And that was like, you know in the late-'60s, maybe yeah, I mean we grew up with an understanding of some, I don't know, it took a while for me to totally get that. That there was like various forms of discrimination that had motivated certain decisions that didn't totally pan out, you know. My dad ended up working as a contracts lawyer for electric boat, General Dynamics, which is basically where I grew up, where everybody worked. Before they started working in the casinos, you know back during the Cold War when we needed lots of tridents, and nautilus submarines, which was very controversial and we gave him a lot of flak for it. You know, it was sort of the best job he could get. He wasn't going to practice law.

ALEX FIALHO: In Connecticut?

LIA GANGITANO: No.

ALEX FIALHO: Huh. How about your mother?

LIA GANGITANO: My mom, um was never really encouraged to go to college. She was a dental hygienist at the time she met my dad and they got married. I remember she did go back to school when we were children and got her degree. And then she pretty much went back to being a dental assistant.

[Dog barks.]

LIA GANGITANO: Shhh. Hey.

[Audio break.]

LIA GANGITANO: Okay, what were we talking about that?

ALEX FIALHO: She wasn't necessarily encouraged to, she got her degree.

LIA GANGITANO: Oh, yeah, to go to college. Yeah. So, she did that later when my sister and I were little kids. But she didn't always work, but she was definitely like of that generation that kind of was on the fence like if some guy is going to tell me I can just be a mom I'm going to do that, but then that's not really that satisfying. So, she perceived different things and she had jobs, not always. And both of my parents were very involved, my dad more so, in like local politics, Democratic. You know, they really supported, like I just remember like Jimmy Carter was just a huge thing growing up. Like they were so into Jimmy Carter. You know, like my dad was a huge Geraldine Ferraro supporter and campaigned for her. You know, so they had trouble with Bill Clinton but I remember something I really appreciated when I was starting to wonder. At the time of my father's wake, which was probably I forget, like five years ago, um, this women um, a senator from Connecticut like took me aside and was like, Lia I assure you your father never voted Republican, which made me really happy because I started having questions. So anyways, that was a big part of our growing up.

What else, uh.

ALEX FIALHO: How about your relationship with your sister? She was an older sister?

LIA GANGITANO: Well we're considered the same age now [laughs], but technically we're a couple of years apart and she's a little bit older. We were always really close and allied. And I personally believe that we're sort of, if we have siblings, especially if it's just two siblings that your personality is very much formed by—and you know in my case my sister, and it kind of gave me like certain privileges growing up like fake ID's and, you know, for every mistake that she made in terms of getting caught like I had that cautionary tale, so I became like a very crafty teenager. And you know, got away with a lot of stuff because there was someone like right ahead of me like, "Okay now I know how to go to clubs, go to see music, get into bars, run away," like I had almost like a guidebook.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

LIA GANGITANO: A few steps ahead. And we shared a lot of friends in high school, most of whom did not make

it. You know, there was like a lot of drug abuse, there was a lot of suicide. I mean I went to Catholic high school, again because my parents had this like sort of strange notion that that was somehow a sheltered space, but in fact—

ALEX FIALHO: In New London?

LIA GANGITANO: It was actually far. Like we could have gone to the public high school in Waterford, which is like the next town from New London where the train stops, but um the closest Catholic high school was in Uncasville, Connecticut which is basically where Foxwoods Casino is. It's like Mohegan Sun, it's sort of where the Native American reservations are. So, it's a little bit more, it was like, we got our driver's licenses when we were like sixteen, car pooled, and you know, but it was like a very troubling place and almost in a way like not that many people I know from that period of my life, like my closest friends, none of them are still alive, actually. And I think that's were like, in the sort of mid- to late-'80s, HIV became something I was aware of mostly because some of my closest friends were intravenous drug users, um who were very like aware. Even when I probably didn't fully comprehend what was going on, or what was becoming clear to them, like almost didn't fully make sense to me, as like a—you know, I was in high school and my friends were maybe a little bit older because of my sister. And there was just like a big storm cloud coming. And I saw it, but I didn't totally—it, my like initial experience of HIV was not the prevailing narrative because it was really all about shooting heroin, sharing needles and stuff like that.

ALEX FIALHO: And you were in high school in the early-'80s?

LIA GANGITANO: Nope, late-'80s.

ALEX FIALHO: Late-80's. So, this was right at that time basically?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I was—I graduated high school in '86 and went to college at Boston College. So, like my sister's and like my closest friend, he died in '86, and it was pretty clear to us. He had had talked to us about being sick, and he was afraid he was going to go to prison, and there was sharing needles. I mean it was very like, you know, he OD'd in a very dramatic way right as the story of like, "Oh, he has these drug charges, and he has these health concerns," and then he's dead at 24. So, you know I didn't have all the pieces, but it was definitely like starting to become clear what was happening, and I was just, yeah, I was a sophomore in college when I learned that he had died. And you know it kind of was a big formative experience, and in my life away from home, which was still like I'm a young person, I started working at the ICA Boston that same year, I was a sophomore, I think I was 18 or 19 years old when I basically took an internship, a work study job, because I needed a job. And you know, the choices were like the Bobst Library on College, which was really cool or like this weird museum in the city like further away, and I was like, that sounds really great. And so, I was doing this work study internship thing, yeah starting in '86. And I think that's the year my friend died. So, it was like my experience in this new world of the arts, HIV and AIDS was like a really different thing then, you know, like suburban straight people shooting drugs. But it was going to all come together for sure really quickly in the coming years, really through, you know, I always talk about it as like, you know yes, I went to college, I barely graduated, I did kind of what I wanted in school, but like the ICA Boston was my education. You know, I started working there when I was so young, I worked in every department, film/video, development, like I just like whipped through as much experience to the point where, you know, I just became part of it and wanted to learn everything, which is how sort of opportunities happened. But I cut a lot of school to work at the ICA, like, it was kind of like a dual education.

ALEX FIALHO: Did your parents encourage an interest in the arts as you were growing up?

LIA GANGITANO: I don't think they knowingly did but even, you know, going back to the reliquaries as a child, and like, you know in their minds these things might have been very separate because, you know, in a sort of traditional way peoples merging of like a cultural heritage with an artistic heritage like—I think part of like the rebellion and the strife as a young person with my parents is that they couldn't understand that like I totally appreciate all of this cultural um, influence, I'm just not interested in being Catholic. Like that was like unthinkable to them. Like that was a rejection of everything they loved and cared for and it's like no, I just don't want to go to church. That doesn't mean I don't appreciate all these other aspects of culture. Like for them it was like all or nothing and for me it was like, but I love you [laughs]. It took a while for that adult relationship to happen because really that's much more of a parent child thing and like at a certain point if you want to have like an adult relationship, it just takes a bit of work. And that also was like very reciprocal because I—I remember even if they didn't like seemingly encourage it, like for example—like my mom, the first show that they ever came to that I worked on at the ICA was called *Dress Codes* and Nan Goldin was in it, Lyle Ashton Harris, Hunter Reynolds, it was like a pretty big show. I mean I had worked on projects prior to that, which we'll probably talk about like for World AIDS day in '94 and, but you know, I remember my mom saying like, "You're doing the

devil's work", but I also saw my dad like seeing his first drag queens and like really liking it. So, he became very —

ALEX FIALHO: In the photos?

LIA GANGITANO: No, no at the opening. It was like Glendda who is um, there was this show called—it was Glen Belverio drag persona, Glendda and they did a show where like, I don't know it was like on the circle line, but anyway they would go to events and, anyway. I can't remember like the details, but there were a lot of people at the opening that, you know, flirted with my dad frankly. So, he seemed to really enjoy it. And I think my mother, like actually in Lyle Ashton Harris's instalation there was like a sink with like a pretty large dildo in it, and like she just like went right up to it and picked it up, and I was like, "Mom what are you doing? Put that, don't touch the art," but you know.

[They laugh.]

LIA GANGITANO: These were formative experiences for me, you know like okay. They're like interested, like it definitely opened their minds, even if they thought it was the devil's work they still enjoyed it.

And truth is they really came to so many of my openings throughout all of the different places I worked at. So yeah, they were, kind of I don't know—

ALEX FIALHO: Supportive.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah. Supportive but also like, I think if they had lived at different times, with different life experiences they know that they might have made other choices. Like I can definitely say that my father was really interested in art, he just never had that as an option to him. So, when he could sort of vicariously experience it through me, he was all over that. Which was—yeah really sweet actually.

ALEX FIALHO: Before we jump forward to college, in high school, how did you and your friends relate to your private Catholic school? You sort of eluded to it, but in a more explicit way. Were you a good student, A? And then B, how were you relating to the religious community around it?

LIA GANGITANO: I was a pretty good student grade wise. Um, but I didn't have to try that hard. And I was kind of a loser. My sister was super popular, and I was like a dork. And uh, I wore like ripped up sweaters and I was kind of like really into the Cure, you know, it was like, I was like an introverted nerd who thought I was kind of above the beer drinking and pot smoking. I basically was kind of a drug addict. Like I was dating like an older person who, I mean you really want the dirt, like a junkie pharmacist. And yeah, there was like an endless supply of drugs. But, I also knew that I needed to get home on time. So, you know, like here's a big pile of blow, but then just take these pills when you need to go to sleep. I mean it was like a kind of manipulated like medicated, it was pretty screwed up.

So, I was always home on time, and made it to school on time, but I was secretly like hiding crack in my life savers. Which, you know, we only smoked crack once in high school and I was like the designated keeper, like, "There's this new drug, we've never tried it, don't we need to try it," and it was like whatever. We didn't really care about smoking crack. It was like a very deliberate rebellion. And like there's not that much to do in these like kind of boring suburban places, so it's like what are you going to do tonight? Well, we're going to drive under the bridge and like try crack. Um, and, you know, in those places, also like public housing, the people that you know who have very different life circumstances are also your friends, and they're not in high school. And um, you know, you might have friends who are armed, or go to jail or um, yeah, it was a really messed up kind of, this was not nice Connecticut.

It was kind of a bit rough. Not that, I mean I put myself in like, you know, potentially dangerous situations, you know, but there just didn't seem anything else to do really. It felt, you know we would escape, you know we would like run away to Boston to see The Cramps, or run away to New Haven to see Echo and The Bunnymen. Like you know, we would definitely escape. There were definitely close enough places like clubs in Rhode Island like Providence, like go see The Replacements, I Lost A Shoe. You know, like we would,—there was great college radio to like, you know, tip us off that there was something else, you know, going on somewhere. But it always, it wasn't like a very glamorous, it was kind of like, oh my God, like drunk driving, and just terrible things that suburban people, you know, you're a kid you just don't know any better.

I mean, I feel extremely fortunate to have survived my teenage years. It's kind of a miracle, actually. I feel truly lucky because I could have definitely paid a price for like just bad behavior. Um, is that what you mean?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. How did you end up going to Boston College?

LIA GANGITANO: I didn't get into Harvard. My dad thought Yale was too liberal, and he wouldn't let me apply.

That was pre-cathartic bonding with Dad, like oh my God those years we fought.

ALEX FIALHO: Cathartic bonding dad is in the art context?

LIA GANGITANO: That was a little bit later. Like when it came to like choosing a school, like he was really going for like girl's college, or you know Catholic college. I mean the weird thing is I ended up going to like Jesuit college, which is really not like Catholic college because it's like a gay cruising ground basically. Jesuits, like Susan Sontag was there, like my first semester or something. Kathy Acker was there, Mary Daly you know. I never got into Mary Daly's class, um, which was quite notable at Boston College, like she would do women only classes. And, you know, so we learned about like lesbian separatism like right away at like Jesuit liberal arts college. So, that was becoming more of like football and school of management. But I was really was attracted to it because I was like an English Major, they had a great Philosophy department. I didn't really know, I mean it was kind of like not my first choice, but it ended up being a place where I could immediately identify the freaks and just be with them.

Important to me there were my teachers were like Avery Gordon, who you know studied with Gayatri Spivak um, Stephen Pfohl who wrote *Deviance and Social Control*, he was like our own Dick Hebdige. You know, like we just—I mean I gravitated towards those people immediately, and they became like very important teachers and mentors. And I got the work study job at the ICA so, you know, I could balance that.

I mean so when I say I barely graduated it's because I couldn't cope with like the core requirements. Like, I'm taking a class where we watch *Cosmos* by Carl Sagan and I'm like ugh, I want to take like the advanced Psycho Analysis in Feminism course with Avery. I mean I kind of knew what I wanted right away, and I still had to take like Latin or something. So, I did manage to graduate, but I sort of did it in a weird way.

ALEX FIALHO: Where did your sister go? And did that influence how you decided?

LIA GANGITANO: My sister did go to what was had been previously an all-girl college in New Haven called Albertus Magnus. Um, but it was in the process of turning co-ed, so you can imagine what that student body looked like, I mean it was amazing.

ALEX FIALHO: Which was?

LIA GANGITANO: You know, like really femmy guys and dykes. [They laugh.] And I would visit as much as possible because it was really fun. Um, you know girls school in transition basically. It was cool, but I don't know that that had a huge impact—I don't really feel like I had that many choices. I didn't really do the college application thing. I didn't know. Like I wasn't really like a fully formed person, I just knew I wanted to go somewhere. And um, it wasn't really about like New York for me yet. And that became like a burning desire like pretty quickly. I mean I stayed in Boston for ten years. So, it was like college overlapped with ICA, and ICA kept going until I was like 30.

But I didn't understand that the return to New York was going to be such like a homecoming for me, because it took a while. Because I was in this like great amazing bubble of the ICA that almost blurred like some of the more difficult, or hard things about living in a place like Boston. But I didn't know because I had never—I had never really lived in New York.

ALEX FIALHO: The reason I'm asking a bit about how you landed in Boston was because Boston very much feels like an important part of your story.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you have a sense of the scene? And at what point did you get a sense of the scene? When I say the scene, I'm thinking of people like Nan Goldin and Mark Morrisroe and the Museum School.

LIA GANGITANO: Oh yeah, right away. I almost moved into that Hemmingway Hotel.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

LIA GANGITANO: Which is where Mark had lived, um on the Fenway. There—

ALEX FIALHO: I talked about Hemingway Hotel a lot in my oral history with Jack Pierson.

LIA GANGITANO: You did?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

LIA GANGITANO: Okay so you know a little bit about that place.

ALEX FIALHO: He says it's the Chelsea Hotel of Boston.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah. Yeah, I mean it was like I tried to get a place there, it's just for some reason it didn't work out. I ended up living, I mean when I was first in college I lived—I mean I moved off campus immediately, I mean I tried it the first year and it was like, no, no, no. Football players, like no. I got out and I moved into a place in Brighton with an older, and upper-class person, meaning like a senior or something. And that was like a good move. And I was commuting to ICA by the time I was a sophomore, but I mostly lived in Jamaica Plain which was very close to Mass College of Art, and Museum School, and Gardner Museum, but um—I'm trying to remember exactly like—the point at which I learned about Mark Morrisroe a lot of things that connect to everything I've done since began. So, I was sort of trying to be like, you know I was an intern, I worked in all these different departments, I was a registrar, assistant registrar I guess, but for some reason I was very involved with WAC, Women's Action Collation.

ALEX FIALHO: What was that?

LIA GANGITANO: I mean I guess—

ALEX FIALHO: It was off campus or ICA?

LIA GANGITANO: Oh no, not through college stuff, but more through—you know, there was just a lot of like activism that was starting to form around HIV and WAC was like, you know, maybe came out of that but was really kind of reproductive issues. So, these things became almost like just part of daily life. I mean people always, when I first, looking at it from afar when younger people ask you like how you got into activism, or how you started demonstrating, or doing these things in the early '90s, it's like well it wasn't really a choice. You know, it was just like, there was no outside to this activity, there was no exterior to what was pretty much just an all-pervasive feeling of you know protecting rights. Like, trying to like not have your government outwardly want you to die or something. Like all of this is coming back into sharp focus right now. But um, there's just like generations of people who have never felt those feelings, like wow everything about being a person in the arts in your 20s. It's like I remember going to San Francisco and just being like the entire art world that I knew previously is gone, it's just not here anymore. It was like a palpable absence of people and those people were artists, but those people were also dying at like a staggering rate.

ALEX FIALHO: When was that?

LIA GANGITANO: And nobody seemed to care, right. Like 1991-2, something like this.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were some of those people?

LIA GANGITANO: Jerome Caja and um, you know, these are all people that I learned about for that *Dress Codes* show, that's when I met Vag Davis, and that's when I first worked with David Armstrong because you know Nan insisted that we meet. And you know like for me there was no other world, that was the world I was living in and so activism was immediately a part of it because you felt like the ground is like slipping away under you, but like mainstream culture had not really noticed or something.

But you know, so there was no choice involved. There was no like "oh I'm going to do this", or become an activist, or be in this like splinter group, it's just like, it just felt like that's just like having coffee in the morning. You know, there wasn't a political imperative or necessity that wasn't a choice, it was just like a fact. And um, I feel like people are feeling that now, but there's almost like a, I don't know, like a questioning like what are the tools, what do we do. We didn't really question it. For me being at the ICA, as like a 20-something year-old person, I was just constantly pushing, pushing, like we need to do something, we need to do something more. Okay, there's this thing, it's like World AIDS Day, what do we do, it's not about closing. So, that first project, which was actually a bit later, like I think it was '94, we decided to like project videos outward on this like window to the street. And you know we shared the building on Boylston Street with like a fire station. So, so much of like my memories of like putting these videos out there had to do with like having to talk to the firemen about it, and like having these conversations. It was like on the street. It's like Mass Ave and Boylston. There's like a subway station. Like we wanted to do the most public things we possibly could. And um, you know without question so yeah, I mean—

ALEX FIALHO: Were you, you said you were an English Major.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Where was your interest in art at that moment? Were you also taking art history classes? And then also like, how did, I know you sort of got, the ICA was an option but was it, where did the contemporary art come in at that moment? Through the work?

LIA GANGITANO: I mean the ICA was the, is, was, I mean it was a non-collecting museum, that has changed since. Um, I did take art history classes, and I did take painting and art studio classes. But mostly, I was into like critical theory and philosophy and things like this, so feminism, psychoanalysis, all of it was coming—you know in a moment where at the ICA at that point, you know that's like a moment, like Thomas Crow, postmodernism, like it's funny and quaint, like at that point in time like Jeff Koons was considered like a political artist, you know. Like of course that seems crazy now, but at the time the art world was very small. The ICA was very connected to New York, David Joselit is curating *Utopia/Post-Utopia*, uh we're reading Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Kathy Acker is like in the museum like doing a reading. You know, it was, a lot of things were coming together and because it was such a tiny world, it was like "okay well we can like chart like when people starting reading theory", and I was doing that in both places. Like seeking it out in college and you know cutting my classes to write wall labels with Greil Marcus for the Situationist International Show.

Um, I was getting it from all sides I guess you could say. So uh—oh and the only time I left the ICA was,—so I was in college from '86 to '90 I guess, and um, I went to Skowhegan in 1990 because I applied with like my, you know, dual major in studio because I was the most, I don't know agrostudio person because there were no like studio majors. It wasn't really an art school and I had a very important person to me who encouraged me, and I mean making paintings like I don't care about that so much now, but this guy Andrew Tavarelli, who really pushed me in terms of like studio practice. And so, the only time that I left the ICA as like an employee was to go to Skowhegan in 1990. And like the people that were there were like Ross Bleckner, you know, who was very important to me at that time.

And I basically missed Mapplethorpe. Like it was that same summer that David Ross took the Mapplethorpe show and, you know, this huge thing is going on. Like I sort of arrived at the tail end of the show where you know, it hadn't really worked out as a blockbuster. The legal fees were like soaking up like all of the potential revenue. It was so deeply problematic that I really understood, like oh, I left this happened, it's like the culture wars. I felt like we're losing, we're losing the culture wars. We're not setting an agenda, we're on the defensive. If you can't explain like X, Y, Z portfolio to your grandma, then you should not be working in the arts.

Like, and like at that point, like the racial dimensions. Like, you know we were pissed off. You know we were like, why do we have to talk about child pornography when we want to be talking about race. Like why, you know why is there a right-wing agenda all we get to talk about like, when we just want to dislike Mapplethorpe for exploiting people. And like, it was just so frustrating. Like the conversation was at such a level that you felt like you were just failing constantly. Like it's not what I want to be talking about.

I felt that really strongly and you know, Skowhegan was so important for me because it was the only time I really left that working environment, and through those nine weeks of like here's a studio, you're an artist, that I realized that like I do not want to be an artist. Like I want to be a curator, I vastly prefer other people's work to my own, and like I basically did the nine weeks, took a full-time job as an assistant registrar at the ICA and like never looked back.

ALEX FIALHO: What sort of work were you making in those nine weeks?

LIA GANGITANO: Oh, God it's so embarrassing. Um, you know like encaustic like kind of weird, I don't know like, I can't even describe it. It's in my mom's house and I'm just like, "Oh my God I can't look at this crap." It's really bad, it's like the worst.

ALEX FIALHO: On the wall?

LIA GANGITANO: Oh yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Paintings?

LIA GANGITANO: Oh yeah, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: What color?

LIA GANGITANO: Drab, drab, pretty drab. Very waxy.

ALEX FIALHO: Abstract?

LIA GANGITANO: Let's call it abstract symbolism.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

LIA GANGITANO: I mean it's so cringey, oh my God. Sorry, it's really embarrassing.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were you—how was the structure, working at Skowhegan? Were you taking classes or were

you just making?

LIA GANGITANO: No, it's like a residency. I mean one of my favorite experiences besides seeing Ross Bleckner in drag, was like Barbara Kruger visited and you know it was like a crit with Barbara Kruger and she said "well this signs painting", and I was like "oh thank you thank you."

ALEX FIALHO: Science painting?

LIA GANGITANO: Signs, S-I-G-N-S. And I was like, Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Yeah. And I never wanted to do that ever again. [They laugh.] I was so done with it, yeah. It was amazing actually. It was really good. I mean I met amazing people and friends for life, and you know it just made for a very like clear choice for me that I, yeah, I wanted to support other people's art. And I was like way too young. Yeah, I mean I think I was like the youngest person there and I was just like, "Uh, I don't know what I'm doing."

I had never had a studio, or been in that situation. So yeah, I moved back to Boston and was working full time at ICA. And you know within a couple of years—I forget exactly how Mark Morrisroe came into my life, but I think it was because we were working on a project and, you know, so I'm still in like the registrar's department, but basically the way that I described my transition from like registrar to curatorial work is you know, like Elisabeth Sussman like dragged my chair across the room.

[Dog barks.]

Oh okay, so while I worked as an assistant registrar, and then a registrar for ICA the sort of divide between registration and curatorial was really like nonexistent, you know. We shared an office, Leslie Noland was working there, David Joselit, I mean that—this changed over time. But you know, I felt like even though I was working as a registrar that my proximity to like the curators was very close and, you know, at some point later Elisabeth would like drag my chair across the hall, and I was in that department. So it really was like about timing. Because again, I mean most of my experience in, as an art worker is like, I'm sure that the period that I was at the ICA is not, you know, considered like a golden age of the institution because you know, it was like sort of strapped financially and there was a lot of transition, David Ross went to the Whitney, eventually Elisabeth followed. You know, there was a lot of different stuff turning over, but because I was such a lifer, you know, I had been working there since I was like 18 or 19, you know, I kind of ingratiated myself and at that point, that created opportunities.

So, there was always like this demand kind of put upon the institution to do like these regional shows. There was this history of shows called *Boston Now,* and it would be like *Boston Now Sculpture*, *Boston Now Photography*, and when it was still, when it was to the point David Joselit, Elisabeth Sussman, I think Matthew Teitelbaum who kind of became director after Elisabeth went to the Whitney. It was like the tenth anniversary of *Boston Now,* and I was assisting on that project, and so the task was to look at all of the previous *Boston Now* shows and do a show commemorating that. So, Mark Morrisroe had been in a *Boston Now Photography* show, you know, when he was alive I think the '80s at some point and David really wanted to include him in this tenth anniversary show. I don't have the date of it, but that was my first introduction to Mark's work. Which I was, it was like life altering to see those photographs.

And also, to see like the world of Boston that it opened up for me in terms of like I just never saw Boston in that light. Like oh this is a town that closes at two in the morning. So almost like to put like a contemporary-ish term on it. It's like world making, like I had never seen that in action. You know like, oh, so Mark and his friends which included obviously Pat Hearn, Nan Goldin, Jack Pierson, Tabboo!, Shellburne Thurber, you know it's just like, it was almost like a portal opened up and I could see, like the world that they made for themselves was like, had nothing really to do with Boston. Like it could be anywhere. It's like their rebelling against their education. They're in art school, but they don't want to be like these distant observers they want to observe themselves, and their lives, and their friends, and their drugs, and their bars. You know, so it really—I felt like I got here too late. But at the same time, I felt like seeing Mark's work opened up this whole world that I wanted to know like everything about.

And so I probably met Pat Hearn at that time because we borrowed works for that *Boston Now* tenth anniversary. And then I was given that little space to—I mean after the outdoor video projection, I think it was the next year, there was a small gallery. I was invited to curate a show for World's AIDS Day. That's when I met Valerie Caris, Steven Swan who was a good friend of Mark, but also Mark's work was included in that show and so I sort of struck up this relationship with Pat.

And so, if that was like '93 or '94, it really didn't take us that long, like as soon as Pat and I were teamed up on this Mark Morrisroe mission, you know, Boston School happened in '95. Certainly the '93 *Dress Codes* show, that was like where the allegiance with Nan and David began, but we would really kind of come together in '95. And you know, that I don't know kind of obsession with the work and it just fueled a lot of things. So, it still has like a huge influence, you know, on my life.

And it was also so strangely like digging so deeply into Boston, into the sort of conditions which created that possibility. Obviously, not only sort of—the relationships and the people, I mean it's so funny that intersectional has become like such a, like everybody knows what that word is now. I had never heard that word, in whatever 1994, but it was weirdly clear to me that the alliances between these people, you know, were so varied. You know, it was about queerness, it was about punk and rebellion, it was about drug dealers, drag bars, HIV, like none of those things were inseparable. And you know, that's what kind of Nan's work is like, it's what Mark's work is like, it's like, you know, you're a teenage prostitute from Malden, Massachusetts, how the hell did you get into art school? Oh, David Armstrong helped you, but also like Mitch, the doorman at The Rat, the underground music basement dated your mom who was also a prostitute. You know, like the kind of interconnectedness of the sort of marginal players. Like, it's not just one thing, you know, like it's not just one affiliation that creates like a movement, it's like many. And it's also people trying to pretend they're not part of that, or rejecting that. That was like the whole point of Boston School was like this could be anywhere. This is not like—it's messy. You know it's not one type of person, or one type of drug, or one type of queer. It's really like a fucked-up family that has all of these different ways in which they come together.

Um, and like not necessarily on purpose, but more like a loyalty to one another that isn't about like one issue. Anyways, that's kind of unclear but a lot of things came together in that project that uh—

ALEX FIALHO: It seems like it's a kind of coming together of the shows prior, whether it's the *Boston Now Show* or the *Dress Codes* show or the *Video Projections*, in a sense, how it all connects.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: I think let's step back and dive into each of these projects a little bit individually, because I think what we just did gave us a good scope.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: For instance, the outdoor *Video Projection* for *Day without Art* at the ICA Boston '92, what videos where shown? How did you project them? Are my two first questions.

LIA GANGITANO: I think it like, it was just this attic space where we put the projector, which projected on this weird like, you know, almost like a Richardson building.

ALEX FIALHO: This is the old museum, its previous space obviously.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, it was like a Richardson original exterior, and like a gram gun like Brady Bunch house '70s renovation inside. But I think we put the projector in this like widows peak, so the window was like you know not in the exhibition spaces, it was like above. And I remember working with people, it's really hard to remember, but I think that's how I worked with Abe Rybeck who still to this day runs an organization called the Theater Offensive in Boston. I would have to really like to dig into the archives to figure out like what were the videos? I mean they were every much like activist art, but I don't really remember like the works. I more remember the conversations, you know, with the fireman, which is really strange.

ALEX FIALHO: What were they about? What were they asking and what were you trying to impart on them?

LIA GANGITANO: I think what I remember most is that we always, there was always this anticipation of push back. I mean there were a lot of funny things about the ICA in that time. Where it's like, okay this weird contemporary art museum shares the space with the fire department, and so invariably there's parking in the back that has to be negotiated by these two disparate groups of people.

ALEX FIALHO: Interesting that you shared the same building.

LIA GANGITANO: But there is also like a sort of make shift dwelling of homeless people, mostly Vietnam veterans, who lived behind the building, and got electricity from the ICA, and haircuts, and staff members received their like benefit checks. I mean, it was totally symbiotic. So back to parking, if anyone at the ICA pissed off a fireman regarding parking they would like write us up for giving electricity to the homeless guys, and basically get the homeless neighbors to just barge into the museum and be like "I need to talk to David Ross right now." Like it was a completely weird situation where they knew like if we pissed them off they would just like screw with the homeless guys.

And it kind of always worked because we would be like, oh sorry. Like don't mess up this weird ecosystem where everything is working fine, it's not a fire hazard. Don't cut off, they had TV. They were watching television all the time, and it worked out perfectly unless someone complained. So, I guess what I thought that kind of like back parking lot bullying would somehow translate into sort of street front of house dialog. And in fact it wasn't really that way. I mean, I guess there was just like an expectation, or a stereotyping like these dudes are going to lose

their minds when they see this and that wasn't the case. You know, it was one of those people are a lot better than you think sometimes. And I did feel like a bit of solidarity there, you know, at least to respect that this was like public space and that people should be able to like voice their opinions however they wanted.

And so yeah, I was sort of still shedding that like, in your face like rebel piss you off thing. But that was also like a stereotype of Boston that was like very real, like I mean some of the WAC demonstrations were like oh we're going to Southie to protest like David Duke, it's like so shades of now. So, like if you're a women's organization approaching a situation like that, we're like protesting a white supremacist, why are you screaming weird creepy sexual things in our faces? That's not really what this is about.

You know, so the new onuses of that initial project, that projection, like I think I was bringing my baggage of like what it was like to go to a protest in Boston is like people are going to scream weird lesbian slurs in your face even if that's not what the issue is about. But I was very happily confronted with something else which was like, okay, people are giving you this platform, they're not just going to shut it down outright because it's like a public gesture. That was like news to me, like oh. Like the content was not just blanketed.

And I think that was like encouraging for me like—because at that point I think we were like all within the museum or within my activist friends, you know, like doing things we do again today, which is like, do you just close? Just put like a black curtain over it? Like it just seemed like an open question. Like should we do something, or do we do nothing? Do we just—I mean it felt in that instance like taking to the street, or like interfacing with the street with like a viable communication tool. So, it definitely like propelled things forward for me where I just didn't feel like this is just pointless.

ALEX FIALHO: To take a step even further back, what I am finding interesting is I've done quite a few of these oral histories now, and all the folks I've interviewed previously were born I would say early '60s, if not earlier. And the trajectory of a lot of those oral histories has been almost like the people I was speaking to are a little further along, mid-20s, which isn't too far along, but they had a particular direction and then it was a major pivot as a result of HIV/AIDS for a lot of folks, and I think that what strikes me about your story so far is that you said you were speaking about losing your friend in '86, you were around 18 and almost like coming up and being there.

LIA GANGITANO: Like in the middle of it, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: In the middle of it, and to even go back to those late '80s moments, if it was coming on your radar more as a result of an IV drug user community, but still. What was that time like or what was your reaction, as early as the late '80s?

LIA GANGITANO: Well—

ALEX FIALHO: And how was it affecting your communities?

LIA GANGITANO: Maybe I saw in retrospect too because it was such a big part of like, for example, like Mark Morrisroe, or what became known Boston School, it's just like you know hindsight is always like a little bit more—maybe my sort of approach to *Dress Codes*, Boston School, was affected by this knowledge that like this is not about one type of person, or one type of community. Like, the sort of way in which the sort of public misunderstanding of HIV was like, Hunter was what, diagnosed with GRID—like I mean I met him through *Dress Codes*. Basically, Hunter came to Boston to do—

ALEX FIALHO: This is Hunter Reynolds, gay related immunodeficiency, GRID, as the early diagnosis of what would become HIV/AIDS.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, so ICA brought him for that '93 show and like then he just stayed at my house and never left. Like he kind of moved in, so—

ALEX FIALHO: Sounds like Hunter.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, and you know so his stories even like backing up, like fit into my understanding of what had just happened to me in the prior years, which maybe at the time I was just like, I don't know what is going on. This kind of like, it's almost like fear of the unknown because no one's like really telling you like what's going to happen, right? So, this sort of like strange bed fellows, so it's like oh people who use drugs are very closely aligned with like gay men or women who—you know, it was like all of a sudden everything like the public voice is telling you is just not matching your experience, and you start to like put it together. Like it's kind of very much now where it's like you end up in allegiances with different types of people because of like a common threat right?

And so, that fed very much into like being born curatorial life where it's like it can't be that thematic. It can't be

that cut and dry and obvious. These groupings of people. Like even just my critique of shows where it's just like how can you presume anything is about one thing. You know, it's like situations bring like the most unlikely people together, that's what a movement is. It's all these desperate parts that have to come together. That was what Boston School was. It's like these are not similar people. These are like a bunch of really different people making different types of work with really different life experiences that have come together, and like really their baseline is friendship and advocacy for one another. It's not like—it was so clear to me at a young age, you know, I'm not sure if that makes an answer.

ALEX FIALHO: It does.

LIA GANGITANO: But it did bring together like some of my weird like tawny drug addict past into like an art community that kind of mirrored that. It's like, you know, this is about being outside of like sports, or religious groupings, or it's like all the outliers have a little bit in common and kind of have to do some serious bonding. You know, dysfunctional familial bonding. So again, it was like that particular group of artists made like a family whether they wanted to or not. It wasn't like a plan, you know. It wasn't like because of their perfect aesthetic alignment or something.

I mean Philip-Lorca diCorcia tried so deeply to get out of doing that show.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

LIA GANGITANO: I mean he so wanted to disassociate himself from Nan, from Mark, from Jack, from David. And like this was in the era of the telephone, I mean it's almost like we didn't really e-mail that much. We would have these long conversations. He's living in Naples. I would be like, okay so you don't want to be in the show. But his pushback about all the reasons he didn't want to be in the show, like were almost like the glue that held the show together. I mean when I dug into some of his—I mean this is like a key to some of my more recent experiences is like really what PL's association with the group, I mean obviously, he went to school with Nan, and he went to school with Shellburne Thurber, and they took pictures of each other, it was earlier than Mark. He didn't really know or like Mark Morrisroe, which was kind of a sticking point, but you know you can see pictures of them all together, but really it was PL's brother Max who was very close friends with Tabboo! who died of AIDS extremely young, who organized like certain photo shoots, or like is in PL's photos. But there's this one photograph of PL's where it's like it's the Pyramid Club, it's Tabboo! on the bar posing, Max diCorcia is sitting, it's like the back of his head and Tabboo! is wearing a pair of breasts like a sculpture by Greer Lankton, and it's sort of like all the worlds come together. And it's like no matter how much PL [Phillip-Lorca di Corcia] sort of denies it, like these are the people in his life and he is like somewhat bonded to them, you know, through his brother.

And so, we would have you know these intense conversations where I'm like he's going to bail. He doesn't want to be in this show and then he would always sort of come back around and be like, "Okay, yeah." I mean, his protest was kind of what made me understand it better. Like the more you don't want to be in the group, the more you're a part of it actually.

And you know the Greer part became significant to me later and Tabboo! told me, you know I was like what happened to those breasts you were wearing? And Tabboo! had gotten mugged after the photo shoot, and somebody stole them, so.

ALEX FIALHO: What insights did you gain from that conversation with PL [Phillip-Lorca di Corcia] or the broader context?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, I mean in one sense like what happened with Boston School is it got taken very literally. I mean Boston School, the title, that was like Nan joking. You know, like kind of making a joke of almost like their young art school experiences at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum where they would see like a John Singer Sargent painting of Isabella in some like long dress. I mean they all did time at that eccentric, weird museum. So yeah. Boston School was like, "Let's riff on this like 19th century painting salon idea." But, really, we—

ALEX FIALHO: Where did she make that joke—in a conversation with you, in a public context?

LIA GANGITANO: Well—

ALEX FIALHO: Or is it not so chartable?

LIA GANGITANO: No, I mean, after being—like in this relationship with Pat Hearn, around like supporting Mark's work, I had really proposed that we do like a major museum, retrospective of Mark Morrisroe at the ICA, and their director at that time was Milena Kalinovska who went on to work at the Hirshhorn for many years, but she was really into the idea, but she was very practical, and I think we both understood that like to get an exhibitions committee of a museum to do a show of a relatively unknown, long deceased, 30-year-old artist was just like never going to happen. And so we thought the way to make it happen—and you know, of course, Pat Hearn was

very encouraging of this—was to ask his friends who were, quite frankly, like very influential art world people like Jack Pierson, but predominantly Nan Goldin. Like we knew if we could get Nan on board to participate in a sort of contextual exhibition featuring a vast majority of Mark's estate, we could maybe convince them to do it. So, I mean, it's pretty clear that Nan already had like a history of like wild advocacy for her friends. I mean, I'd already experienced it in '93 with *Dress Codes* where she was like "I'm not going to be in your show if you don't put David in it," and we're like, "Okay. Great." You know. Like she always brought her friends with her, you know. She insisted upon that in a non-negotiable way. At least in my experience, which is something that, you know, I think is admirable and, you know, it was David, you know—that's how most people know about Greer Lankton, Kathleen White, the artists who were in *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*. I mean, I think even—you know—David Wojnarowicz. Like so many people. I mean, with Witnesses, which was what? Like '86 or something?

ALEX FIALHO: Later.

LIA GANGITANO: Later.

ALEX FIALHO: Opened in '89—

LIA GANGITANO: '89, okay.

ALEX FIALHO: —and into '90.

LIA GANGITANO: Okay. So, I mean, Mark Morrisroe—like the *New York Times* image review for that show is actually a Tabboo! painting of Mark. I mean, I just feel like those things are like—when I look at it like retroactively, I'm just like "Wow." You know. Tabboo! still has that painting. This is like iconic, historic, you know, the stuff that Nan put into the world publicly is very important, but also like, for me personally, had a huge, huge influence, so I think that she named the show like in a meeting on Boylston Street in Milena's office, and we were like, "Yes! That's it!" Not because we thought it was like an art historical term, or something that should be taken seriously or replicated in zillions of shows that have like actually like redone that show. It's like we were just kind of like joking. Like we were trying to say like "look. This is like not a movement. This is not an aesthetically tidy group. This is like just people. You know." It's like friends like supporting each other. Their commonalities are pretty disparate. PL's rebelling against it is as much a part of it as any affinities. But people took it really literally, which is fine. I mean, I have no issue with that. I just think it's interesting that the way like art history works, or the way that history in general works, is you want it to be like really clear, and it's much messier.

And, you know, everybody's prime motivation for participating was an advocacy for Mark. You know. A very clear wish to promote his work and actually to realize like his life's wishes, which were like to show in a museum. You know, like that's what he wanted, and so it's like his friends are trying to get that for him. And everybody brings along a different friend, you know, so—

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

LIA GANGITANO: —Jack brought Tabboo!, which, frankly, from like the whole museum politic curatorial clarity was the most difficult, because Tabboo! was a painter, and this is supposed to be about photography. And I have like Doug and Mike Starn hating on me because they want to be in the show, and they're just like, "Why not us?" And I was like "I love you guys, but like, your work isn't about anything to"—you know, they were like celebrities at that point. I don't think they ever really forgave me, but whatever. I was more interested in making a case for Tabboo! who really was like a harder kind of step because, you know, he was just working in a completely different medium, and really the way that I was able to justify it was because—I mean, I still really believe—Tabboo! was like a painter and a performer, but also he was like kind of—or is—in a way like the art director of the whole group of people. Like any still life that he painted, Mark would photograph, and like this kind of aesthetic of the '50s that everyone kind of aspired to became—he articulated that, so in a sense, like the mood, or aesthetic, or feeling that people recognized in the sort of signature photographs—like Tabboo! crafted those looks, or like you're looking at this picture—I mean, it's Nan's picture of them. It's like—I mean, Tabboo! would just say—if we knew Nan was going to show up with her camera, we would just ask more drunk. You know, he articulated like the performance, or performativity that became part of their interaction. You know. It's—

ALEX FIALHO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

LIA GANGITANO: It's not in any way like a show. It's not false. It's just a dramatization of like themselves that they were able to enact for each other and for their work, and so Tabboo!'s almost like the art department [laughs] of it, or something.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. We're sitting in your bedroom with this photograph above your bed by Nan of Tabboo! and Mark.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: What do you think of that one?

LIA GANGITANO: I mean—I mean whenever I look at, I just think—their style is impeccable. It's very unusual because Mark is blonde, which is not that common, but it's more that I look at it, and then I remember like we were just acting more drunk, or we're trying to look more fucked up than we actually are, because it just makes a better photo. It's like a better story, and I think they all did themselves like a great—they should be very grateful that they did that, because it's not any less true. You know. That's like a—Mark Morrisroe Polaroid that Pat gave me actually.

ALEX FIALHO: That's what I thought. It's a self portrait?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, it's when they were doing the fifth year program in Paris. Like museum school had this option like if you applied for it like you could do like a fifth year abroad, and so they all went to Paris together. Most of those photographs have that like wallpaper behind, which is kind of beautiful. But I don't know how old they were—like pretty young. I mean, I guess, you know, you're in your early 20s when you're finishing college or something.

ALEX FIALHO: How about—I had a question, but I lost my train of thought—

LIA GANGITANO: Oh, well, let's gather our trains. Yeah, I feel like I need to get on to Pat.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's take a little pause.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, where were we?

ALEX FIALHO: We're in the throes of the—I'd say—Boston years—

LIA GANGITANO: Oh yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —and I'm just curious, because I have a sense of the ICA Boston now, which is a very different ICA Boston than then, I think, but how big of a team were you? And what was the sort of organizational energy at that time? Early-'90s?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, I think I mentioned before there was a lot of like transitioning of directors, interim directors—I think I experienced—you know—there was like a moment where we had like a PR department, but then most of the time we didn't. You know. I don't want to be nostalgic about like a lack of infrastructure or—I mean, in my experience, there is an advantage to be like scrappy, struggling institution, because obviously, for a person like me, that created a lot of opportunity. Because it was just like people working, you know. Anyone who was like committed could just like do things. I mean, it was a very different world of learning on the job, and it's not like there weren't these moments—like this is not totally on topic, but one of the projects that I worked on, which I was really into at the time, was this Chris Burden retrospective that was organized with like another partnering institution in Los Angeles. And at that point we actually had like probably a little bit of money and there was a PR department—or a firm that we were working with—and they created this like super offensive campaign for the Chris Burden show, which was like the poster said "Some people think this isn't the type of institution Chris Burden should be in," and it was like a—they'll never see my face in Kansas City, so it was like the mask. The Balaclava mask, and I remember very distinctly when Chris Burden came to the museum and saw these posters, he very covertly threw them all in the dumpster, which was awesome. It was like these stories all seem like really quaint to me now. Like "oh this was before museums were like mega-corporations and artists could actually impact things." I mean, everything about my particular timeline—life experience—is like right before things changed. You know, so it's like so they're taking corporate sponsorship as an institution, and they're using a PR firm, but they still have an artist who's going to be like "no" and can like do their own little civil disobedience to disrupt it. It's like these things are like virtually impossible now. Like there's just no way that any of those things could occur now. But, for whatever reason in that transitional period that I grew up into these things happened, right? So they inform a lot of like how I like proceed in the world or something.

ALEX FIALHO: How about this *Dress Codes* show that we've talked around but—

LIA GANGITANO: Well, *Dress Codes* for me—I mean, I guess we spoke—

ALEX FIALHO: What was the theme of the show?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, this is what gets tricky. So the world—the projects were all very—they occurred in like not prime real-estate of the museum. They were like kind of enabled by like a little tiny tangential space being available. This was not like major real-estate in the museum. Right? *Dress Codes*, which was basically curated by Matthew Teitelbaum, who was the interim director of the ICA—he was brought in as a curator by Milena

Kalinovska—I think—no—Elisabeth. Anyway, this part might have to be a little bit like backed up with like how it actually happened, but you know, Matthew Teitelbaum, Bruce Ferguson, and myself. And this is a clear sign of those particular times where like these guys wanted to do a show about—you know—pardon the antiquated language—crossdressing. And they invited me to co-curate the show, because like, frankly, they needed like a woman on the team because it just seemed really weird for these two dudes to be curating this show. And again, like very formative for me. Like I knew that I was given like a very clear job. You know. Millie Wilson was in the show. I invited Cathy Opie to be in the show. It was her first museum exhibition. That's how we became friends, which is also connected to many things that unfolded in my life. Ron Athey, many things.

ALEX FIALHO: We'll get into them.

LIA GANGITANO: Yes. Working with Nan, David, Lyle Ashton Harris, Hunter Reynolds, Diane Torr—we did workshops. It was the first time I worked with Vaginal Davis, Jerome—

ALEX FIALHO: [Jerome] Caja.

LIA GANGITANO: Yes. Rafael—I mean, there were like other like more kind of—

ALEX FIALHO: Tell me a little bit about the Rafael Sánchez works there.

LIA GANGITANO: We were exchanging letters, and like beyond just like incorporating a lot of work by women in the show—that was like sort of the task—there was also like this weird lounge room where I was given sort of like free reign to do like—it almost became like the make-up painting's room by default. You know. So Jerome, Rafael's make-up paintings—I mean, Vag came to do a performance, but you know, I guess I'm starting to see my weird like squirrely role where it's just like if someone gives you like a little lounge area to do whatever you want, you just start to like bring in as much as you can. And that exhibition sort of functioned that way because like Yasumasa Morimura was in that show. Or Rocky. You know. There were like very known, huge artists in the show, but there were also like these parts of the show that like really—I felt like people were giving me like a little bit of space to like bring in—I don't know—like more fringe elements that became like sort of major influences for me.

So Rafael, at that time, we just exchanged letters. Like I feel like maybe he was traveling, and I saw documentation of like peanut butter and jelly paintings, make-up paintings, this like kind of like this really hard to define drag persona that was less about gender, but about all these other things, and you know, we just—our relationship sort of began there. And so what was in the show were the flag foundation make-up paintings.

ALEX FIALHO: Which are amazing.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. I'm trying to remember. Vag, that was our first performance, but there were definitely—I wish I could look at that artist's list right now, but I mean—I will definitely say that working with Cathy Opie on that—I mean, I basically knew about Cathy's work through one article in Art Forum. It was a piece written by Judith Butler, who was just coming into my like field of vision as like very important. And Cathy's mustache paintings were—I mean mustache photographs—were in that article, and I'm just like, "Whoa. What are these?" And you just call the person up, and—I think Cathy like built the crates for her own photographs and shipped them. When she came for the show, I think it was the first time she'd seen snow. Like she came to Boston, and I remember like walking across that weird, little park, and she had never seen snow before. I mean, I don't know, like—I guess, in retrospect, it seems sort of significant, but in a way like it was because of her photographs being in that exhibition we became friends, and she invited me to this shoot she was doing. It was a project for—it was called the Estate Project, and she was invited to use the world's largest Polaroid camera, and it was like over here on like Second and—Second Street and like between First and Second. I don't know where that camera is now, but it was just like in this weird garage space. And she's like, "Oh, why don't you come to the shoot?"

We ended up doing the exhibition of those large format Polaroids at Participant, but really when I first went, I was just like observing like, "Oh this is really cool. Whatever. It's a giant camera." But the point is that that was the first time that I met Ron, because the sort of subjects of the photographs were based on like Ron's work with Darryl Carlton, and I sort of showed up at the end when it was sort of like a culmination where it's like almost, you know, Ron is doing all of his performances at once. So he has like the crown of thorns like needles in his head, but he's also—Carlton is doing the St. Sebastian's piercings of his legs. He's got like second bag of saline in his balls, and I was just like, "Whoa." And, of course, we were like smoking because it was at the point where you could still like do that, and there's like nurses, and this was, again, like super formative moment. I mean, maybe we were already talking about taking this show—showing the Polaroids for the first time at the gallery—but they were being made. So this green screen, this giant structure, which Ron is being hung from, and he's just like laughing and goofing around, because like, you know, he's still like dripping bag two. It was like—at first,

I was just like an observer of the scene and, you know, Cathy is like kind of directing it, and Ron is like getting ready. And, you know, they had already shot like—I don't know—a dozen pictures, and so I didn't totally understand that this was like cumulative. And all I can say is that at a certain point like after all the goofing around and the collaboration, and everyone's like setting up the scene, when it really came to be the point where the photograph was supposed to be taken—you know—Ron is like hoisted up, and everything is in place, and like everything is ready—the spinal tap needles come out of the head and like the amount of blood that comes out is like so much. And there was just like this moment of like all of a sudden like the vibe amongst the technicians and the camera staff just went like wooooooah. They just like couldn't not—I don't know—it was like almost like all of a sudden this weird vibe hit the room like this is like too much. And, you know, the amount of blood emanating from like Ron has gone from like totally under control to like okay, this is like we can't handle it. At which point Cathy, in a certain way, is super like, "It's fine." Take control. And asks us like to just be like, "Can you guys help me—like just help me remove this seamless, green paper, and we're going to put up a new one." And I'm just like, "Okay. Sure. You know, like help." But it was like the feeling in the room just changed, and I was like, "What just happened?" Like you could feel almost like a—I don't know—just a change of—like all of a sudden like this very collaborative moment went into like a panic moment, which wasn't supposed to happen, at which point I became like totally bonded. Which is like, of course, and we like move this paper. It's like very—dripping with blood. Put up a new one. Everything goes back to normal. And then it's like we go into the room where like the actual camera apparatus occurs, and like these flashes go off, and there's like Ron upside down image, which is like how the Polaroid magic happens. And I was like "Okay. Well, that was kind of the amazing part," but in a way like the part that like stayed with me was like when the tone in the room changed to like fear of like—anyway, I guess for me that was—something changed, and it meant like not being ever afraid to like go there and show this work. Like I mean part of the narrative of us at Thread Waxing doing that show was like, "Well, no one else will do it." And I was like well that's not that interesting. You know. Like I want to be like, "Oh, well we did it, because no one else would." Or this is amazing work, and it should be shown. But anyway, and it sort of left me with like a like in those moments where people who perceive themselves as being like really ready to go there like no matter what—like reach their limit of comfort—it's like that's for me where like—I don't know—your work actually starts. Like, for me, that was like okay. Totally committed to this. Like this is not just like a knowable outcome.

ALEX FIALHO: Those eight feet photographs are incredible.

LIA GANGITANO: The Estate Project—

ALEX FIALHO: Tell me a little bit more about how they were shown, and then also the Estate Project.

LIA GANGITANO: Well, that was almost like a commission by the Estate Project for Artists with Aids. Patrick—I'm trying to remember his last name—

ALEX FIALHO: Moore.

LIA GANGITANO: The works were—they invited Cathy. They forged the collaboration with World's Largest Polaroid, and then Cathy brought in Ron and Darryl and—I'm trying to remember—Cyril [Kuhn] who's like the artist whose arm is like up Ron's ass. You know, so it was like a bunch of friends coming together to do this thing. You know, it's like a unique situation. I mean, the camera—I walk by the place where the camera used to be, and it's just like a—I don't know what it is now, but you know when you pass by something that you experienced, and you're like, "Oh my God. That was the best thing ever in my life." You know. Or when you recognize that a certain experience is going to have like a big impact, or just change the course of your life, so I think in that instance it was like meeting Ron, having this sort of sacramental content redelivered to me in such a way, so I think when I was talking about my parents and my sort of rejection of Catholicism, or just like religion in general, you know, it was not just like a culmination of this was my relationship with Cathy, and the work that she made and her first show—it was more like I was kind of—the experience of like stepping into the situation when others were not that willing to do so like—he's doing like a St. Sebastian like Jesus kind of scene, which you know, quite frankly, I would normally have like no particular interest in. But when that sort of imagery is translated into almost like an HIV reaction emergency like something like transformed. Like all of a sudden I was like I totally understand this work in this other way, and it's redelivering my whole past experience to me that really, you know, I remember like looking at like the family Bible was the dirtiest pictures I could see as a child. I love Saint Sebastian or whatever, but I had so left that imagery behind, so to have it given back to me in this meaningful way, which was like very like profound experience. I was like—I don't know—kind of became like a believer. And—you know—in like Ron, which you know, kind of changed the course of things for me to a certain extent.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's zoom back a little bit to Boston still.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —well, actually, off record, we just talked about Frank Wagner—

LIA GANGITANO: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: —and I think let's bring him on record. I don't know where that will put us in time frame, but let's just talk about his influence.

LIA GANGITANO: It actually weirdly is the exact same time frame.

ALEX FIALHO: As?

LIA GANGITANO: It's 1993—4ish. So, the strange thing is that, you know, if I could flash forward just contextually to say that when I started working on the Greer Lankton show it became very clear to me in my kind of grappling for like, "Oh, we need an exhibition designer. We need all this information. We need to compile this like history." And I was sort of all over the map, because I was merely working chronologically. And it was at a certain point that a very close friend and colleague—you know, when somebody sort of bitch slaps you and is like "hello"—those people never talk to those people, meaning like transgender people, drug addicted people, were not really in the same conversation as like certain other parts of the art world. It's like just because everything happened in the same like course of like a couple of years like—you know—because I wasn't here, I'm just like, "Oh! So all those people were like friends or got along." And it's like no, they were like gallery artists, people who were more into like activism. Even just something as simple as who was using drugs and who wasn't. These were like real, social dividers. And those social dividers existed in the art world as well, so the reason why that reminds me of Frank Wagner is because the reason I met Frank was because I worked on this exhibition—do you need a pen?—at the ICA, and I'd have to check the year, called *Public Interventions*, which was curated by Milena Kalinovska, the director of the ICA with Eleanor Heartney. And their kind of brilliant, first sort of decision in terms of like the making of that show was to invite Group Material to sort of act as consultant designers of the exhibition.

And so this is almost happening at the same time as like—closely in proximity to Boston School, or just prior—so I was—Group Material—Felix was still alive—Felix Gonzalez-Torres—and was part of Group Material at that time, and he had a relationship with Milena, and so it was sort of like a meeting of all these sort of like disparate worlds of—you know—that didn't necessarily hang out together, but in my chronological time frame, they sort of did—which is just to say that it took me many years—perhaps decades—to understand how Frank inhabited a lot of these different worlds.

So, he came to Boston for the opening of Public Interventions to support Julie Ault and Doug Ashford—you know we sort of became friends. And, you know, basically just kept in touch until now. And so then I had to sort of like back out that Frank Wagner was the first person to work with Pat Hearn on like Mark's first solo exhibition in Berlin at nGbK. They did a beautiful publication, which of course, had like—you know—been part of like my sort of introduction to like Mark's work, because it was like such a great catalogue.

ALEX FIALHO: When he was living?

LIA GANGITANO: No. He was already dead actually.

ALEX FIALHO: Shortly thereafter then?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, I can't remember—I mean, Mark died in '86.

ALEX FIALHO: '89.

LIA GANGITANO: '89. Okay, so it was pretty shortly thereafter. Anyway, so this is just to say, these very disparate worlds had certain common denominators, and weirdly, or clearly to me now Frank Wagner was a huge common denominator. And I think at the time after the Greer Lankton show, at articipant, Wolfgang Tillmans brought the show to Berlin, and that was sort of instigated by—you know—Wolfgang's first show, Between Bridges, was David Wojnarowicz, so that was how he came to see Greer's show, and the relationship began. But it just opened up a lot of questions for me like what is this people would talk about this kind of affiliation between like the East Village in the '80s and '90s and like Berlin, and no one could really quite say what is it. Like what is the connection? It was like kind of referred to in the shorthand kind of way, but no one ever backed it up with any what's the glue really? And I guess last January, I was on this research trip for the Pat Hearn American Fine Arts Exhibition at CCS, and I was like, "Oh, well we should interview Frank." And so Jeannine Tang and myself, you know, we went to Frank's house, and we interviewed him for several hours about, you know, his relationship with Pat Hearn, and so he basically like retold, you know, his sort of curatorial life story like through his friendship with Pat, and I mean I've known Frank for all of these years, and I know all about his show with Mark, but—and I know that he did a studio visit with Greer because Nan had asked him to, and he had told me, but it was like the first time I really like got a load of like—it was—you know—it was Frank's work that brought like—Safe Sex, AIDS Activism, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Cady Noland, Hunter Reynolds, Lovett/Codagnone—like

basically, he was the link. Like he was like missing connection. It's like one curator who so vehemently believed that like HIV/AIDS needed to be like in the public, in people's line of vision all the time from the beginning, continually like throughout his career until, you know, last year. He's still doing it. So like when he pulled out a catalogue saying he saw—you know—work that he saw that at Pat or at Colin's galleries—he pulls out this catalogue from like—I think it was like 1993, but now I feel like I just attribute everything to that year somehow. This publication that said Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Cady Noland. I was like, "How is this possible?" This is like the exhibition I always wanted to see, but never knew actually happened, and that could only happen for like this one tiny instance of time where it would like make sense where like, you know, the sort of issues of like American violence and like kind of almost like activist—it just was like a combination that made no sense outside of that moment, and that he's the one who did that. It just—it just was like I didn't know that it had happened, and it sort of like made me see that like one person's work could so perfectly articulate like a political, cultural moment that most people don't even want to acknowledge is happening, and like somehow Frank translated this very like American—I don't know—like—I don't know—like a moment and like deployed it and brought like a certain type of like activism and awareness to Europe, or to Germany that like literally didn't exist before. I mean, like maybe I'm overdramatizing it, but I was just like, "Whoa. This guy is like slowly and methodically changed like a whole landscape," and yeah, yeah. It was great.

ALEX FIALHO: I definitely had that sense in my work at Visual AIDS. And he was definitely—

LIA GANGITANO: He like looms very large. And, you know, of course, like meeting him through Group Material and Julie and Doug, I mean, there are just like certain people in your life like—I always sort of like attribute it to Pat in a way, because like I was just a child, like when she just saw in me a way to make this Mark Morrisroe stuff happen, but there are also people like Julie and Doug and Frank who just took such an interest or, you know, it's like that thing where it's that first time someone talks to you like an adult, you remember it. Where you're not the intern or the assistant—I mean, Nan was really, extremely formative in that way where her disrespect for authority lended itself to like "you're the curator of this show. Own it." Like this whole kind of constellation of people like invested like so much time, and energy, and knowledge, you know, into what could have turned out to be like things that never happened. Like they were just like, you know, believers. You know. Like so like entrusted me to do work and didn't care like what my job title was that it really—it's almost like seeing it from, you know, 20 plus years out, I'm just like, you know, just having access to the work that they did and their like generosity in letting me help, or assist, or work for them like just opened up so many possibilities to just—I don't know.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you have a sense of how your—I would say vision, or practice as a curator, or stakes as a curator—were coalescing at ICA Boston? What stakes were you working around, and how did that sort of propel you in the two decades since?

LIA GANGITANO: I mean, I was like super young, so there was nothing—I didn't have like a plan, and I had absolutely no career ambition whatsoever. Like my career trajectory is so backwards by today's standards. Like I really just—

ALEX FIALHO: How so?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, you know, it's like I went from working in a non-collecting museum to working in an alternative space to starting an alternative space. It's just like, you know, embracing abject poverty, and no life security and, you know, I really—in all honesty—like I'm almost like raised by wolves, or something where it's just like the whole idea of like art as commodity, or any monetization of art work—I mean, I basically just grew into a situation where I thought like the papers I was reading at the ICA Boston, which were like, I mean, the founding manifestos of ICA were written in like the late '30s and early '40s where, you know, that museum started as an offshoot of MoMA just showing the collection of the Museum of Modern Art New York in Boston. Like these Harvard kids started it, but then it soon developed into—by like 1940—they denounced the idea of collections. They changed their name from modern to contemporary, and wrote a manifesto about how art should be like an experience and should not be about the accumulated wealth of individuals. I mean, it's like bananas. And I was just like in that basement reading that, and that's what I thought art was or museums were. Like I had no frame of reference for even the idea of like collecting. I mean, it's just a weird place to start. You know.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

LIA GANGITANO: So you know when people are like "why don't you start a gallery?" I'm like "I have no clue." Like I don't—I don't relate to art in that sort of way, so I have no experience of it. And I just kept going further into, you know, more ephemeral, less object-oriented, no commercial value—I mean, it's just not part of my experience, which I think is like an anomaly. Right? So at a certain point when that sort of intersects with, you know, the large scale loss of like artist's life, then all of a sudden, it becomes even more, you know, like what has completely evaded any kind of mainstream canonical market version of the art world. You know. It's like then

reality comes into it, and you're just like these are, you know—what would happen to Mark if his friends didn't like put that in front of people's faces and like change—you know, I mean, there's a million stories. I mean, it's like Paul Thek, you know—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

LIA GANGITANO: Or, you know, artists have like this completely different version of like what it means to be an artist or what it means to be successful. It's like, you know, obviously that's what I'm interested in. It's like, you know, how to look at an artist like Greer and say like, okay, well, she's part of this moment in the East Village when there was so much attention, but it was like about lifestyle, and she's not really fitting in—you know, like how do you put that back into the story like—I don't really know that that's entirely possible. Maybe it just like fractures off into like a different story, but I've seen that happen so many different times through advocates. You know, Nan advocating for Mark. And Nan advocating for Greer. It's like those things had like huge influence on my work, and you know, frankly, any sense of purpose I might have is just because someone else has said "look at this" and "this is important." And it does belong in the timeline. It belongs in the history of art. And there are reasons why it's like omitted, but I think what's important in doing that kind of work, and I think—I'm not trying to say like this is like my special purpose—it's like if we can't like contextualize it, and say there's, okay, there's Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz, and Greer. With Mark it was like there's Mark who you might not know about, but then also David Armstrong and Nan Goldin, Rafael S**á**nchez. Like I think often there's like a desire to create, or reinforce like and "look what I found. Look at this anomaly." It's like the actual opposite. It's like look at this person who was actually, completely a part of this and has like a history and a context and a network. Like that's where you can really not like—where it's not like, "oh, I'm recreating in like a ghetto for this artist to be in." It's like "no, this is actual history." It's not queer history. It's not alternative history. It's not—it's just—there are always going to be people that don't—who are so ahead of their time that they don't really get—they're not understood. So, I don't know—maybe that's like a—maybe it's me like trying to diss certain curatorial endeavors that further ghettoize the artist as like, "look at this two-headed bird I found." It's just like such an annoying—it's like—it's like trying to elevate something, but at the same time like not really acknowledging its place. You know. Or that there's always been a place for the outsider, or like a margin or—and that you don't have to recreate that same marginality to give attention to it.

ALEX FIALHO: Completely.

LIA GANGITANO: Does that make sense? That was my point.

ALEX FIALHO: How about Boston as an atmosphere for you in the early-'90s? It's sort of the height of ACT UP's New York moment. Of course, that's coming into Boston somehow. Was activism a part of the dialogue in Boston, particularly with these artists, with you, with the scene in general? Where did activism sit?

LIA GANGITANO: You know, like I sort of mentioned before, it was definitely just like daily life. Like there was no separation between like art life and activist life. Those are like the same life. So, in that period of time I was spending a lot of time in New York. You know for work, to see shows, to do—have meetings with people, organize things, and you know, the sort of surface face of New York that I remember was completely, you know, just like a sea of Jenny Holzer, Guerrilla Girls, Barbara Kruger, ACT UP Everywhere. Gran Fury. I mean, you could not avert your gaze from a kind of wheat pasted conversation about all of these things. So, it was just like a pure visual field of activist messaging. You know, I've been trying to sort of update, or grapple with like my own prior period of—I mean, I tell people I spent my entire 20s thinking that Washington D.C. was all gay people, because we would go to D.C. from Boston all the time [laughs] for like gay pride, AIDS demonstrations, and I just had this illusion that Washington D.C. was like millions of queer people. Like I had no real tangible understanding of it as an actual place like where people lived. I just thought it was this giant mass of demonstrating queers. You know. Like I'm actually like—think about that all the time—like okay what would it be like to go now? I mean, I didn't go to D.C. for the Women's March because I had to work, and be in New York, but it was kind of like weighing on me really heavy. Like do I want to disturb my—you know—my 20s to 30 year-old vision of what it was like or what it was? Because it's sort of like dear to me, sort of like this misrepresentation, you know. Because that's what we did like all the time. And—

ALEX FIALHO: Demonstrate?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah. Pretty much, yeah. And, you know, I've had like—I don't know—just so many like kind of weird—I don't know—conversations with friends where just like, like trying to imagine the same things that were going through people's minds then like imagining it happening now. Like I had this conversation with Joy Episalla, and it was such a vivid image like talking about like and when we considered throwing ashes on the White House lawn, and she was saying you know, at this meeting it was all about individuals that wanted their actual bodies thrown on the White House lawn. And, you know, I kind of knew that had been something discussed, and it was like such an image of like what would that be? Like today? What would that mean? And the fact that like this shit was on the table like so fully at that point in time, and like this kind of like the notion of like

civil disobedience, or like the stakes being that high like and the fact that like you see these images of ACT UP members like infiltrating like CBS News. It's like you want that to be possible, and then you also, you know, but like how would that be possible now? So I'm still in this moment of like what are the ways? Like what are the means now? I think back to the intensities of like wow someone saying, "Please take my dead body and throw it there." I mean, I can fully remember like that being a totally valid feeling. But I feel like there's so much like—I don't know—like restraint at play. Like, oh, we could never do that now. We'd go to jail, or this would happen, or t would happen. It's like—I guess it's like a call to like rethink self-censorship, or you know, like how far will we allow ourselves to go in a—under that sort of rubric of protest. I mean, people were willing to go pretty far, and in a sense, it was very effective. But I see a lot of like anxiety and confusion amongst like younger people like what can you do? I think that's a little off topic, but—

ALEX FIALHO: Not at all.

LIA GANGITANO: —I definitely feel like if you were to say like "what was on your mind when you were like that age working in a museum," we wanted to be just like "fuck it!" Always like pushing like causing trouble basically. Like being totally unafraid to just be like—I mean, I think I did get sort of in trouble, because I was like a total employee of the ICA, and I'm only mentioning this anecdote, which can be struck from this record [laughs], but it's because I see the Annie Leibovitz-like photo *Vanity Fair* piece coming is that in that sort of post Mapplethorpe, post a blockbuster show will save us, we want Ticketmaster to, you know, be hired so we can like make some money as a museum, which was already like never going to happen. The ICA decided to take a touring exhibition of Annie Leibovitz's photographs, which were like okay. Whatever. But it was around the time of the Gulf War, and it was like a package show of some kind, and for some reason, myself and some other colleagues and friends just could not deal with the *Vanity Fair* heroes of the Gulf War like photo spread shot by Annie Leibovitz where you have like smiling Schwarzkopf and photos of stealth bombers. And it was very disturbing and celebratory piece, and I don't know, I was working at the museum, and I had no business bitching about it from the inside, but I just couldn't—I just couldn't not be like a 20-something like "no!" And so my friend and I basically did this like poster series kind of where we did all this research about how photography had changed the course of the Vietnam War, and it was through images of the war, you know, that people mobilized. You know, it was like seeing it really made a huge difference, and you know, we did all forms of bad cut and paste, and very shove it down your throat didactic messaging, and we installed these images in like the public restrooms [laughs] of the ICA. And we got totally busted. And, you know, Annie felt really bad, and you know, she said, "Oh, I didn't write the bylines," or whatever it was. And, you know, it just got all taken down, but for whatever reason, I mention it, because we were just like "no. This can't be." And I sort of feel like it seemed kind of quaint and adorable now, but you know, we were really just interested in talking about like, you know, the politics of a paycheck like well this is your job, so you take these pictures. I didn't write the bylines. But, you know, ultimately those images had an impact, and they influenced people, and those are really similar tactics to ACT UP. It's just like, you know, images do like affect people, so I don't know—I guess I'm just saying, you know, some of our political actions were a little bit lazy like, I mean, there was like a risk involved, but it was also in this insular world. It wasn't like super public. It's like, "yes, people buy tickets. They see the show. They see this in the bathroom," but yeah, maybe it's a good analysis of like, "Well, we couldn't just let it pass, but we kind of really just did anyway." Like it didn't like shut down the show. It just made us feel like, "Okay. Well, we did something." It's just not really enough, or effective.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the backdrop of the cultural wars itself? You know, the ICA had the Mapplethorpe show. You've talked about your connection with Nan and finishing *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*. Let's just talk a little about that really charged '89/'90 moment, and then of course, Ron's iteration of the cultural wars, which is a little later.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: That's like '94, but it's still like right there. How was curating at that point?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, weirdly, one of the first—one of the first shows that I really was involved with—I guess it was like in '89. There was like this pair of exhibitions that ICA organized with some partners in Germany. It was like a set of exhibitions called *American Art of Late Eighties* and *German Art of Late Eighties*. And so, in my assistant registrar job I sort of toured *American Art of Late Eighties*. So, that included performances by Karen Finely, Constance Dejong, and Tony Oursler among many others. Mike Kelley was in that show. I mean, it was kind of like a major, huge museum show, but I mentioned it because, you know, it's like you're a kid working in a museum, but your job is like to book Karen Finley's plane tickets, so you know, it was, you know, like again, just to say, my experience working in museum was a little unusual like getting Visas. And then all these artists boycotted the exhibition when it was supposed to travel to Tel Aviv, or something. You know, it was like a lot of formative experiences for me of like, you know, taking care of people not objects. People who have like, you know, politics and convictions and, you know, you can't just like move that around like—I mean, the weird thing is that that tour of that exhibition, which is weird to think about in this moment when the NEA and the NEH is like possibly like obsolete is just like it was—the tour was supported by the USIA, which was the United States

Information Agency whose sole purpose—it was like a federal entity that was basically about promoting American art like around the world. I mean, the show went to like Helsinki. And I mean, it was just like—it's really weird to see like where we are now and just like what was the world that I entered into as like a late teen, you know. It's just like "I'm working for this thing, you know, this—the USIA to promote Mike Kelley in Finland." [Laughs.] It seems crazy, right? Yeah, that's—it's like—Karen Finley must have like yams everywhere. It was like a thing that seems so impossible to me now, but that's just how it was at that point in time. And, you know, just to I guess because I'm working on this project which involves like American Fine Arts and Pat Hearn Gallery, like for me mostly the Pat Hearn part is like very—you know—kind of important life experience, but just to say that at the time that I was like living in Boston and traveling to New York, mainly to have meetings with Pat about Mark, because we worked on this thing. You know, it's like we didn't have cell phones. And, you know, Pat was not a person who—I don't think she even took the subway. You know. So we would set up these meetings like "oh, meet me in Chelsea." There's like three galleries there. There's nothing there. There was like Printed Matter, or a bookstore, or whatever. But pretty much there's nothing. I would like get on the train at six in the morning. It's like a four hour train ride from Boston. I would get to Chelsea like mid-day, and I would just like sit and just sit on 22nd Street. Nothing's open. Nothing is there except Dia and like the Joseph Beuys Rock, and I would just sit there and like wait like sometimes for hours.

What am I going to do? Like call the gallery? Like no one's there. And just wait for hours for Pat to get there. And when she would arrive, she would be so "Oh my god. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry." Like and I would just be so happy she showed up. Like I wouldn't be mad, or annoyed in any way, shape, or form, even though I had been sitting on a curb for like however long, you know, because she kindly showed up for the meeting. And then we would just proceed to do whatever it was we were going to do. For me, that was somehow like the epitome as—like the world is very different now—like there wasn't any number to call, or it was just about a certain trust. Okay, well Pat's going to get here where she gets here, and then we're just going to proceed and go through like Mark's polaroids, or do what we need to do and there's not going to be like some—I don't know—judgement. Like where were you? Why weren't you here? I don't know. Maybe that's like a very irrelevant, anecdotal story, but yeah the whole like way we did business was like so unlike any form of conducting business now. And so it had more—I don't know—just more to do with like trusting a person, or knowing that they're eventually going to show up, and that you have like a common purpose or something. It's like watching like television shows about like—I don't know—like how did people like hijack planes before they had cell phones? [Laughs.] It seems impossible, but people did that you know. Not that I'm advocating it, but I'm just saying.

ALEX FIALHO: I think, as we wrap up today, maybe the last thing we'll talk about is to return to that *Day Without Art* show that you did in '93, which we didn't really get into specifics. You mentioned Valerie Caris.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: It was probably in one of these nooks that you squirreled away in a sense—

LIA GANGITANO: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: —to use your words—whose work was in the show itself if you can remember? Valerie perhaps?

LIA GANGITANO: Valerie was in the show. Steven Swan who was a friend of Mark's. And like the subject of some extremely gorgeous portraits by David Armstrong. They went to museum school together, and I learned a lot from Steven actually, and you know, interviewed him a lot about Mark.

ALEX FIALHO: And was there a theme to the show, or was it just bringing together a few artists in the context of *Day without Art*?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, it didn't have like a title or a stated theme. Also, a good friend of mine, Suara Welitoff, who still lives in Boston in Cambridge, and you know that seems kind of—I met he through like *Unsolicited Slides*, and I think she was in that show, and she was one of the artists that I introduced to Frank Wagner, and then he actually brought her work to Berlin. So, it's like another one of those like Frank connections. But I'm trying to think who else. Suara, Valerie, Mark, Steven. I might look it up between now, and our next interview just because I know there are other. I mean, it wasn't like a huge show. It was very modest. But it really sort of set the almost a foundation for—maybe this—I wanted it to be like on point. This is a show about HIV and AIDS, but I didn't want it to be like what people expected in terms of one, like a kind of one-dimensional view of it. So, I mean, of course Valerie was extremely influential in that discussion at the time, because she was, you know, such a, you know, very visible, vocal, you know, woman with HIV. I mean, she really—I mean, she was like an education. You know what I mean? And I know that ABC No Rio did an exhibition with her work. And she's very connected to Gordan Kurtti and Jack and Peter, but I didn't really make that connection. You know, like sometimes it takes a really long time to put like two and two together, like I almost didn't really understand the Valerie Caris that I knew in Boston whose work we showed was, in fact, like the same No Rio—I just—it took some time for me to like bring it all together.

ALEX FIALHO: Was she in Boston then making work?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, yeah. I think. I mean, that's how it appeared to me at the time. I mean, maybe she had kind of a foot in both worlds, but I wasn't like placing her in this other scene that I was like pretty unaware of at that time, so I didn't—it was sort of like, "oh my God. That was Valerie." I wasn't totally getting it.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you—and this is a specific question, so memory might fail—but do you remember what works were shown at first? What type of work she was making at that time?

LIA GANGITANO: I know I have like images like in my archive, but I can say this for sure: it was definitely work that made me like super uncomfortable [laughs], and even in the sort of—oh, how do you call it—like, you know, your comfort zone of like I can push it this far in a museum sort of context. Like I remember with Valerie, I was like, how am I going to, you know, finesse it? You know, like it's not like I was sitting in front of an exhibition committee. I mean, I really just had to make a case with my bosses, or you know, colleagues who I love. But, you know, they would sometimes be like "what is that" or "it's too much." But I know that with Valerie, I myself was like personally challenged in that line between you know, what is art, what is activism, what is—you name it—any other thing. Like your personal archive, your sex work, your college paper—you know—like maybe doing my career backwards—meaning like I had to start in the museum with that kind of challenge where it's like differentiating or, you know, just this bullshit placing value on like one thing over another. I think it was like super personal. I think it was very diaristic. You know, something I became like somewhat better versed at later. But, you know, you just kind of like had to choose your battles and make cases for things. You know like—I remember feeling like, I'm going to do this. Like get this work in this show, but not really knowing exactly how to do it. And that has nothing to do with the merit of the art work. It has to do with, you know, just the harshness of its form, or the rawness. It's like we're so used to things being like—I don't know—kind of overly layered so that people can sort of deal with it. It's like—in that period of time certain art that was too raw, too disturbing, too personal, it was not valued. You know. It was not. Even like David Wojnarowicz's work. Most people were like, "It's a bit much." You know, it like took some time for people to appreciate anger in the voice. Like it was very hard to make that case. You know. Thankfully, like some of that work, like did sort of filter in, and I mean, I think that's like sort of, you know, that's when you look at like Felix Gonzalez-Torres versus David Wojnarowicz as like really different levels of access. And it does have to do with like I think aggression, or anger, or something. Like the most aggressive voices have taken longer time to be assimilated. And then there are these different valences. Like Mark was very angry. He was very sarcastic, but he was also like very interested in like beauty and, you know, there's tons of room for like misinterpretation, but the most like raw, or aggressive, or angry imagery, people did not want to look at that. They don't want to see that. It takes longer you know. A bit.

ALEX FIALHO: I think that's a good place to call it an interview. Day one.

LIA GANGITANO: Sure. Then we have to talk about like Ramsey's crazy shit with like bloody bed sheets. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. Did you—before actually last one—did you meet Mark?

LIA GANGITANO: No.

ALEX FIALHO: You didn't? We'll talk about Ramsey tomorrow.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

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ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Lia Gangitano on February 6, 2017 at Lia's home in New York City for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Visual Arts, and the AIDS epidemic, Oral History Project, day two.

So yesterday, we went pretty thoroughly into your time at ICA Boston, and I wanted to hear more from you about what you felt the Boston School show did or what some of the results of that show were, both in the reception and now also, the sort of the bringing to the fore Mark's legacy, but also the community that he was a part of.

LIA GANGITANO: Sure, well, the exhibition got quite a bit of attention and, most notably—I think her name is Vicki Goldberg, reviewed it for *the New York Times*, which, you know, was not an everyday occurrence for us in Boston to get that recognition here. And maybe because a lot of the artists were in New York. I think Shellburne Thurber is the only artist still living in Boston; she's always lived in Boston, in Cambridge, and I think PL [Phillip-Lorca di Corcia] was living abroad at the time. Everyone else had—Tabboo!, David Armstrong, Nan, and Jack were—you know, had presence in New York, so that might have been the reason, but nonetheless, it had a

pretty significant impact, and there were other reviews, so what happened through the press is that the title, Boston School, which, as I mentioned previously, which was kind of tongue and cheek and not meant to be very serious, kind of was taken up as, like, a real term, and it's been, like, repurposed and kind of used as more, like, a legitimate label, which is not entirely the intention.

But in terms of our goals with the whole project, you know, Pat Hearn really having a clear sense of Mark's aspirations, and it wasn't just the artists in the show supporting Mark's work, but also the writers and the catalogue, people like Rafael Sánchez and David Joselit and—I'm trying to think who wrote specifically about Mark—oh! Ramsey McPhillips, he is a very important part that I was grasping at, Mark's boyfriend. I would say Randy and Pat, primarily, had a very, kind of, anecdotal—they became, really, the interpreters of Mark's aspirations, and so knowing he wanted to show in a museum, knowing he wanted to be famous, knowing that he—what his ambitions were and those becoming the goals of the project, we felt that it was very successful and, you know, various things came about as a result, like the first monograph by Twin Palms, Pat was able to make that happen shortly after the exhibition. The catalogue itself was also very well received. People really liked the combination of, like, extremely personal and also some more academic writing; there's interviews, so there's part of Ramsey's, kind of, semi-fictionalized biography, which drew on his journals and mythology.

So it felt like, in giving greater exposure to Mark, I think everyone felt, you know, Mark's career was happening, and so it—for me personally, I mean, obviously, working on that project at that age with that group of people, many of whom are a huge part of my life to now, you know, had such a huge, significant impact on me, but also it, sort of, created a perception that I was, you know, like a photo curator or that, you know, at least—having done that exhibition allowed me to think about applying for the job at Thread Waxing when it came up. That was sort of happening simultaneously to what seemed like the millionth change in directorships of the ICA.

I had basically grown up at this institution. I had realized this project that had completely, you know, altered my life or had culminated, in a way, the time I had been working at the ICA, and I thought, you know, I should practice applying for jobs. Someone told me about the job at Thread Waxing, and it happened very quickly, and I know that that show was what made them pay attention to my application, and so I kind of packed up my life and moved into this apartment [laughs] and definitely people like Pat were, like, kind of waiting, you know, and I had already worked with a lot of people in New York, artists and galleries, so it wasn't too abrupt a transition, and one of the weirdest regrets I have, you know, when I was working out at Boston School, David Armstrong really wanted to have me sit for a portrait, and so when I came, I was like, "Yeah, we're going to do that," and it just never happened, and so I've been thinking about that a lot because, even though he died two years ago, there was just a memorial for him last month, and I sort of remembered, you know, that sort of open call that never really materialized, but yeah, so I brought a lot of that, sort of, family with me to New York.

ALEX FIALHO: What was your perception of Thread Waxing?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, the truth is—

ALEX FIALHO: Upon applying.

LIA GANGITANO: —I really didn't know that much about it, and so my, sort of, quick research really pointed to the causes, you know, why they wanted to hire a curator. Thread Waxing started in 1991, was founded by Tim Nye, who was in the Whitney program at that time, and, you know, he sort of started the space pretty casually. You know, he was just like, "Oh, let's just rent a space and do a show," and then it turned into another show, and it didn't really sort of formalize itself right away, and I sort of arrived midway through its 10-year existence, and so there was, like, a strong perception that they needed a staff curator because people were a little bit like, "Oh, Thread Waxing Space is trying to be The Knitting Factory, The Kitchen, Exit Art, Artists Space, all rolled into one," because they did tons of music programming and performance, as well as pretty, now, iconic exhibitions, always by guest curators and artist curators. People like Christian Leigh, who, you know, in some ways, is somewhat forgotten, but his influence, I think, is still being felt, in that he sort of contributed to this kind of star curator idea or placing this sort of curatorial utterance at the forefront with artists and artworks kind of being secondary, and so that also gave me, like, something to speak back to or be in dialogue with because I was, like, so not interested in this idea of foregrounding the curator. It was sort of antithetical to my approach, which was about artists, so you know, I got here, and I sort of inherited some projects. Like my first exhibition, which was called *Spectacular Optical* was something that was already on the books, but I sort of picked it up, you know, in its early stages and sort of took it in a different direction than, perhaps, was expected. You know, this was a show including and about David Cronenberg, the film maker. So, you know, if Boston School made people think of me as sort of a film person, which wasn't really true, *Spectacular Optical* made people think I was, like, a film person, but those things are always kind of temporary. But I did like the sort of conversation with the like sort of history, or recent history, of the organization that I had just joined.

ALEX FIALHO: Was Christian Leigh the curator there long-term—

LIA GANGITANO: No.

ALEX FIALHO: —or was he a guest curator?

LIA GANGITANO: No. He did one exhibition at Thread Waxing Space which was called *I Am the Annunciator*. All of his shows were based on Alfred Hitchcock films and, you know, they were like this barrage of artwork, like, floor-to-ceiling hang and, like, Warhol, Cathy Opie, all over the place, but it—they didn't really stress a sort of individual artist perspective, but, like, almost, like, a total image that all sort of channels back to his ideas or something. And he became somewhat notorious when he kind of faked, like, some sort of Arsenale Venice Biennale exhibition, where he got all these artists to be in the show and to ship the work to Venice, and then he never paid the bills, and artists didn't get their work back, and he disappeared, and you know, it was like a thing.

But I guess, even just talking about that just makes me remember, like there's something so throwback, almost, like not my '80s part of what he was doing—yeah, that made me want to talk back to it, and so the show that I sort of did in response to *I Am the Annunciator* was called *Mr. Fascination*, and it was sort of adopting his method of basing the show all on a film maker, but I chose like John Cassavetes, and I guess it's sort of interesting to think about now because Jochen Klein is about to have an exhibition at Galerie Buchholz that opens this week that Julie Ault is installing, and he was part of Group Material, but that was sort of the first—I mean, it was an opportunity for me to include his work in this exhibition because it sort of dealt with, like, sentimentality and fragility of relationships, and it's very much like deploying this almost Hallmark, greeting card sort of aesthetic, but to some ends, and I was sort of contextualizing—I was very—I was very influenced by a piece that David Deitcher wrote for Parkett called *Sense & Sentimentality*, I think is the title, and it's basically a piece he wrote in response to a very lukewarm reception that the Ross Bleckner and Felix Gonzalez simultaneous shows at the Guggenheim had.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh yeah.

LIA GANGITANO: And so, you know, that seemed extremely problematic that, you know, it was frankly homophobic and, you know, Felix was, I think, already passed away—

ALEX FIALHO: '96.

LIA GANGITANO: So it seemed like a real affront to the sort of issues that both Bleckner and Gonzalez-Torres were about, you know, like, David's piece of writing is really talking about heroic modernism and how, you know, people don't like emotionality or sentimentality. It's like considered weak or gay—so I was very—

ALEX FIALHO: The lack of response or the way that critics wrote about it was the affront, and David was responding to that?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, yeah. And that piece already had a big influence on me and on the exhibition, and I really wanted to talk about, you know, why are feelings not valued, and so, yeah, and so we worked with Hudson at Feature, and he hooked us up with Jochen Klein's estate, which is run by Wolfgang Tillmans, who has his boyfriend and, you know, obviously working with estates was something that I wanted to keep doing in shows with other artists from Making Work Now. It was sort of—yeah, important to me. Ellen Cantor was also in that exhibition, and that became like a very significant, long-term relationship—other shows and I, sort of, informally manage her estate with her bother.

ALEX FIALHO: Jochen and Ellen were both in that show?

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Just for confirmation.

LIA GANGITANO: So I have to say that, in this dialog with these—Christian Leigh's curatorial premises, I soon became, like, tired of group shows altogether, and I think it was pretty early in the life of the organization that Cathy did the—Cathy Opie did the project with—the estate project for Artists with AIDS, so we showed the large-format Polaroids. That was becoming more of my interest, was like utilizing that 7,000-square-foot loft in SoHo for single projects or a solo artist. I mean, Cathy was collaborating with Ron Athey on that project, and that's how we met, so things unfolded pretty quickly on that project and I think, I guess—the point, I guess, I'm making is going from thematic, large-scale group shows to, you know, working with individual artists, it really had to do with wanting to have, like, deeper relationships with artists, and that kind of—"Drop your work off at the beginning and pick it up at the end," felt really, I don't know, unsatisfying in some way.

And I will mention, like, we did have a project room format, meaning there'd be, like, one large space, and then for a period of time, we had a project room space, and in that was, like, the first project I did with Lovett/Codagnone. And, you know, their work and my relationship with them was very important and, you know,

grew into other projects. But I think I knew them through maybe Frank Wagner, and he had shown their work quite a bit. So, you know, these are just kind of some of the significant relationships that kind of carry through—that started, for me, at Thread Waxing.

ALEX FIALHO: When you said that Christian Leigh has had an influence or—what were you referring to?

LIA GANGITANO: I just really found that his foregrounding of the curator at the expense of artists was really problematic and, you know, that it sort of spawned a whole new idea of what a curator is. So, I mean, I don't think we would have, like, Hans Ulrich Obrist if we didn't have Christian Leigh, even though most people who are younger don't remember this guy [laughs]. So, it was really just—I felt—I guess I always want to rebel against something. And so, that seemed like a good thing to, like, shout back at, that somehow you could still do a project with many artists that allowed the artist to be, like, in the foreground. And, you know, you can see it even in, like, like, invitation cards, like, where it's like the title of the show, the curator's name and, like, the artists are either tiny print or not even there.

I blame Christian Leigh for that [laughs], actually. Or, you know, even the installation design where it's like putting that many works, like, floor-to-ceiling is not even good for the work. It's like people's artwork on the floor getting kicked. You know, on so many levels, it was, like, kind of a shift toward, okay, so all this artwork, meaning what the artists have to say, is strictly in service to the curator. And, you know, that's kind of normal now.

But I sort of attributed it to this sort of splashy guy who worked for Bartolucci, and everyone was kind of fascinated with him. And, you know, when I say it's not my '80s, you know, it's more of that sort of polish and money and, you know, kind of self-aggrandizement through art, which I found, you know, kind of insulting, so.

ALEX FIALHO: How about—seeing all the projects that you've done at Participant, I completely see the sort of artist centered solo project format. But with the Boston School as sort of a big jumping off point—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: How did that group show, maybe because it was coming from Mark—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —as a central focal point? Or I don't know, how does that kind of group show relate to the ways that you're thinking about group shows and artist shows?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, this has been another aspect that's been somewhat glossed over by the reception and people kind of latching onto this idea of the Boston School. I mean, technically, the way that we saw the project and the way it was, like, formatted in the space as well as in the publication, was that *Boston School*, the exhibition, incorporated a survey from the estate of Mark Morrisroe, which—

ALEX FIALHO: That's kind of what I was thinking.

LIA GANGITANO: —typically, it's kind of a weird format, but—so the whole second floor of the museum was the survey from the estate, which was ostensibly organized by Pat. She chose the work. She organized the work. I can't remember if we talked about this previously, but, you know, working with Pat on the arrangement of the Polaroid room was, like, so impactful to me because of her choices, you know, not to show the self-portraits chronologically.

Of course, she wanted to include the sort of death and dying images because Mark made so many of them. And he asked his friends to take Polaroids of him when he was, you know, extremely thin, extremely ill. You know, the sort of image that has become, like, synonymous with that moment, making visible the ravages of HIV/AIDS.

So, it's not that she didn't want to include those pictures; it's that she didn't want to end on those pictures. So, they were incorporated into self-portraits where Mark is gorgeous and young and funny and goofy and Paris, New York. But as you go around the room, you're not, like, getting to, like, oh, and then he died, you know? So, the last image of the show is actually a Polaroid of a cloud. And so, I just thought she really made a certain statement in not wanting the work to just become about that deathbed image. So—and that was just one room of the show. There was, like, another section that was all the sort of sandwich, negative, color photographs.

ALEX FIALHO: Which are amazing.

LIA GANGITANO: Which are amazing. And the zines *Dirt Magazine*, we had the original, like, mockups and a lot of ephemera. And so, you know, it was, like, a survey, and I can't say exactly what percentage of the estate comprised that exhibition. Pat maintained the estate, so I assumed it was a lot of it. But it wasn't until I saw the *Winterthur* exhibition after the acquisition of the estate that I was like, "Wow," I think that Pat maybe said it was,

like, 80 percent of the estate. But it wasn't in 1995 because the show in Switzerland was huge and, you know, very clear because I don't think that you needed to know anything about Mark's life and history going into that show because it was all very, very obvious.

They showed tons of Polaroids, a lot of black-and-white work that I had never seen before, but almost as a segue into Mark—you just see an artist develop. So, like, through the way that the rooms were arranged chronologically and by sort of format, you kind of see the moment in this young person's life where, like, they figure it out, which is, like, the sandwich negative prints where he would take a color photograph, re-photograph it in black and white, take the two negatives, and print those together. You just see, like, he found his thing.

It was, like, the signature, you know, image, and he just went for it, like, really hard. And, you know, that's a vast amount of work. And then you can see, without reading a single wall label, like, then Mark got sick. And that's when you start to see the incorporation of x-rays, dental records, stuff he had access to in a hospital room, that—then you see his struggle to just keep making, keep making, you know. It's quite profound that, you know, no didactic could really tell you that because it's right in the work.

And so, but back to the show within the show. So, surrounding this survey of, you know, a pretty decent portion of Mark's estate, then there were these, kind of—then the group show kind of, like, hugged it, you know what I mean? So, you entered the group show, which Mark's work was not incorporated in. It was all on the second floor. So, the first floor and mezzanine galleries that you would see first before Mark's work, you know, it was, like, yeah, half of the show, and Mark was the other half.

And, you know, it was designed that way for that reason to show the sort of family and friends, these people that photographed one another that had sort of similar rebellious instincts against sort of documentary photography. You see—we chose work of Tabboo!'s very specifically that would then be, you know, recognized, like, oh, so Tabboo! painted these objects, a still life he made, and then you might notice a photograph of Mark's of that same setup or that same group of objects.

So, for whatever reason, that distinction, maybe—we were just trying to get away with something, you know? We wanted to get away with doing this exhibition of a deceased 30 year old, unknown—relatively unknown artist. And that was how we were going to do it [laughs]. So, if the sort of structure fell away or receded as years go by, that's fine. But it was a very deliberate and calculating maneuver to get Mark the show.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. Did his prominence continue straight away or how did that develop over time? Because now, you know, the estate is in *Winterthur*; there's the, more or less, catalogue raissone—

LIA GANGITANO: There's been other books, yeah. And it definitely took—I mean, it developed over time and built over time, I would say, this sort of—I mean, there was a consistent growing interest in Mark's work after that exhibition. And yeah, so the Twin Palms book. I can't remember exactly, like, what next, but it definitely felt like it sort of put his work forward in a pretty major way. And, you know, so when Pat passed away, and that estate went to her husband, you know, it wasn't totally clear what was going to happen. And I remember speaking with Colin, you know, around the time Threat Waxing Space was closing, and I knew I was going to start Participant.

There was a period of time where, you know, Colin kind of wanted to go, like, kind of merge, almost, and, like, the key to that was Mark's estate. Like, he was very interested in, like, can Participant, which probably didn't even have a name yet, you know, assume responsibility and care of Mark's estate as part of its sort of founding mission? And I was like, definitely, and there are founding drafts of business plans that include that, like being a place for that estate to be, which didn't happen because it was acquired by Michael Ringier through Beatrix Ruf.

ALEX FIALHO: How did that land for you?

LIA GANGITANO: I would say that I think everybody involved knew that it was a really good thing for Colin because the sort of burden of inheriting Pat's estate meant a lot of financial, you know, issues around estate taxes and, you know, it was complicated. And Colin became sick so shortly after Pat's death that it just seemed, like, you know, like it was just so much to deal with. And, you know, so it seemed in a way that it was, like, a great relief that the estate would be cared for and maintained at this very high level of care and that it would be seen.

So, it wasn't without, like, a certain amount of sadness to be, like, oh it's going to be in Switzerland. But it seemed like it was good for Mark's work. And it meant, like, for posterity, it's, like, refrigerated storage. And I don't think, actually, the Polaroids will ever see the light of day again. They were all shown in facsimile form because Mark's methods were pretty unconventional with the Polaroids. And the way that that happened Elko Wolf, who worked for the Polaroid Corporation, like, in Cambridge Massachusetts, I think Mark knew or thought that Polaroid gave a grant to Nan. And so he wanted money, too.

So, I don't know. I've heard many versions of this where he, like, you know, approached Elko for support and instead of being able to give him money, Elko provided Mark with a pretty endless supply of Polaroid film, both negative and just regular Polaroid without negative. But often, it was, like, outdated or discontinued or something that required a lot of process that he never really did. So, he was playing pretty fast and loose with these different types of film and, you know, I don't, I think that there's, like, conservation questions and so, I don't think they'll ever be in the light, which is a little sad, but it's also, you know, I guess, posterity. So, yeah. It was bittersweet, I guess you could say.

ALEX FIALHO: Yesterday, we ended on a note around wanting to make sure we talked about Ramsey a little bit.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And I just wanted to open that up.

LIA GANGITANO: Sure. Yeah, I mean, when we were working on the *Boston School* show at ICA, I forget what event or opening, this guy just walked up to me and handed me a business card, which said Mark Morrisroe [laughs]. And that was how I met Ramsey. And I learned pretty quickly that he had, you know, been writing this biography of Mark. I'm trying to remember; I think they met when Ramsey was living in New York and he was working at The Odeon. But I'm not sure if they met at the restaurant. And they were boyfriends and, you know, at the end of Mark's life, Ramsey had been conducting intensive interviews with Mark. Mark wanted Ramsey to write, like, a really extravagant drama-filled biography of him. So, Ramsey really took that task very seriously, and we published a couple of chapters in *Boston School*.

The book has never been published, but Ramsey continues to, you know, really put a lot of his life's energies into Mark's legacy. So, he recently did a book called *Mark Dirt*, which incorporates a lot of his ephemeral collection. Like his research where he, you know, Mark used to like to tell people that his father was possibly the Boston Strangler, so Ramsey did, like, DNA testing on the person who turned out to be not the Boston Strangler anyway [laughs]. You know, so there's all these weird science pages of documents, like, proving the not Boston Strangler is not Mark's dad and it's, like, weird report cards and psych evaluations of Mark, you know, from when he was in art school and letters and notes between them.

And so, you know, I don't know if it's—I think it's fair to say, like, that book was—I'm trying to remember—I mean, it was just published a couple of years ago. But I think Ramsey was reacting to the sort of more sanitized version of Mark's work. And he wanted to do something more Satan-ized, as he called it. So, that was the *Mark Dirt* book, which I wrote, like, a short piece. And the piece that I wrote—

[Dog barks.]

Shhh. The piece that I wrote for the *Mark Dirt* book is very short, but it was really about Mark's films and his obsession with Tennessee Williams. And it really sort of wanted to get at, just prior to his death, Mark expressed a desire to make another film. And it was like *Hello from Bertha*. It was based on a Tennessee Williams play called *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*, which, you know, features a very, like, surly and obnoxious, like kind of Mark's mom-like lead. And it's about her, you know, tortured artist husband who thinks he invented color.

So, I mean, there's a lot of really great hyperbolic stuff in there that I could see why Mark was attracted to it, so. It's really about, like, the film he never made but wanted to make. You know, with Mark's estate, you can really see Pat's crafting of, like, a signature style in terms of really putting forward the Polaroids and the sandwich negative color prints, you know, as his most accomplished work. I think it was unclear whether Pat felt that the films should be included in that. You know, because they're so campy and raunchy and, you know, she might have had questions about those.

But, you know, it was sort of deep in her soul, like, she was sort of a media and performance artist, so she did eventually incorporate the films into the estate. But things like Mark's paintings were excluded and those were bequeathed to Rafael. And so, I think that Pat didn't feel that the paintings—I don't know what she felt. I can't really say, but they didn't add to the legacy of the entity that they wanted to put forward. And I know that they also argued and both, like, sort of changed sides of their argument around the exposure of all of the notations and markings in the borders, which, of course, seemed to me like the most significant—a very significant part of the artist's voice. And yeah, so they both changed their mind about that. Like, what's a good career move?

ALEX FIALHO: They both being?

LIA GANGITANO: Pat Hearn and Mark Morrisroe.

ALEX FIALHO: I see, so in dialogue with each other.

LIA GANGITANO: Something that they, you know, bandied about career wise, you know, like, what's a better

move? And—

ALEX FIALHO: I love them with the margins written in.

LIA GANGITANO: Oh yeah, it's amazing. It's really amazing. And, you know, it sort of preserves, like, Mark's voice. But I think that what was clear when the exhibition came to Artists Space was that that voice could also easily recede if the work is edited. Like, if there's less drag, less camp, less surliness, then you do lose the voice, meaning, that show is very focused, I think, on beauty, or I don't know. Like, some sort of Neo-Romanticism that, you know, has nothing to do with Mark's personality or, you know, he was, like, punk from Boston.

So—but the absence of the more campy stuff meant that—I mean, I remember being in the room and someone was reading, like, the inscription. There was a photograph of Mark in the shower that he had given to Brent Sikkema. And he wrote this, like, super sarcastic inscription, like, "Dear Brent, for all that you taught me," or something like this. And that in that particular context, you could read it as, like, really sweet and sincere or something, which that was not Mark's way. And, you know, he was being really sarcastic. So, yeah, work is meant to be shown in different contexts with different interpretations.

But in, you know, working with Mark's estate for so long, with the people that were really close to him, you realize that—how quickly their voice can recede into the background, and they sort of slip away a little bit more. And that's just what, I think, what happens over time. So, any way to sort of recall and remember and, you know, utilize the sort of firsthand relationship seems really important. But, you know, that's not necessarily, like, museums' jobs or, you know, like, it's tricky. But, you know, I don't know what will happen next with Mark's work. We'll have to see.

ALEX FIALHO: It has a significance for me. It's—the first review I wrote for *Artforum* was of Mark's show at Clamp Art, and I remember sitting in that space. And that was an interesting show in that it kind of had an example of a lot of the different processes that Mark used. And I just remember sitting there and reading the *Boston School* book in the gallery all day and just being in the middle of it, and really coming to understand the importance of Mark's work—

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —from that book in particular, as a reference.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And then just seeing a few different types, the sandwich prints, and all the different displays, so.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah. Like, Brian Clamp pretty much, soon after the *Boston School* show, like, kind of did his own version of the show and, like, didn't really tell me, which, you know, is no big deal. It just felt—

ALEX FIALHO: In a commercial context, though?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, it felt a little bit strange. And, you know, it's like fine. It's just—there are definitely like, oh this is, like, an unauthorized copy and then there was, like, a museum show in Spain where the curator, you know, very openly was in touch with me and a lot of other people. You know, so both the unauthorized and authorized sort of sequels or remakes, I mean, it's all good.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

LIA GANGITANO: It's just my awareness or involvement in those things has been disparate, to say the least [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: One thing I've talked about with Rafael Sánchez, who loaned me the copy of the *Boston School* publication I have, when I walked into your apartment yesterday and had it in my bag, you said, "Oh, where'd you find that?"

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: Because it's definitely a—

LIA GANGITANO: It's hard to find.

ALEX FIALHO: —hard-to-find publication. But it's such a reference and resource. And, you know, even in that, I did an oral history with Jack Pierson a couple weeks ago and I'll do Nan Goldin in a couple weeks. Even what it means for their work is important, as a text. So, it's unfortunate that it's as hard to find as it is, I would say. Rafael, and then, as a result me, kind of dreamed of a reprint or some sort of way to make that publication

distributable. So, anyway, I'm just saying that out loud.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, yeah I feel like—

ALEX FIALHO: It's coming up on 25 years, even, I was realizing.

LIA GANGITANO: Oh my gosh, wow, yeah, that's true.

ALEX FIALHO: In three years.

LIA GANGITANO: That means I'm old. Yeah, I mean, that project definitely fell within a tenure of the ICA, which, you know, was definitely one of transition and struggle and the current version of the ICA Boston is very different. I mean, I was, like, I wonder if they have any copies or do they throw them out, you know, because it sort of represented the previous period of time.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, wow.

LIA GANGITANO: I don't really know. It wasn't, like, a huge run. And I worked with, like—Primal Publishing were, like, two friends of mine, my college roommate and her boyfriend. You know, it was such a labor of love and very modest and old style. Like, go on press to some place, you know? It was, like, so pre-digital in a way.

But yeah, it would be interesting to revisit and, you know, it had a huge—I mean, the reverberations, you know, I probably said this before, is, like, there would have been no Greer Lankton show two years ago at Participant had I not done that exhibition, you know, in 1995. Like, all the seeds were planted then.

ALEX FIALHO: Because?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How so? Feels appropriate for you to say that, as I see this photo by Nan of Tabboo! and Mark over the photo of Greer hanging in your bedroom.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, it's—

ALEX FIALHO: That's a good duo.

LIA GANGITANO: Well, because of Nan, mainly, that was how I learned about Greer's work. Also, *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing,* which included Greer's work as well as several of the artists in Boston School. Yeah. It just seemed kind of, like, faded, somehow. Yeah. Everything that the Boston School artists exposed me to in terms of, like, you know, different ideas of community, different ideas of risk and precarity, but also being artists who largely gravitated toward the East Village at that time, you know, there was a lot of commonalities. And also, in a way, I mean, obliviously, Tabboo! and Greer were friends, and they share a lot of affinities in terms of, like, their work. And yeah. It just really, I guess, just, it felt faded somehow.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you learn anything in terms of method that you think might have helped, too? I mean, you've done a lot of work around artistic legacy, so this isn't by any means the next project that addressed an artist's legacy. But is there a—

LIA GANGITANO: I mean, I probably wasn't that conscious of it when working on Greer, but certainly being, like, persistent in a way about finding out everything I could. I mean, I think maybe the saddest part was just revisiting, like, the loss and devastation of, like, Greer's immediate sort of peer group and time, meaning, you know, she was very connected to Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz, so of course, that was very kind of similar in that she was a muse to so many photographers. But, you know, when you're looking for work of Greer's, invariably it's like, "Oh, that person is dead, and their partner is dead."

And, you know, you're really digging up, you know, just a lot of, like, emotional turmoil. And, you know, just literally, it's just painful. When you see, like, all the circles around the person are, you know, so impacted. And what I really thought about when I was meeting certain of Greer's friends who are also, you know, friends and colleagues of the Boston School artists, it was almost palpable, this realization that the loss of their friends, in many cases, brought people together. But it, oftentimes, split people apart, as well. Like, people who were really close lose someone in between the two, and then they just can't be friends anymore, you know?

So, there was that kind of pain also within, you know, it was a community, and that community was ravaged and the people left behind were damaged by that. So, it definitely—it was very connected in terms of, like, as a process. I mean, it was not fun. It was really not fun. It was sad. And yeah. I mean, I had fun with Paul and other people, but mostly, it was, like, very hard emotionally.

So, yeah, I guess it's funny to look at sort of a long view of your work which you're too busy doing it to have any sense of it being planning or connecting the dots or calculating certain—you know, it's just—it's almost, like, unintentional. But then when you look at it as a whole, you're like, oh, so these kind of strands or strains of interest that just kind of go through everything or, you know, connect a lot of disparate seemingly disparate projects that I'm like oh, of course, that's really connected.

And yeah. I guess it's—I mean, my career is, like, going always in this sort of backwards trajectory of like not going into more formal or museum or institutional settings going the opposite way also means, you know, I'm pursuing what I believe in or want to do. Like, no one's telling me what to do, so maybe it seems much more coherent because I'm not working within an institution that is giving me, like, parameters. I'm kind of, like, listening to artists and pursuing the context around the work, not, like, the individual genius, but it's like who is around this person. And so, maybe I'm not curtailed by this sort of other constraints, so it becomes a bit more of, like, a family tree or something.

ALEX FIALHO: I like that, family tree. Let's move actually, then, back into Thread Waxing—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —as a context for you. How were you choosing shows there? And what were some of the projects that feel like they stand out?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, definitely the two that I mentioned, *Spectacular Optical* and *Mr. Fascination*. Those were, like, very defining for me, and I was, you know, we were collaborating with an organization called Trans Arts Cultures Media. And, you know, we published the *Spectacular Optical* book with them, and then I wrote two essays about the sort of response to Christian Leigh sentimentality, David Deitcher. So, I had sort of a publishing sort of partner for those projects, which was really important. But, you know, it was my job to look at all the proposals that were still pouring in and so, we did invite others to curate projects there.

Bill Arning curated an exhibition about gym culture, and Warren Neidich curated an exhibition about conceptual art as a neurobiological praxis. So, I was making selections almost, like—with Warren's show, it was like this weird moment where people were really into—I forget what we called it. It was like that era was zombie formalism. It was, like dumb art or something. And I was just like, "Oh god, dumb art, that's, like, so awful." And then I saw this exhibition proposal, which was all, like, maps of the brain and, you know, chronicling the history of conceptual art as it relates to, like, yeah, the brain.

So, I was like—I mean, I was like, I want to do this, you know? It was, like, very different than kind of what was happening around. So, I, you know, worked on other people's projects as well as my own and, you know, working with the estate project; that was really important. Cathy Opie and Ron Athey. We continued to do music programming. That's how I came to know Anohni, through a CD sent in the mail. And I put Sadie Benning in, like, a very early—in my time there I did an exhibition about painting called *Message to Pretty*. Sadie was in that, Enoch Perez, and—oh, Eileen Myles wrote for the catalogue. And Eileen, at that time, was curating a—I think she curated some readings—well, maybe that started at Participant.

But you know, there was always kind of an eagerness to have other people, like, to support other people's organizing and curatorial work. So, I guess the transition into the solo shows, I guess, you know, at the time of Lovett/Codagnone's project room, concurrently with that was a solo exhibition by a Norwegian artist named Børre Sæthre who I basically just met at the ISCP, which didn't have a C then. It was before the curatorial program. So, he was in residence.

And that was kind of how I met artists from other places, predominantly, because I really didn't travel as much once I came, you know, it wasn't, like, mandatory for me to go to Venice and Documenta, you know, that wasn't like required viewing for me anymore because I wasn't working in the museum.

[Side conversation.]

LIA GANGITANO: Okay. So, I was really visiting, you know, the studio programs. And that's how I met Børre and we—I think the last exhibition at Thread Waxing Space, which would have been the summer of 2001, was, like, a direct product of the last time that I did that, you know, art show international travel. So, that must have been—I think it was in 1997 when Venice, Documenta, and Sculpture projects in Minster were all at the same time. And I was sent to go see all those shows by the ICA.

And while I was in Germany, I was doing my interview for Thread Waxing Space. So, it was definitely, like, right as I was getting ready to go. But that's where I saw Sigalit Landau's work for the first time. So, it did take all those years to make that exhibition happen. And it was, you know, the last, it was the last show on Broadway at Thread Waxing. So—

ALEX FIALHO: Why did they close?

LIA GANGITANO: I think, you know, the founder, Tim Nye, was—Tim was always, like, a person very ahead of his time, and he had a lot of projects that he started—almost, like, too soon or something. He founded *Sonic Net*, which was, like, the first, like, online music magazine. And he was really into, like, broadband. He just—he was always into stuff, like, almost really ahead of its time. You know? Like I feel that—and he, like, has a very entrepreneurial spirit.

So, I think he just didn't want to do it anymore, and I think that the board and the organization was maybe too young to know that we should have, you know, changed the name, changed the space, but keep the 501(c)(3), you know, because now that I look back on it, I'm just like, "That's like giving up a rent-stabilized apartment; you just don't do it." You know, it's, like, really hard to start from scratch. And I really learned that the hard way because, you know, you're starting from zero with city, state, and federal funding; whereas we would have had 10 years of fiscal activity. You know, from a practical standpoint, it was probably a really bad idea. But in terms of, like—

ALEX FIALHO: To close Thread Waxing and transition to Participant.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, I mean, I didn't know that at the time or I would have asked him [laughs]. But it was complicated. So, you know, obviously, that timeline is really strange. It was, like, doing this incredibly ambitious and overwhelming project with Sigalit, clearing it out in the summer, saying goodbye to the space, which, you know, looks like a Michael Snow film. You know, it was like, you could see it from Broadway to Crosby Street. You know, it was amazing. Saying goodbye in August, and then, obviously it's September 2001.

So, I mean, it kind of feels like now a little bit, like this sort of soul searching of like, "Oh, I'm starting this new organization and it's 9/11, and I'm in lockdown for weeks and weeks and weeks, not really knowing what's going on." So, I'm kind of having similar feelings now, where it's just, like, "Oh, what's the point?" And then, like, "Oh this is way more important now." You know, you just go back and forth, feeling completely dejected and then mood swing to completely defiant, and it just keeps bouncing back and forth.

So, that was very much how I felt in the fall when I was trying to start up an organization and, you know, some of the most boring stuff, like, no one's writing insurance policies for Manhattan. It's like, oh, so I can't get a lease. You know, there was just all this practical stuff that was made very complex because of the situation that had nothing to do with art, you know? It was just, like, the world. So, it took a bit of time.

ALEX FIALHO: Were you already in the throes, or at least in the midst, of founding Participant as Thread Waxing came to a close?

LIA GANGITANO: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: How much time did you have, when Thread Waxing was no longer going to be, and then were your eyes already set on, not transitioning to another institution, but creating your own?

LIA GANGITANO: I think I knew for, I don't know, a number of months and many of my founding board members were affiliated both with ICA and Thread Waxing Space.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were they?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, like, my director at Thread Waxing Space, Ellen Salpeter, she's on my board still since the founding. Tim Nye, who started Thread Waxing Space, you know, his foundation gave me a startup grant. It was, I think, $25,000 to start Participant. You know, I used my severance pay [laughs]. So, you know, it was very linked, and there were people, you know, extremely involved with Thread Waxing that just kind of helped me in very significant ways to start Participant. So, yeah. I mean, I had started writing up, you know, mission and the sort of organizational ideas and forming a board. But nothing to do with physical space at that point, although, prior to the decision to close Thread Waxing, we knew we had to move.

So, a lot of real estate research had gone on, so it was sort of that, plus a sort of realization of what things were like in the sort of immediate aftermath of 9/11. You know, it was very clear to me that I needed to work in my own neighborhood, that it wasn't going to be about moving to some new place, that there was no way I was going to be able to do what I needed to do without a sort of neighborhood network, not really to do with art. I mean, it was my friend Terry who had a store downstairs who hooked me up with her real estate person—I mean, her insurance person so that I could get an insurance policy, which I needed to get to rent a space.

So, you know, a lot of it was, like, business stuff. Like, the owners of Piano's really helped me figure out some stuff. They were opening that bar at the same time. So, that was the kind of thing that was really helpful to me because I'd never started a business. I mean, it's a nonprofit; of course I was familiar with aspects of that, but

you also have to, at the same time, yeah, run a business, and I certainly had no clue how to do that.

ALEX FIALHO: Why were you interested in founding—

LIA GANGITANO: I have no idea.

ALEX FIALHO: —your own gallery?

LIA GANGITANO: I don't know [laughs]. Well, because I'm really stubborn, and I didn't want to stop doing what I was doing. And I really believed that artists needed things from nonprofits that they weren't getting elsewhere.

ALEX FIALHO: Such as?

LIA GANGITANO: You know, space to work and produce work: films, installations. I mean, even at that time, I don't think that many of the artists that I was working with had traditional studio spaces. You know, they just didn't have that. And I just, I guess I genuinely believe that many of the artists that were so influential to me from, you know, when I first came, like, Charles Atlas or Michel Auder, you know, because they primarily worked in video their whole careers, you know, they were interested in non-commercial, non-institutional settings as places where work gets made and shown and yeah, I wanted to be that—yeah, gathering place.

I mean, at that time, it's 2001; there's already new models around alternative spaces can be a website; they can be roving; they can be many things. But for me, the physical space was very important and maybe, like, old fashioned. But I wasn't willing to—I didn't want to give that up. It seemed like a really big part of the sort of assets that we provide. I mean, also, there's all that moment a lot of talk of, you know, artist housing, gentrification. You know, I was really responding to a need for physical space, I guess you could say.

I mean, there's other things. You know, a different value system, efforts that are not solely about monetizing art, you know, also, a certain kind of genealogical, you know, attachment to all the things we've been talking about, you know, artists who are no longer living, remembering the sort of struggles of activism. Yeah, so I felt that in that moment when the art world was getting more glamorous and more wealthy, I just—yeah, I wanted to create a space that operated according to a different value system. And I felt like there were many artists who were also interested in that.

And, you know, I mean, I was, like, shocked that an artist like Charlie wanted to do a show at Participant, you know, because he was already so kind of legendary in my mind. But, you know, it made sense given his interest and his career, which was predominantly outside of the sort of market, that that would make sense. Or, you know, in my mind, like, Renée Green is an artist who, you know, has shown internationally in museums for, like, decades. And so, I mean, I was introduced to her work by Pat Hearn, and we knew each other for some time, and we had mutual friends in Lovett/Codagnone, but again, it was the same feeling of, like, oh my gosh, Renée wants to do a show. That is amazing.

You know, because not all artists, like, aspire to Chelsea Gallery or, you know, artists get something that they want from working with small nonprofits who really care, and there were a lot of instances like that in the early years. So, you know, Lutz Bacher, we did many projects together. And it enabled me to continue long term relationships like Hunter Reynolds, Kathleen White, Rafael S**á**nchez, Børre Sæthre, the Norwegian artist I mentioned that did a big show at Thread Waxing. You know, it enabled me to continue working, you know, with Kathe Burkhart and Laura Parnes while expanding outward into sort of new relationships, and I mean, I always talk about Charlie's exhibition, which was in the first season, as, you know—Charlie brought his family with him to this fully live exhibition.

So, it was such a gift to have that experience early on, where Charlie's collaborators, like, Yvonne Rainer and Merce Cunningham; they're coming to the gallery to sit for a portrait. But then our other friends, mutual friends, like, that's how I met Stanley Love, who I just did a project with last year. I mean, I was stalking Stanley since [laughs] Charlie's show, like, more than 10 years ago. So, that project—

ALEX FIALHO: When you say Charlie, it's Charles Atlas.

LIA GANGITANO: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: Just putting that on record.

LIA GANGITANO: Charles Atlas. Yeah. So, that was, like, the gift that kept on giving, you know? And it also encouraged me to instigate live projects and it was very influential in inviting Julie Tolentino to do the first project we did together, *For You*, which was a one on one performance, like a durational four week project, but for one audience member at a time. Like, I got really hooked on the live exhibition that sort of Charlie, in my world, kind of invented, sort of.

So, you know, it made me completely rethink what an exhibition is. And we were on Rivington Street at that time and, you know, the lot of exposure and interface with the street and, you know, it was definitely, like, a very eager and open kind of audience, you know, which I think had something to do with the neighborhood. There was still, like, a very fresh and recent memory when everything around here was, like, you know, a theater or art space or graffiti or—you know, like, there was just art everywhere. It wasn't, like, weird to see people making a show or—it was just very normal. Like, street-visible culture down here. I mean, that's changed, like, quite a lot recently. And [laughs] what are you getting into?

ALEX FIALHO: My jacket [laughs].

LIA GANGITANO: Okay. Yeah. But I guess at the time, I felt very little barrier between, like, the sort of urban neighborhood context and, like, what we were doing inside. And, you know, we always—I mean, definitely moving to Houston, even though it's—

ALEX FIALHO: What year did you move from Rivington to Houston?

LIA GANGITANO: We were at Riverton for the first five years, and then we didn't renew that lease, so we moved to Houston, and it was, like, the end of '07. And we opened that space with a play, which was collaboration between Lovett/Codagnone and a playwright, Tom Cole. And we did the play before the space was renovated. So, it was, like, dirt floor. There was no door. It was just, like, a hole. And I was so happy, like, one of the reviews said it was very pre-Giuliani [laughs], which I thought was a compliment. And I kind of just forgot why I was moving. Oh, I know. Because on Rivington, even though it's only a couple of blocks away, there was a lot of, like, shorthand for like, "Oh, it's a storefront gallery. It's very, like, Lower East Side." But as soon as we were on Houston, it was almost, like, instead of, like, looking sort of south, we were, like, staring north.

And, like, the East Village became, like, much more identified with the gallery because we shortly after moving, you know, we did shows with Kembra Pfahler with Tabboo!, with Stephen Tashjian, you know, rather than this kind of storefront Lower East Side performance history, it was much more this kind of Pyramid Club. Sort of, you know, it's weird. I don't really know why that is. But the East Village came back into my life in this very strong way once we moved a block and a half. It's kind of odd.

And so, these different, like, you know, sometimes when I, like, try to map it out or put it into words, it's like, okay, so the Pyramid Club, you know, sort of signals a certain type of, like, performance activity or Black Lips, Performance Cult, where, like, Anohni, Marti Domination, Kembra, Genesis P-Orridge; all these people kind of have, like, this sort of rich sort of history or connection to Pyramid that kind of, you know, overlaps and kind of parallels with the sort of, the ACT UP family, which is people I've mentioned, like Hunter and Julie and Lovett/Codagnone.

But, you know, I did a project with Jonathan Berger; it was, like, a really funny realization when, like, Alessandro saw him and was like, "Oh my god, that's like the teenager who came to all the ACT UP meetings [laughs]." I'm like, "Oh, he grew up." But, you know, so there was just this funny way, like, these different strands of who we are, like, as an organization, we're starting to, like, you know—these shift and change and sometimes you don't know that there's a connection and it comes back around. So—

ALEX FIALHO: How about—

LIA GANGITANO: I was just going to add, like, Charles Atlas, Ellen Cantor, Lovett/Codagnone, and Marilyn Minter, I mean they all showed at the same gallery. Xavier Le Boudin, which was one of the, you know, early 22nd Street Galleries, like when Pat moved there. So, I definitely saw all of their work in that gallery. And yeah. It's interesting the whole landscape sort of shifted. But yeah. People kind of stay in your life, I guess.

ALEX FIALHO: How do you program or make your decisions around who you're going to show?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, I guess—I mean, the way that I tend to meet or become interested in artists is often through other artists, so this kind of, like, you know, building a community around, you know, like yes, I met Stanley Love through Charles Atlas' exhibition, and then I pursued that for, like, many years to make something happen. I mean, through—I think it was, like, a project that Jonathan did with Ron Athey and maybe also Justin Vivian Bond, is probably how I met both Viv and Ron. And like, Jonathan is a good example—Jonathan Berger is an artist, but our first work that we did together was—he proposed an exhibition based on a work of Stuart Sherman, and it was a group show that also included Andy Kaufman, and I was, like, sort of in my not—it wasn't really a part of my art life, but I was a bit obsessed with Andy Kaufman, and I loved Stuart Sherman's work, and you know. But I bring it up because I tend to learn or expand my sort of frame of reference a lot through other curators' work. And so, almost all of the group shows at Participant, with just a couple of exceptions, have been guest curated by artists. And that's like a very strategic way for me to meet artists.

ALEX FIALHO: I like that.

LIA GANGITANO: And I do all the other normal stuff, like visit MFA programs, and go to the International Studio Program. But for the most part, it's, you know, if you're working with an artist, you're going to meet their friends who are artists, and they're going to recommend, and like, those, to me, are the most, like, meaningful forms of, you know, engaging. And I think that's why I would say I don't have, like, a very calculated agenda aesthetically or—I'm not setting out with a plan of like, this is what I'm going to show, and this is what it's going to be. But any consistency is because the majority of the program is, like, I'm meeting artists through the artists I'm working with. So, of course, there's, like, a shared value system or shared interest, you know, amongst people who know each other, and engage with each other's work. And I'm trying to think if there's any good examples. I met Jeffrey Gibson at a Creative Capital retreat, and he said he was into Cher and Leigh Bowery, and that was pretty much—that was that [laughs]. You know, it's so—

ALEX FIALHO: Like M. Lamar through Ron Athey.

LIA GANGITANO: Yes. I met M. Lamar when we were doing Gifts of the Spirit with Ron, a workshop, where Ron invited M. Lamar to play keyboards, basically. And we just hit it off, like, pretty much—

ALEX FIALHO: I can see that.

LIA GANGITANO: I was like, what do you do? Well, what do you—you want to do a show? Or we should do something. And it just kind of—I mean, yeah. I mean, it's like I could tell that, you know, Reginald and Ron were like a family, so—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

LIA GANGITANO: —it's just like, oh—I have like an in-built, already, trust base, or I want to, like, instigate a project, and I would say—yeah. It's—I mean, with Greer—I mean, I never totally fact-checked around this, but my impression of how that happened is that Greer's husband, Paul Monroe, had done an expedition of the ONE Archives in Los Angeles and was sort of—

ALEX FIALHO: Of?

LIA GANGITANO: Of Greer's work.

ALEX FIALHO: How long ago?

LIA GANGITANO: A few years. I've—it was a couple years before Participant. And I think, you know, he wanted to do a show in New York. And the story goes, is he pitched the expedition to the Whitney because the—Greer had been in the Whitney Biennial in 1995, curated by Klaus Kertess, who was introduced to the work by Nan Goldin. And it really was like a big career resurgence. I mean, the majority of, like, Greer's sort of East Village, you know, known career is, like, in the early '80s. Like, '82 to '84. And so, this was, like, kind of her return in '95, which was the year before she died. And apparently, the person at the Whitney was like, okay, well, we're moving. There's no way that we could do this anytime soon. You should talk to Lia. And basically, Paul Monroe had no idea who I was or what Participant was. And so, he called his friend, Marti Domination, who I just, you know, worked with a great deal on the *Dead Flowers* exhibition that was in—at Vox Populi in Philly, and also Participant. We did a major publication, and you know, Marti—

ALEX FIALHO: I'm sorry. What was *Dead Flowers* about?

LIA GANGITANO: It was a group exhibition. It was the only group exhibition I've curated that happened at Participant in the whole, whatever, almost 15 years. That is an—the project was instigated by Vox in Philly, which is like an artist-run space. And they do one guest-curated show per year, anFd it was funded by Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative. And I was like, I can't curate a group show. I'm trying to pay the rent. It's like, I don't do that anymore. But they had secured funding, and they agreed—I agreed to do it because I was like, well, if the show can also travel to Participant, then it would make sense. And so, the show was based on a character actor named Timothy Carey, who—you know, when I'm talking about like, oh, different value system or different gauge of what it means to be a successful artist? What does it mean to have integrity as an artist? He was like a kind of career suicide Hollywood character actor, who basically channeled all the funds he made on the inside into these independent, outrageous, amazing films.

And I think Marti was the only artist in the show that actually knew who Timothy Carey was because, you know, she had a great interest in, I don't know, character actors, and Cassavetes' films, which Timothy Carey was in many, so—Paul Thek was in the exhibition. Breyer P-Orridge, Cynthia Plaster Caster, Kembra. Oh, and very significantly, it was the first time I worked with these—the Alvin Baltrop Trust. There was a very significant number of photographs by Al Baltrop. Ed Halter of Light Industry had curated a film program, and there were lots of performances. Johanna Constantine, Marti. Anyway—

ALEX FIALHO: So, I got us off topic, but I know the *Dead Flowers* show. So, I wanted to stop on that for a second. But Marti knew you from *Dead Flowers*, and Paul called him?

LIA GANGITANO: Right. And so, it was so coincidental. I mean, it was like someone at the Whitney's has called Lia, and he calls Marti. And Marti's like, of course I know who he is. I mean, it seemed, again, like that fated thing. Like—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

LIA GANGITANO: —what are the chances that that would've happened? And basically, by the end of our first phone conversation, I was like, yes. Of course I want to do a show with, you know—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

LIA GANGITANO: —of Greer's work. Like, absolutely. So, yeah. It just—that was how that happened. But of course, the Whitney connection is all because of Boston's school, and you know—

ALEX FIALHO: The reason that the Whitney—

LIA GANGITANO: Would have suggested—

ALEX FIALHO: Was it Elisabeth, or—

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, I think so.

ALEX FIALHO: Maybe let's take a quick pause?

LIA GANGITANO: Okay.

[Audio break.]

ALEX FIALHO: So, one thing that you keep talking about is this idea of a value system, and we've talked around it. In a recent interview with—I don't know how recent, actually, but with the *San Francisco Art Quarterly*, I pulled out a line that you said that I thought was really important. With the quote, "Social character of art making. Familial quality of collaborating. Communal aspects of activism," end quote. That's sort of the backbone of what your work is about. And I'm just curious to hear more explicitly about the value system. And maybe that's a jumping off point for—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —what other things you value at Participant and otherwise.

LIA GANGITANO: Well, I mean, in a way, that quote was probably, like, talking about, like, the sort of genealogical way of looking at, like, how we work. You know, and so, it can be more generally traced to like, many of the artists we work with draw from their experiences in ACT UP and Gran Fury, and—so, the sort of methodology or horizontality or, you know, kind of working together, you know? It's related to like, oh, why do we make so many films as opposed to show so many painters? Well, it's that, like, you need many people together to make a film, or there's an ensemble of actors, you know? So, you know, there's a connection, I think. You know, talking about club performance scene, it's like, similarly drawing on, you know, wanting to be with people and work with people. And also, about having, like, message. You know, like, something to say. Like, you know—and in a sense, even when we left off, we were talking about Greer.

You know, much like I was talking—you know, Mark Morrisroe, I attribute him having an art career now—it's his friends. And it was also Greer's friends or people close to Greer that made that project have a life now. And I just think that that is an important factor. And often, when I talk about Greer, it's also how the project almost demands an afterlife. Like, it demands that you continue, even if the show is over, and we brought part of it to Berlin. And of course, we'd love to do a publication. But really, the afterlife can be just like quietly and methodically trying to place our work in museum collections or, you know, any kind of behind-the-scenes work to make sure that these very incomplete art historical cannons are corrected or that people place Greer in an appropriate context. And so, being involved in, like, contemporary art doesn't mean that the influence of these experiences, you know, with AIDS activism, it really is about remembering and bringing the history of artists forward into the present.

So, it's not like a conscious effort so much. It's just like who we are, you know, and a lot of like who the artists are. I mean, with Hunter's show, Hunter was in *Dress Codes*. That was the first time we were together, was '93, but when we did this exhibition at Participant, you know, there was a lot of discussion about what the work was going to be, what he wanted to make. And once I saw his clippings collection, you know, articles that he had

clipped from *the New York Times*, from a very succinct period of time where that was, like, front page news, you know, I really encouraged him to work with that archive, and you know, of course, he made this incredible body of work that—photo weavings from these newspaper clippings. And it was so incredible to experience young people seeing this material for the first time.

One, because it's like completely—it's like a file folder. You know, it's like people who use computers. Who, who is in their 20s, has cut something out of a newspaper? Just what they are alone was unfamiliar. But the way in which, like, the internet has, like, completely changed the way we collect anything, you know? I just have very moving experiences seeing people, visitors reading the articles, and seeing the weight of this collection, and it felt like, how could one amass this today? Like, Google? I mean, it wouldn't really be the same thing.

So, it was very impactful. And he was just doing what he does. You know, like, he's always been kind of a collector, pack rat, hoarder. So, the fact that he came upon this box and made this body of work for the show, you know, it made sense. And it really did this sort of cross-generational dialogue, which I think is really important. And it happens a lot in our sort of more live public events, where, when Conrad Ventur organized these screenings in tribute to Mario Montez, who were working with on a project, and Mario passed away like, I don't know, within two weeks of the beginning of what was going to be a live filming project.

So, Conrad organized these screenings, and it was really quite palpable, like, to see, like, really young members of the audience, you know, having conversations with Mario's boyfriend or colleagues of Mario's. You know—and maybe that's like a very New York-y thing, like where you're often in the same room as, like, a factory superstar and, like, a college student. It's—

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

LIA GANGITANO: —kind of special. But to be kind of like, a point of meeting around certain issues, whether it's HIV or, you know, in some ways, with Hunter, advanced HIV became an important conversation to have. So, I guess what I wanted to also say about Greer, because some of the more meaningful exchanges I had around that show were with, you know, gender and non-conforming young people, who clearly traveled great distances to see the show and, you know, were articulating, like, something which I think about a lot, which is that people want, like, their forebears, you know, they—people want to locate a history that looks real to them.

And I remember having this conversation with Anohni at the Paul Thek opening at the Whitney, where she said something like, you know, this is not like a missing link. This is a missing continent. You know, Paul Thek was so outside of his time, and I feel very much that way about Greer. Like, for whatever reason, it was her time, and you know, people from, like, art, fashion, gender politics, all of it, you know, it was like, I feel like, a great demand for her. And so, I'm responding to that.

ALEX FIALHO: Participant's exhibitions are obviously great. One thing I really love, as a space, is that it feels flexible, in a sense. And that, especially in the context of this Visual Arts and AIDS Epidemic Oral History Project, some of the more live public programming or almost like Pop-upesque projects have felt like it's brought some important histories back to the fore, whether it's the Cookie Mueller—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —series of public programs, which I thought were all fantastic. Gordon Kurtti's *One Night Stands*—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —the project that we collaborated on with Visual AIDS around Chloe Dzubilo, *Transisters*—

LIA GANGITANO: Yep.

ALEX FIALHO: —*and the Goddesses of Rock*. So, maybe let's sit with those three in particular—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —for a minute. Let's start with Cookie Mueller and the book launch and display and programming that came around that project.

LIA GANGITANO: Well, all of the examples that you just mentioned, you know, stress—well, one, like—the Cookie Mueller book is derived from oral history, and so, the fact that people are gathering—you know, all those things are about, like, gathering around an artist and sharing, you know, fairly intimate information about their lives, which is really important. And so, being together is what generates—it's what makes people remember, right? So, it is a really vital aspect of the public programming to just be in a room and talk to each other and be prompted to remember certain things. I mean, for me, beyond the Gordon Kurtti exhibition, which Allied Productions and Carl George so beautifully organized, *One Night Stands* was, I mean—I can say this because I

didn't organize it. I just, you know, I was like the host/janitor type person. I was completely blown away, like, every one of those nights, not because it felt like some kind of reprisal or re-performance or nostalgic reinvention. I mean, these were people, like, showing up and really—while making a tribute to, you know, a 26-year-old artist, who never really got to fully become an artist, it was—felt completely in the present. Like, I don't recall any moment where I didn't feel like everything that was going on was completely relevant to now. So—

ALEX FIALHO: I'll just say, I read the Gordon Kurtti publication initially—it's almost three years now, but hadn't dived into that book. I read it on the subway this morning and was sitting there crying because it's just another artist lost to AIDS. Cynthia's essay is just really strong—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Yeah, it's a very vivid, like—I don't know how else to describe it. And I did have these experiences when I was talking to people about Greer. When someone can just really bring, like, right up in the present moment, like, such a vivid image of, like, who a person was, and what they cared about, and why it's important. And you know, maybe artists and writers and—you know, maybe that's their gift. So, I did feel that quite a lot with Cookie and the Gordon Kurtti project, for sure. Like, this was not about some kind of nostalgia for a past moment. It was about how these artists continue to overlap with the present and are completely relevant. What was the other example?

ALEX FIALHO: Chloe Dzubilo and the—

LIA GANGITANO: Oh, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —*Transisters of Rock*—

LIA GANGITANO: Oh, my gosh.

ALEX FIALHO: *Transisters & the Goddesses of Rock* program, which had a lot of folks like Jayne County—

LIA GANGITANO: Jayne County on Skype, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.] That was a feat. I don't know. I'm patting myself on the back for that one, about teaching Jayne County how to Skype.

LIA GANGITANO: Very, very good job of that. Yeah—

ALEX FIALHO: And then Kembra Pfahler on video, and then—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —Gyda Gash and Kathy Rey, who are in the Transisters band—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And of course, T. De Long—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —and Anohni.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: It was an amazing night. We have documentation of it on Visual AIDS' Vimeo page.

LIA GANGITANO: It was really great. And you know, the sort of—you know, just the sheer amount of loan requests for Chloe's work is, like, incredible. And you know, Chloe is so missed, and a lot of stuff has happened since she passed away that, quite frankly, we always talk about it like, Chloe would not have believed this, you know? Like, Laverne Cox, who was her neighbor, you know, being on the cover of *Time Magazine*. You know, like, these things would have seemed kind of incomprehensible a few years ago, so—

ALEX FIALHO: Where was Laverne Cox her neighbor?

LIA GANGITANO: At the Prince George—

ALEX FIALHO: At the Prince George?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: That's what I thought. Wow.

LIA GANGITANO: And so, like, you know, even like Transparent. All this kind of, like, awareness raising and—it just—yeah, Greer fell right into that moment, where, you know, a lot of attention was sort of gathering around certain issues. So—and you know, I think—yeah, a lot of people assumed that Greer died of AIDS, but I think that was a lot to do with—well, her friends and her—and Nan's photographs, but in a way, I think it sort of—the influence of HIV and AIDS on Greer's life was so profound that the fact that she died of a drug overdose was sort of, I don't know, not—it's not inconsequential, but it's very closely related. So, that was always—not always, but that was often a weird conversation during Greer's shows. Like, this kind of taboo subject of like, well, wouldn't you do drugs if, like, all of your friends were dying around you? You might, you know? So, you know, it's not always, like, bringing up the easiest conversations to have often with, like, strangers in a gallery, but I think that that is also valuable. And we didn't really do any public programming. It was just often a lot of people gathered [laughs] for that show.

And yeah, even in the sense that these were private conversations, often, you know, it was—I swear this is not made up, but like, you know, because the—Greer's *Trolls* were sort of facing the street. Like, people would really stop when they were walking by because they were sort of in your face, like, right at the front, near the door. You know, people could see the exhibition from outside. And this guy came in, and he was, like, their deli guy. And he just recognized the work because, I guess, Greer went to his store, and it was near Einstein's, where he had seen the dolls in the window, and he was just walking by and asked me, "Oh, is she still alive?" and, you know, he was able to, like, kind of fill me in a little bit. And it was just like neighbors in the neighborhood, or—it was just really interesting to me what an impression she left on this guy. And like, he clearly liked her a lot. You know? It was just very unexpected-like things would happen with that show all the time. Like, people would come in. They knew her; they would tell me certain things. It was great. I think that was like, kind of a—it's good that the show was, like, in the neighborhood—

ALEX FIALHO: Definitely.

LIA GANGITANO: —because it allowed for that sort of thing to happen.

ALEX FIALHO: And I'll just say, in terms of the ethos that you're talking about or like the genealogy of how things, organically, just seem to happen in terms of, for instance, with this *Goddesses of Rock* event—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —that we did around Chloe. When we were coordinating it, I was working closely with T.—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —and T. was obviously working closely with you, and we were all working close together. But there was one point where there was just a lot of moving parts. We were trying to make sure—we were trying to involve Anohni—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —who was deeply influenced by Chloe and had a strong relationship, and it was hard to schedule, of course—

LIA GANGITANO: [Affirmative]

ALEX FIALHO: —and then, at one point, I was coming by Participant to see a show. I don't remember off the top of my head what show it was. It must have been, like, early May 2015. At any rate, I went in, and I basically thought that the program might not happen because it was approaching; we hadn't really nailed down the date. We didn't really have a sense—I walk into this space. Kembra is in the back with you and T., and I think had just spoken to Anohni—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —and it went from all kind of up in the air to everyone who was involved—not everyone who was involved, but like, the people who needed to be in the same room—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —were all in the same room, and they just talked—

LIA GANGITANO: Right.

ALEX FIALHO: —to Anohni, too, and it was like you had to almost walk in the door, and then it was—

LIA GANGITANO: It like, clicks.

ALEX FIALHO: —it clicks—

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah. That happens a lot.

ALEX FIALHO: I feel like that's what happens a lot with you in this space.

LIA GANGITANO: It does, really. Or—yeah. I mean, like, definitely a lot of weird collaborations have been born in that way, you know, just being in the same room—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

LIA GANGITANO: —or hanging out in the office. It definitely has that—yeah, it's like a strange quality. Whenever I —I'm trying to picture it, and it's like there's always, like, Gary Indiana's in the middle—

[They laugh.]

ALEX FIALHO: I like that.

LIA GANGITANO: —so he just likes to hang out in our office. It's great.

ALEX FIALHO: I think I'll move us, actually, to—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —now, maybe, considering—I would say that your reputation or you're very well known for being just a staunch supporter of artists and what they are trying to make happen—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —in your space. And I think let's move to a little bit of the relationships you have—working with living artists.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And I think if we're talking about the importance of being in the room or in the space, maybe, the Julie Tolentino *For You* show—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —might be good to talk about a little bit.

LIA GANGITANO: Sure.

ALEX FIALHO: What did you think? Was it 2004?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, it was pretty early in the—I mean, as I said, like, Charlie's live project definitely provided, like, an encouragement—

ALEX FIALHO: It was live in what sense?

LIA GANGITANO: Julie or Charlie?

ALEX FIALHO: Charlie.

LIA GANGITANO: Charlie's exhibition had no existing artwork in it. He basically set up his studio in the lower level at Rivington, and put out a call for people who wanted to sit for video portraits. And so, he was mixing, like, what was being shown in the gallery was, like, a large scale projection of what he was mixing live every day. So, with Julie, I mean, obviously, her work is predominantly performance, durational, movement. The way that we developed that project is Julie was living in New York at the time, and she worked with a choreographer, like, during breaks. It wasn't like a full year, but like, in between shows for like, maybe nine months or so, she would sort of come in and work with a choreographer to kind of develop these site-specific or site-responsive movements in the gallery.

And then, when the show came about, it was about kind of creating this very scripted environment where a performance would take place. And there were video prompts. People would have to book an appointment. When I booked their appointment—when they arrived, they get checked in. They make certain music choices.

People are being led through an experience, but there were just elements I couldn't really predict, such as, you know—you know, the temperature of the gallery had to be, like, warmer than, like, the entrance way. Or, like, Julie didn't want to have any verbal communication while the day was unfolding. So, it became about, like, figuring out how to keep the flow of appointments on schedule, if someone didn't show up, making sure Julie had breaks and water, and was warm enough. I mean, it really never announced itself as such, but in some ways, for me, it became like this—almost like a lesson in care, or you know, having to take care of Julie's needs so that she could do this very physically demanding and intense, like, encounter with, sometimes, strangers. Sometimes, friends. You know, we didn't really know.

So, yeah. That was like a crash course, you know, in—you know, in order for Julie to create the experience for the viewer that she wanted, like, certain things had to be taken care of by me, which are very—it's a very different set of concerns and caring for objects in a gallery, or performance—performers during, like, a finite event. You know, this was like, seven hours a day, sometimes more, every day. As word of mouth about the project, you know, was circulating, we had very few breaks. I think we had to add another week to the project because we were like, overbooked. Yeah. And so, I feel like, you know, Julie's life experience as an activist, doing Clit Club, caring for friends, working in performance troops, dance ensembles, et cetera. I mean, all of that life experience really was channeled into the work.

And you know, I worried that it would be really—like, is it going to be too much for, like, a visitor to—I mean, it's not a very typical spectator relationship. You know, you're having to do things. You know, first, Julie is not really paying attention to you. But then, at a certain point, she is. And I guess I was really learning from that experience, like, again. Like, people—you don't think that the art going audience is looking for this kind of intense connection, you know? People can be very passive in their viewing of art and performance in some cases. And so, it was very encouraging to me that through Julie's, you know—I don't know, just her—it is life experience. It's also training. You know, it was really able to show me that people do want that experience. They do want to have a more active role in, like, an art experience.

So, yeah, I would say that that's just like one facet of Julie's work that—you know, it's pretty unique, I guess. And you know, this sort of close affiliations with many of the artists, I've already mentioned. Like, Lovett/Codagnone and Ron Athey and Vag Davis. I mean, it is a kind of—you know, it's like a bizarre family [laughs] that supports each other, and you know, all of their work is so different, but in a way, their influence on each other is also kind of—you know, it has its roots in a shared history, you know, which is not unrelated to AIDS activism and caring for their friends. I think it's a big part of it.

ALEX FIALHO: You mentioned horizontality. Can you talk a little bit more about what you mean by that?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah. I mean, when I've been like, sort of called upon to sort of think or write about like, what is the alternative space movement mean to you, or how does underground art culture—you know, I've written a few times on the topic, and you know, I try to look back into the sort of original New York alternative arts movement. And those histories often cite feminism and ways of organizing that are not hierarchical. So if you look at, you know, Art Worker's Coalition or Colab, you know, the structure that alternative spaces modeled themselves on were these activist groups that didn't have, like, a boss and, you know, assistance. It was like a collective effort.

So, you know, there's that historical piece that I think of Art Workers' and alternative spaces as borrowing directly from activism, feminist, anti-war, et cetera. And I try to sort of apply that—in terms of the staff structure, which often, like, relates to how we collaborate with artists, meaning we're all in support of each other. You know, I—you know, when I'm working with like, a guest curator, I'm actually really happy that I can be of service to them, you know? Like, help them do their work. I don't feel that because I'm director of the space that, like, anybody works for me, you know? It's like—I realize like, you know, most of my favorite colleagues—many of them are my former students, who I learned a lot from. And I often encourage them, you know, to get involved with Participant, so that I can support their projects. And I don't know exactly how that relates to, you know, how I work with an artist is pretty similar. Like, I want to do work for them. And I think that's what I mean, in a nutshell.

It's like, I don't—I just don't think that any sort of hierarchical structures—I've always felt like that impeded work getting accomplished when I worked at museums. You know, like, it didn't make things run more smoothly that there was this sort of departmental structure or hierarchy. It didn't seem to really match, like, what the work that was being done, which, if you're producing work, you have to be ready to make something you've never made, or fabricate something you've never heard of. Like, I just don't see how kind of corporate hierarchy style/structure can actually accomplish things like that. But again, it is maybe structuring things more like an activist model, like, well, if we all do this together, we're going to get it done. But something like that.

ALEX FIALHO: How about both the history of the space, the site—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —that it's currently located in, which I think is an interesting history to recount—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —and then, also the name, Participant Inc. How did you come to that?

LIA GANGITANO: Oh. Well, the first thing is, yeah. Participant's current location—it was formerly El Mirage. More than a couple of artists have made a subtle reference to that in their projects, you know. I think any artist who works site specific would be interested in—you know, that moment of a—you know, it's sort of—wasn't that long ago, but it does seem like a different New York City.

ALEX FIALHO: What was El Mirage?

LIA GANGITANO: Oh, a sex club. Sorry. And you know—

ALEX FIALHO: Gay sex club? General sex club?

LIA GANGITANO: I think they—oh, no. Gay male, El Mirage. And I think a couple of times, they tried to do La Mirage.

[They laugh.]

LIA GANGITANO: And I don't think it was—I don't think it was as popular, or it didn't really take off. And yeah, Participant—oh, okay. So, that is a much longer time ago. When I was working at Thread Waxing Space, I worked for a period of time with Johanna Fateman, who was a curatorial assistant, I guess, at Thread Waxing. So we worked together, and I think I mentioned—yeah, Sadie Benning. We did a show together, and anyway, during Thread Waxing days, they were forming Le Tigre with Kathleen Hanna, and you know that thing—you know, we spent a lot of time, like, batting around band names because they were starting a band. So, you know, Jo and I would sit around and not do work sometimes, and try to think of like, these lists of potential names for their band, which became Le Tigre. And then, you know, when the band sort of became popular, Jo stopped working at Thread Waxing.

But when I was starting to try to figure out a name for Participant, I kind of hit Jo up because her email from way back then was—I think it was . And for some reason, in my mind, I thought like, participant seven sound like a conspiratorial, like, corporation or something. Or like, almost like a Cronenberg type name. Like, spectacular optical, or you know. I just thought it sounded funny. And like, I wanted—like, I could imagine like a business card that, like, says your name, and then under it, it says participant. And so, I just asked Jo if I could, like, kind of partially steal her email address. And she said yeah. So, it had nothing to do with audience participation, or anything nice. It was more just like, it sounds like an alien from outer space. And my second runner up name was executive secretary. So, I was into that kind of like—we need an office hutch. Like, it was like this kind of pretend office etiquette I found really amusing. Like I'm—you know, I run executive secretary [laughs]. But that's available for band names now.

ALEX FIALHO: That's why you tagged on the "Inc" at the end of Participant? How did that come in?

LIA GANGITANO: I'm very literal sometimes, and I know some people associate incorporated with more like a business-y think. But I mean, to become a non-profit, we had to incorporate, and you know, we are technically an educational corporation in the State of New York with 501(c)(3) status. Yeah, it just—I was just being literal. That's why I'm like, it's there, but it doesn't have to be there, necessarily. It's just a fact. We are incorporated.

ALEX FIALHO: Just one thing I want to get on record—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —about the Smithsonian project and this Thread Waxing—I believe that the Thread Waxing archives are at the Smithsonian Archives [of American Art] now?

LIA GANGITANO: Yes. They were acquired almost at the same time, and in tandem with Colin de Land's photo archive. Like, the press release was one release—coincidentally.

ALEX FIALHO: Coincidentally? Nothing to do with the fact that you were centrally involved?

LIA GANGITANO: Nope, nothing.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay.

LIA GANGITANO: I think they were—you know, trying to describe those acquisitions as having to do with like, alternative, like, art. You know, like a very non-traditional commercial gallery, and a non-traditional alternative space that there archives were somehow, you know, thought about like in the same way. And that's just the programming archive. So, you know, preparing that archive to go to its next home was, like, a big part of my activities when Thread Waxing was closing.

ALEX FIALHO: I would say that Participant is unique in what it does, in terms of what it's capturing—the type of artists it's showing, the community that's galvanized around it often. There would be an immense void if it wasn't operating. And I'm just curious about—I feel like for so many people, it's such an important site.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And I'm just wondering—and it's you as the operation—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —from my estimation. Of course, it's everyone around—that comes around it, but—what I'm trying to get at is—not to say pressure, but—

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —it's such a vibrant, important site, where so many of these histories are being told—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —and kept contemporary, and kept in the living moment. And A, I just want that marked, period. But B, that's something you've worked for decades—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —to make happen. How does it feel to almost be a continent unto yourself, in that sense?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, I definitely—you know, I can't deny the precarity of the organization is, you know, that's real. And we all experience that, you know, oh, yeah. This could disappear at any moment, just like many things. It's not—it's not a given. Its existence is not a given. There have been many times over the course of Participant's life that I'm just like, I don't know, it's really hard to keep it going. And it hasn't really gotten easier. And I do feel like belonging in coalitions or, you know, getting W.A.G.E. Certified, being part of Common Practice—back when the Warhol initiative was happening. You know, the thing that's saved me many, many times over the lifespan of the organization is actually being put in a room with others who are doing similar work, and just feeling like, okay, I'm not alone in this. Like, with the war on initiative, what it was really about—like, a sort of nationwide network of people, completely different from each other, but who were kind of, you know, we were part of like a bigger thing. Like, just existing as a not for profit art space, you know, puts you in allegiance with like, spaces across the country, or spaces, you know, around the world. So, you know, yes, sometimes, I kind of feel, you know, like it's a kind of tough road, with like a small staff or like a small budget. But I always feel very heartened when I feel like I'm part of a larger movement. It's good to be reminded of that. So, I guess—you know, I feel like a strong responsibility to also—you know, it hasn't been like, directly stated, but you know, part of like, instigating these projects or forging collaborations, getting artists to make films or plays or shows, it's about like, insisting that those things are still possible here. Because there's such a prevailing—

ALEX FIALHO: Thank you.

LIA GANGITANO: —I don't know, just sort of pessimism. Like, for as long as I've been—can remember, people have been like, oh, New York is over. You can't be an artist in New York. You can't do this. You can't make a film. Like, I'm just like a brat, and I'm just like, yeah, you can. Like, you can. And you know, I just don't want to be in a world where those things aren't possible for people. That would be terrible. So, it's certainly not easy. It's, you know, really hard, actually. But I just think it's important to create a space where people feel like they can make and say and do, you know—like, their dream project. I'm an Aquarius, obviously, so like dreams are very important [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Have a recent or upcoming birthday?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah, thanks. It happened. So, yeah. Is that what you mean?

ALEX FIALHO: Yes, and thank you for the work, because it's important, across the board. One thing you spoke about was—and it feels powerful and intense, was opening after 9/11.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: Which you talked a bit about the logistics, and how that was difficult, in terms of insurance, or this or that. But I'm curious—and then, you also equated it with a feeling that you feel at the moment—

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —around both dejection and then defiance?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Is there more to how opening after 9/11 might have informed what you do? And also, in zooming ahead to now, how is what is happening right now with Donald Trump's first two weeks in office informing what you do? Or solidifying it?

LIA GANGITANO: Maybe it's kind of what I was reaching at, just before. You know, like this idea that certain situations are kind of engineered to create, like, hopelessness, and a sense that thing are not possible, that you're like, stuck. There's no outside to it. There's no alternative anymore. Like, I just sort of—you know, I feel like that's like, always looming there. Like, this sort of feeling that, you know, it's futile, or that—you know, that's kind of also why I get up in the morning, is to sort of combat that—shut down, out of options way of thinking. You know? I mean, to me, like, art and artists are all about, like, you know, not really having a choice in the matter. I mean, I think any artist is not making artist because they're choosing to. It's like, that's what they have to do.

And so, I mean, what's being engineered right now—yeah, it feels very—it feels maybe more culture wars than post 9/11 because what's happening now, or what feels like the effort in this moment is to set an agenda where you're not even having this—the conversation you want to have, you know? That, to me, was the most frustrating element of the culture wars—it's like we weren't really talking about the things that were important to us. We were like, saying, oh, this isn't child pornography. Like, that wasn't what was happening. So, this is a much more extreme case of that, where people are questioning like, what is real? What is a fact? What is—you know? So, you're constantly—oops. You're constantly bombarded with, like, a reality that you just are like, how is this even—how is this even, like, possible?

I mean, I used to think about this—I mean, in the '90s, it was also like—there is no room—like, it was more—there was a certain period, I guess, after culture wars and things were defunded, and art is bad for you, where all of the sudden, transgression became almost a popular culture thing. Like, there was like this really rapid co-optation by the mainstream of all things indie or alternative. That maybe had to do with the sort of, you know, influence of the internet, where it's just like—I feel like artists felt scared that there was no further transgression that wouldn't be automatically absorbed. And I'm trying to remember what that felt like, actually. Because when you turn into this, like, wave of conservatism, that seems like so quaint and adorable. Like, that wasn't really a problem. So, I guess, to answer, you know, your question, I think more specifically, because I just got caught up in, like, the waves of all these different things. Like, you know, I just want spaces where people feel like they can remember; they can have, you know, potential dreams of, like, moving forward with—you know, I just think—I want those—I don't want to be in a New York City where artists don't feel like they have a chance, you know? And not in a business or money or commercial way. I mean quite the opposite, that there's an exterior to that business model of art as well because I feel like—yeah. Like, there needs to be places where these alternative value systems are put into practice and are given, you know—like, there's more than one way to be a successful artist, and there's more than one way to be remembered. And it's not about exclusions and inclusions, you know? I once got into—I'm not like someone who looks at comments or—comments online—

ALEX FIALHO: You are?

LIA GANGITANO: No, I'm not. You know, the one time that I—I don't know. I don't know if this is like, an appropriate story, but Dirty Looks organized a screening that I think was at Judson Church, and one of the works that were screened was some work of Charles Atlas—*Son of Sam and Delilah*, which is, like, one of my favorite of Charlie's works, but I love so many of them. But it's kind of like, his AIDS piece, where he basically made some correlation between, like, a serial killer and disco dancing. And John Kelly is one of the main performers—

ALEX FIALHO: Singing opera.

LIA GANGITANO: Yes, exactly. And I think—there were other works of Charlie's included, and you know, so there were a couple of points, you know. So, it's John Kelly. In another one of the videos that was shown, it was shown in Florent.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

LIA GANGITANO: One is this kind of Patty Hearst reference. And basically, in the review, the person is kind of taking the whole thing down, and basically, you know, calls John Kelly a lip-syncing drag queen, and calls Florent like, a diner or something. And I just was so annoyed by, like, the lack of information or, you know, basic fact-

checking, that I made a comment. And then, someone came back and lashed out at me, like, you know, oh, sorry, we don't know like—what about—they made it seem like this was, like, esoteric queer history. And I was like, the fact that John Kelly is like a trained operatic singer, or that Florent is like, a known, iconic entity—I'm like, these are not esoteric queer history facts. It's just history, you know? You know, it took—and I was like, I'm never going to comment again because it was just so unpleasant.

[They laugh.]

Like, because even one of the Patty Hearst references was wrong, like—you know, the logo for the Symbionese liberation—yeah, it's just like, come on. That's just history. Anyway, I don't know what the point of that is, other than like, I guess, if those things are somehow foregrounded, or that you can be in this situation, where a shared history or shared genealogy or whatever you want to call it is valued and not marginalized or considered unusual. I mean, I think that that's just—we all want to create those spaces, and we want to open them up, you know, to as many people as we can. Anyway, yeah. And you know, I'd rather, like, you know, create the New York that imagined than, like, bitch about it not existing anymore because even from the minute I moved to New York, I mean, the first people I met—literally, like on this block, practically were—Taylor Mead, who lived across the street. Rene Ricard, who hung out at Max Fish, and Michel Auder, who had a studio on Orchard. It's like, where I was coming from—

ALEX FIALHO: Where did you meet them?

LIA GANGITANO: Max Fish, mostly [laughs] you know, because it was like, mostly the local arts-ish bar, and you know, it was downstairs from here, at the ground floor. So, the whole, like, staff of Max Fish were like, my, you know, protectors when I first moved here. And—but I guess the point is that, you know, from where I was coming from in Boston, like, the factory had already been, like, buried alive as if it was like a historical thing. And I'm just like, no. These are like, my neighbors and friends. And like—I mean, that was really—you know, just important, that kind of—making it very apparent to me that we tend to put things in the past, even though artists carry this stuff with them into the present, if they're lucky enough to, you know, be alive. It's like—so, I wanted to kind of be in the company of, like, people who had this life experience. So, it was like I didn't experience, you know, the Factory or whatever else may have come before. But its impact on the present shouldn't be like—it shouldn't—I guess it's the thing where I was talking about before. Like, it shouldn't recede into the past if it's still happening, you know? And that definitely—you know, it feeds into a way of working, I think. Like, relegating certain activities or practices into a past moment? It—I'm very stubborn about that kind of thing, somehow.

ALEX FIALHO: I'll say a couple things as responses. First is that you mentioned Dirty Looks. And I just wanted to bring in—it's not immediately, because it's not a Dirty Look show, but it was a show curated by Bradford—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —Nordeen, Things: The Queer—

LIA GANGITANO: Oh, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —Legacy of Graphic Art and Play—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —I believe—

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —had artists—Robert Ford, Curt McDowell, Tom Rubnitz, all of whom passed from AIDS-related complications and are not stories, necessarily, fore-fronted around these conversations, so that feels like a show, just to at least have—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —in the air. And then, I wanted to pull out—like I said, I was reading Gordon Kurtti's publication this morning, and Allied Productions, Jack Waters, Peter Cramer, Carl George, who lived—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —catty-corner. You know, for a long time—decades, decades long, Lower East Side residents—at the end of their intro to the book, they said, "This book represents an effort to sustain the fragile, ephemeral narratives that help define the histories of people, movements, and life. We're thankful, as survivors, to serve as witnesses to, and stewards of, this lost moment." And that just struck me as a very moving—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —thing to—

LIA GANGITANO: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: —read this morning, and to think about all the sort of work that comes out of this community building and legacy building—but with a forward thrust.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And as we sort of wrap up this conversation, I'm curious about two things. And I'll ask them separately. First is—AIDS, I think, is often thought about nostalgically, or considered nostalgically because the height of the crisis is, you know, before anti-retroviral treatment—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —the death toll was greater. How does the ongoing AIDS crisis inform what you do?

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: Or in what ways is that in the present reality, of Participant and elsewhere?

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah. I mean, we touched upon this, but maybe—you know, the past couple months have been, you know, difficult. Tony Feher, passing away. Also friend and neighbor and someone we worked with. Also, Frank Wagner, not that long ago. David Armstrong. The sort of—the sort of cycle of—I don't know what to call it a cycle of. I mean, basically, losing these dear friends, colleagues, artists, ostensibly due to advanced HIV, I got kind of like, angry all over again recently because, you know, Frank's life's work was about insisting that AIDS be brought in front of public audiences repeatedly. He did *Love AIDS Sex Riot*—or *Riot Sex*.

ALEX FIALHO: *Love AIDS Riot Sex*.

LIA GANGITANO: You know, just a couple years ago. I mean, I was very inspired by him, as a curator, but also, as, you know, an activist who, you know, was all about—like, this is not over. And then, to feel like—with Tony Feher and Frank, and you know, these are people like on the sort of front lines, AIDS activists, and you know, I personally—you know, I find it infuriating that they don't get to turn 60, you know? So, the struggle, the fight that they were engaged in, you know, it's just very—yeah, it's just wrong to me that they don't get to continue to survive. So, that's something I've been thinking, you know, a lot lately.

And you know, our kind of consistent eagerness to collaborate with Visual AIDS is also, you know, about teaming up on that. You know, that it's—you know, it wasn't like the government or some, like, health organization that invented safe sex. Like, artists did. And so, in that same way, artists should be hashing out all the debates that are going on now around prevention. Kathe Burkhart partnered with the Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center to do free—hep C testing, you know, as part of a project that she was working on. I do think, you know, it's not a single issue that we're needing to address. But it's like, this kind of like, artist, activist, grass roots—you know, we are, in a sense, a place where that can happen, or should happen, or has been happening. And it didn't really ever stop, for—I mean, for me, it's like the continuum of height of crisis, or now, it's like—it doesn't change our job, right, at all. It's like, for every artist, estate, or archive that we've worked with, there's just vast amounts more that hasn't been seen, and hasn't been given attention. That work will never run out, you know?

So, yeah. I feel like, you know, in sort of agreement with Frank, that yeah, this has to be relentlessly put in front of a public—especially one that, you know, is forgetting or is in a circumstance that seems far less dangerous, right? That's even kind of more urgent. And it's really important to be current as well. And like—you know, it's kind of like knowing a lot of people that have only been, like, conscious adults during the Obama Administration [laughs]. It's like, oh, no. You don't know—yeah, you don't yet know what it's like to feel that your government, like, openly wants you to die. Like, that is not a feeling I wish upon anybody, but we're all going to have to, like, cope with it, you know, in a different way, obviously. But you know, it's—yeah. I mean, I think that those guys put it really eloquently as well, in the passage that you read. And it felt to me, every day, that they were truly, truly accomplishing that with Gordon's show and with the programming. Like, their purpose was clear, and I think it was felt by the people who experienced the project. With Bradford's show, I mean, I loaned some of those—magazine issues to the show—

ALEX FIALHO: Really?

LIA GANGITANO: —because I just had them, you know? From when we collected zines, you know? I think I learned about it, you know, around '93 because some of my copies were from the reading room of *Dress Codes*. So, I was very happy to be able to bring that history forward, and, you know, when we were talking about, like,

some of the public programs that brought, like, people together, I was really thinking about the reading for thing—specifically, like Brontez Purnell, who, you know, just brought a very—you know, dissenting, hilarious voice to the space that felt really—yeah, just very well-loved and appreciated. But you know, it was a complicated history that Bradford was trying to tell. And it was sort of coinciding with the Art Aids America Show, and so, it was naturally put into dialogue with other exhibitions. And that felt significant, you know? Like, to have different—just different voices, kind of, at the same time.

ALEX FIALHO: Generationally, in dialogue, too.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And whether it was, like Rafa Esparza—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —or Aimee Goguen or Seth Bogart, in the main space—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —and sort of bouncing off—or even Brontez Purnell, for instance, who is a really interesting voice—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —in this moment around these questions. Visual AIDS is commissioning him to do a video project for—

LIA GANGITANO: Oh, great.

ALEX FIALHO: —Day Without Art upcoming. He's also invested in an artist, Ed Mock, who is a dancer in San Francisco who's under-known. So, Brontez is both at the forefront as a contemporary voice around HIV/AIDS, I'd say—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —but then also, at the same time, looking back.

LIA GANGITANO: Right, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: So, it's these layers that we've been talking about, basically—

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —for this entire interview.

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And I think this will be my last question. What are you looking forward to? What will Participant or Lia move into, if you could plan it out or otherwise?

LIA GANGITANO: You mean, in life?

ALEX FIALHO: In life, either the space, either where you're heading?

LIA GANGITANO: Well, I'm hoping to complete a couple of projects. One is a publication that was actually supported by the NEA, among others, which is about the history of Thread Waxing Space. It's called *The Alternative to What?* It's sort of a history of the space, but also kind of a history of the '90s. And you know, I've been working on it for forever and would like to finish it. We're also trying to finish a publication with M. Lamar. I hope, someday, to deliver on the Greer publication. So, I guess those are kind of big aspirations, and I don't know why books are so hard to finish, but—

ALEX FIALHO: They're really hard to do.

LIA GANGITANO: —they're just really hard to do.

ALEX FIALHO: They take a lot—

LIA GANGITANO: But I do feel like they're needed, you know, and wanted. So—

ALEX FIALHO: You can see, like, what the Chloe Dzubilo *DUETS* book did for Chloe's work and legacy—

LIA GANGITANO: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —for instance.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Very important.

ALEX FIALHO: With Alice O'Malley, and Che Gossett, and T. De Long.

LIA GANGITANO: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Yeah, no. Those things are very important, and you know, I hope that—I mean, we have a bit of time left on our lease, if I don't, like, mess it up, and I really would love to continue to do what we're doing. I mean, usually, when I'm asked, in one instance, by our—a funder, the Lambent Foundation, you know, they really are into asking you to like, you know, kind of say what you want and what you need. And I feel like I ended my last one—like, we just want to survive. We just want to exist. And sometimes, that seems really difficult. So, I don't aspire to expand or have lots more money or any of those things. I just want to be able to continue doing this work. So, it's like a pretty boring aspiration, but I would like to not cease to exist [laughs]. But I do think maybe like, this desire to make certain things tangible, in a book form—I mean, it might also be connected to this sort of voice of New York City, this self-obsolescing voice. Like, artists can't be here. Artists—there's no—you know, it's so expensive. Like, all this kind of barrage of what you can't do. I definitely want to keep doing it.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. I want to say thank you.

LIA GANGITANO: Oh, thank you.

ALEX FIALHO: Not just for the conversation, but also just for the legacy of work that you've done around these questions because I think you just live it, you know? It's like, you can just look to the example of the projects that you work with and how the commitment manifests.

LIA GANGITANO: Right, and the other side of that is I don't really know how to do anything else [laughs] actually. Thanks.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]