



The Portland Art Museum Podcast - Episode 8

SPEAKERS

Grace Kook-Anderson, Charlene Vickers

- G** Grace Kook-Anderson 00:05
You're listening to the Portland Art Museum Podcast. My name is Grace Kook-Anderson and I'm the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art. On this last episode, we learned more about Henry Tsang, a multimedia artist from Vancouver, British Columbia, whose work can be seen as part of the map is not the territory exhibition through May 5 2019. On this episode, On this episode, we'll hear from Charlene Vickers, another artist living in Vancouver, who not only has contributed sculptural pieces to the exhibition, but also presented her Diviners Protection Performance at the Museum on March 22 2019, using her displayed diviners spears. A link to the video of Charlene's performance is in this episode's description, as well as a link to this episode's transcript and other relevant websites. You will hear my voice from time to time but only when there is a change in topics or to add a footnote. Until then, this is Charlene Vickers.
- C** Charlene Vickers 01:13
My name is Charlene Vickers, and I'm a Vancouver based artist. Originally from Wauzhushk Onigum from Northern Ontario, Kenora. I've been living in the city for about since 1990. And I've been making work artwork for that whole time. I'm a painter, I do sculpture, installation, performance, music, sound, and whatever else I can get my hands on. As a young person, I wanted to be a painter

G Grace Kook-Anderson 01:51
and

C Charlene Vickers 01:53
and I thought, well I could possibly do this the rest of my life. And I kind of made the decision that that's what I wanted to do and I didn't really care about money and I had like romantic notions of me being like an artist in New York and having a big studio and making like 10 foot tall paintings. So that's what I decided I was going to sort of late go into the world and try to make some work. My my dad would often bring home books of different artists or give me books for my birthday of different artists and two of those artists were Norval Morrisseau and Arthur Schilling, and they're both Ojibwe painters. So I found and really colorful, sort of beautiful sort of fanciful, expressionistic kind of things. So I found that is really inspiring for me and I wanted to like sort of emulate that sort of painting style. I went to Emily Carr and I also did an undergraduate degree at SFU and then MFA at SFU as well. I was staying in school for as long as possible. I would say that I didn't really find a mentor until I met my friend Rebecca Bellmore. So she became like a big influence and also my friend, Maria Hupfield. And yeah, that's those are two mentor sort of people that I can think of, in terms of them, thinking about what sort of work they make, in terms of sculpture, and then also what they do with that performance. I think that that with my work, and how I make my work, it really relates to me, trying to figure out how I can connect myself to the world around me but also to where I'm from, which is Northern Ontario, Kenora. So For me, it's like I find that a lot of my work is either discovering how to be involved in like learning like cultural sort of action like beading or making moccasins. Or it's a way to sort of figure out how to comment or like look at the world, and how do I situate myself within that place, and space, and history. As Nish Kwe Ojibwe woman?

G Grace Kook-Anderson 04:31
Based on the work in the map is not the territory, it seems as if Charlene has accomplished her goals of self exploration and ancestral education. But the ways in which Charlene presents her findings are what makes them remarkable.

C Charlene Vickers 04:46
There's like four separate bodies of work there's like works called Diviners. That are also diviners, but they're made from grass that's wrapped in fabric and my hair. Yeah, and then I've got a series of turtles that I made And they're just like, turtle clan. And then I've got like it also another installation of moccasins, on chairs and blankets, blankets, and that

one's called sleepwalking. Yeah, and this is all work that I made between 2004 or no, from 2001 to 2010. I think that lead with the moccasin work, it's all about me reclaiming My, my, my identity and my history, and through the making of moccasins, but it also being able to tell like personal sort of narrative. So I think what we're interested or what I was interested in was, even though I have been living on the West Coast for such a long period of time, and a lot of my work is about like living away from my community, and not knowing that space, but also feeling that there is a connection through what I make and what I do through performance or if I'm sewing or beading and what I'm doing through those actions is continuation of actions that people in my community would do. Right. So that so it's like, I feel like I have an embodied connection within, within what I do and what I make. So like, the work that I make is an index of like, of that history, and those people in my community itself. So I think I would say like, right now, when I look at the body of the like, sort of like the history or like the surge of layers of themes that go through my work, that go in and go into my work, there's my my experience and my view of the world. And how how it is that I can like, create a presence or a space for what I do. Well, if I think about like the the work that will be in the show, I would say with with the moccasin work, it's about, it's about making these sort of like culturally specific objects that are actions of me reclaiming my identity, but also being able to like reflect my experiences in my views and perspectives of what's happening for indigenous people in Vancouver. And then if I think about the diviner work, which are my wooden spears and my wrapped grasses, I would think about that as being creating work that that is being like a divining of spirit. So in in that way, they're sort of about healing, and also about creating a space of remembering for missing and murdered Indigenous women. So that's like, that's why I'm having a little bit of hard time thinking about theme, you know, because it's very specific, those works. And, and then the work. That is the turtles, that work is sort of also attached to that specific sort of reality that I'm talking about it because I see the turtles as being searchers of people who are lost or missing. And women who women and their families who have like, gotten have who are experiencing that reality or who have lived that reality. So that's what I see the that those sort of, sort of things that are happening in that work, it's a little hard for me to talk about

Grace Kook-Anderson 09:24

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Charlene's work is clearly very personal to her. This becomes especially overt when she performs with her art. If you're listening to this episode on the day it is released, there are still a couple of weeks to see the exhibition. If not, or if you're unable to visit, please keep an eye on where Charlene's work will be shown in the future. Listening to the way she describes her art, begs for it to be experienced in person, including them as part of the map is not the territory felt important and contributes so perfectly to the exhibition's themes. At this point in the conversation, we did ask Charlene about her thoughts on the

exhibitions title,



Charlene Vickers 10:08

well, like at first, I guess, first, it made me think about borders, and in like sort of these sort of political borders between the states and Canada. And then between the provinces and thinking well, like those are like, are really political sort of things that exist within governance and government governing countries and people and that kind of thing. And then it also sort of made me think about my own sort of reality of, of living on the west coast, and then being from Ontario, but then being in the show that's sort of representing the West Coast, like everybody, like moves around, like all over the place it all the time. So then I was like, reviewing this morning, where the phrase comes from, and thinking about how you can see above your own identity, and in in, in being sort of grappling with how you conceive of you have your own identity, and you walk through the world, and then you also are perceiving how people you think how you think people are perceiving you. Right? So then it becomes what is my imagined thing is, is sort of like me going through the world, thinking that I'm being perceived in a certain way, I don't know, I'm just like, sort of like balancing through, like imagined things and then real experiences, and always trying to find some sort of balance between this is this is what what is happening, and this is my experience. And then it's always through conversations with other people that, that where I'm like describing what it is I'm going through, and then it's like, it's through talking to people that we sort of come to, like, I come to a conclusion, I was talking to Grace about this idea that I have, of embodied territory, right. And this is sort of my own own way of describing how I feel when I'm making work, or if I'm performing, and that what I'm doing is connecting myself, to my history and to where I'm from, and expressing that sort of, through people's experiences. of what I do. So what I'm really interested in is opening up sort of spaces of, of sort of relating with people, right. And I'm allowed to have my embodied territory and my my own perception of like, who I am, and like how to express my indigeneity, and how people experience that and sort of experience my work and interpret it. They're allowed that freedom, too, so it's in terms of like thinking about mapping or territories or like imagined or what is reality, then maybe it's through this idea of embodied territory is where I can find this balance, or this sort of sense of what is real, right. And then it's like, this is my, my thing, and then that's your thing over there. And that's okay. I guess like I, I think about liking the fact that that, that it's sort of this coastal, sort of gathering of different artists. And that's exciting. It's it's exciting and and I really like the the title of the of the show, I think it's really intriguing. And sort of thinking about how my work can fit in there. And I'm really excited to like meet the other artists as well, like I've met like, I know a couple of them. But a lot of them I haven't met yet. So I'm like looking forward to like that experience.



Grace Kook-Anderson 14:52

This interview was recorded in January, roughly a month before the exhibition opened. Since then, all of the artists had the opportunity to spend time with one another and witness how their art interacts with that of the other artists. That's when the connections between them truly develop. One theme of this exhibition that we haven't yet touched upon with Charlene is the influence of environment, we asked her to explore that concept,



Charlene Vickers 15:22

maybe through materials, and different ways of looking at my experience living in Vancouver. And how that can be expressed through materials. Maybe with like, with my Spears, like I specifically made them out of cedar, and carved them. And up and up until that point, I'd never carved a single thing. And so like I I sort of, I guess I taught myself like how to like just use some tools on the wood. And then I guess with other materials like with the diviner grasses, I was using grass from around the city that I had gathered. And initially, I was thinking that I was going to try to find sweet grass, and have those and make like tall smudges. But then I was thinking that that sort of gathering of sweet grass isn't necessarily something that is part of my experience really living in the city. So is thinking that it would be better to have the grass from the city be in the work, I think that that the the works that I would have in in the show would be reflecting of reflecting my experience of living in the city of Vancouver, for sure. And let's see other materials, like with the moccasins, some of the moccasins are made by like, by beer cases from like local breweries. So that's another sort of reference to the local, local, and maybe playing with the history that people like to promote with beer brands, and that kind of thing. For me, like I'm trying to, like, make something that's new, and something that excites me, and that's going to have me learn something new, like learn a new sort of skill and, but also be be representing, or representative of the place in the world around me, I recently had the the, the cedar Spears in Toronto at U of T. And then before that they were in Montreal. And I think like a lot of these works, I have sort of shown around the country, so of Canada, I think that there's a way of communicating to people and, and people taking in what you do, as, as I get like, I can't necessarily even tell you what my friends say about my work really, I can only like imagine what it is people are getting out of it. But I think that in some instances that that the work, even though it's it's sort of being made in Vancouver, and it's sort of like taking in this sort of environment and the materiality that I can gather within the city of Vancouver in the West Coast, and then take it away in and show it in different parts of the country. And that still relatable in those spaces as well. And people will always bring their own interpretations or, or, or sort of like, different nuances to the work as well. So I feel like that that's something that's that I like to have happen, and I hope that it does happen. So I think that maybe maybe one interpretation, or experience that I have gotten from people is, is that there is sort of like a way, or a space that's

created, that is restful. And it's sort of creating this environment that is contemplative. So I think that in some ways, I hope that that there's this space that's created that is that a space that sort of like a safe space for people, if there is some sort of if if like the meaning of the work is reaching out to the audience that I am creating, or I'm trying to like communicate to, which is to create, like this environment of healing. If that, if that is actually going to happen, then I hope that the space or the sort of like energy within that space is one that is is safe, and then it's able to create like an open an open for people, right? And that they will be able to if memory is sort of like opened up, or if there's emotion that's opened up, that they don't feel that there isn't a way to it's just like so speculative.



Grace Kook-Anderson 21:23

For the most part, Charlene's work is not meant to remain in one place, it could even be argued that she is creating tools for communication between an individual and their environment.



Charlene Vickers 21:35

Well, I sort of like talked about how, what it is that I think that my body is doing when when I'm like living in Vancouver, and I'm I'm walking through Vancouver, and I'm walking to my studio, or I'm like, walking to, I don't know, the Vancouver art gallery or and going over to another gallery and going to openings. And I think what it is that I'm doing is I'm just present, right. So I think that what it is, if I think about what my body and my brain and my heart are doing is, I'm being present. And I'm being here to represent, and to speak, and to maybe point things out to people. And it really is to voice right. So if it's performance, or if it's sculpture, or if it's painting, or it's to make music. I think that the that what it is, is to be visible. And maybe like everything it is that it is of being an artist in and being interpreted or or read as an artist in and that's, that's the most important thing. Because there is like a long period of time where where it was, it was like it was more difficult to move through the city for me, it was it was to be sort of read in a certain way. And my presence was read in like maybe even like negative ways. So it was like sort of going from like being faceless, to like having presence and like, like what it is that changes within your body. And, and and in how how you sort of like change your own brain in your own thinking. And I don't know what I'm trying to describe, but it's empowerment, using sculpture and performance. It's something I've been sort of playing with collaborative collaboratively with my friend, Maria Hupfield. And we would often like get together and make work together and then take the work that we made these little sculptures and take those and perform them in a performance for people. I think that that, as that collaboration that has grown, I think what we were like initially playing with was the idea of, of objects or Indian art for sale, and then trying to create work that we we that went

against the sort of like typical sort of items that you would find in like a native art gallery or, or at a at a sale like I like a Indian, like we did our performance at Indian market in Santa Fe. So we were just taking everyday objects and then altering them and then creating this work that was just meant to be performed or or demoed. And then we would just do our performance with the work and then it wasn't for sale. Right. So it was mainly on that sort of like leaning thinking about the art market. But I think since that time, our work has really changed quite a bit. And that we're sort of like making the these objects, we recently made this really this really tall, 10 foot tall Jingle Cone out of paper. And we performed it at the Seattle Art Market. And we weren't really sure like what would become of the cone and like how we would perform it and what our experience of it would be. But it really ended up being about who we were as, as Ojibwe women and then what the jingle cone meant for us. And then what sort of through performance, what sort of lessons that we were getting, by performing this object and what it was that we thought we were, like, both experiencing at the time. So we were like this, this object became sort of this thing to bring it out knowledge, right. So that's like a big jump from like, I don't know, eight years ago, when we first started out, making small works together as like, sort of a fun project, to like creating, like really sort of monumental sort of things that were very, very opening up windows that were really personal for both of us. So I think that that sort of experience is sort of like a life experience thing that has happened. And I think it's interesting to think about, that you make work that you can learn from and you're like, Oh, this is an art practice, but it's a life practice, right. And then you're learning from like, what it is that you're making. And so I think that's pretty exciting.

Grace Kook-Anderson 27:44

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Charlene's jingle cone is a tremendous megaphone, made of cardboard and brightly colored paper. It's designed is modeled after a jingle dress, which is worn by Ojibwe women while performing the type of dance also called jingle dress. Much like Charlene's jingle cone, a jingle dress is covered in ornate cones that create a jingling sound as the women dance. Links to images of jingle dresses and Charlene's jingle cone are available in this episode's description,

Charlene Vickers 28:16

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we like perform that work over the over at the Seattle Art Fair. Four times. So we did the performance four times and after every single performance, we'd sit down for like a half hour and talk specifically about what it was we thought was happening. So it was like really open for us to like, discuss, and what it was with the you know, like, we would be like, we would change the performance a little every time and be like, well, that's not working and why is it not working? And and then be like, Oh, we felt good about this. And this isn't

feeling great and the space is too big, it's too echoy or like, just like, I think it was. And then any any sort of things that we think is like a, like a way to look at the world or come up with a way of what we think the object means. then it'd be like, oh, like this. That's interesting, right? Like finding it to be like almost like a teaching. Right? This is this object is opening up teachings for us. And and maybe in that way, it becomes like a personal object or conceptual object as well. I think like, we've been performing like, on and off for about eight years. And I think just every single time we get together, there's like a different, different venue, let's say, and like a different idea that we're in different things that we be making in our studios and own practices, and growing individually as artists. And then when we come together and talk about what we what could the possibilities be then it just seems to be building. So that's good. Well, I've got like, for performances, ideas of things I've done, sort of like in the midst of doing lat last year. And so I think it's like, there's like a lot of studio work, or a studio sort of residencies that that might be coming up. And I'm thinking that everything's very open right now. So I think that that's the best way to work. And, and not not necessarily have like, like a path that I've got marked out or it at all. Well, it seems that lately. It's usually the venue that's really sort of shaping what it is that we do, or I do. And so it's like, opportunities. If they come out, they come at you, and then there's some new thing to do, or a new space to work with. Or just like, a new space to work in, then it's like, that's what motivates me right now. So it's just like, I've got like, some usual things that I like to do a lot of, and, and I've got my studio practice here, where I sort of can do those sort of things. But then there's also lots of things to do outside of the studio. And I think that's usually quite exciting.

Grace Kook-Anderson 32:06

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One theme of this exhibition that Charlene's work frequently focuses on his decolonization. By performing her work publicly, Charlene continuously reminds her audience, that native culture is very much alive.

Charlene Vickers 32:21

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I think maybe if you if you think about decolonization, it sort of relates to that, that moment of voicing,

right that I was talking about, or before, I've got this friend Roxanne. And she's talking about the banning of the Potlatch and the banning of ceremony within, within Canada. And that, by doing that, they're trying to like render indigenous people as being voiceless and unable to practice what makes them powerful. Right. So I think that by being an artist and being able to, like make your own decisions, and being able to like, point things out, that that is being involved in in decolonization in expressing a sovereign sort of action. So I think that perhaps, I'm not using the word decolonize in my artist statements necessarily, or like having it in the language with my work, but through what the work is. That is decolonizing. Right. It might be. It might be the environment that I'm trying to create, or it's like, it's a process. It's a process. And for me to be involved in that process is part of my own decolonization, decolonizing myself. And I think that, that it's not something that happens all the time or sticks. It's just something that's a process and you're continually questioning and figuring it out what it is to do that. And I think it is the conversations that you have with people that it is where you're able to like create some sort of foundation for yourself. And I think that's, that's what to decolonize is. Right. It's like a continual process and a continual conversation and continual negotiation, that is always happening. And, yeah, so I think through art, you can do that.

Grace Kook-Anderson 34:51

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Thank you for listening to the Portland Art Museum podcast. With only a few weeks left for the map is not the territory, I encourage you to keep an eye on on the artists' websites to see where these installations end up in the future. On the next episode, we hear from Mary Ann Peters, an artist based in Seattle, Washington. I'd like to thank Charlene Vickers for her contribution to the exhibition and Jon Richardson this Podcast's Producer, and thank you for listening.