

2022 RESIDENT FACULTY LECTURE, June 24, 2022

[video plays 00:00:05 – 00:00:38] {applause}

Gordon Hall: Hello. How's everybody doing? {cheers, some responses from audience}
Okay. I wrote this intro yesterday before the world was the world it is today, but I think we all agree it's best to do what we're here to do, and be together.

So, it gives me great joy to introduce Suzanne tonight. Suzanne is a prolific artist, who since the early 1990s has been asking questions about the ways language functions to make worlds. Words. Spoken, overheard, handwritten, scrawled, typed, text messages, listed, ranked, found online, on newsprint, on walls, and in signs, legible, unintelligible, fragmented, recontextualized. Suzanne McClelland has digested them in paintings, using an epic number of mark-making materials and tools, as well as in posters, books, sculptures, photographs, folios, and collages.

In the essay written for Suzanne's 2017 retrospective at the Aldridge Contemporary Art Museum, curator Amy Smith Stewart offers us an epigraph, this sentence from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. "Sweet crazy conversations, full of half-sentences, daydreams, and misunderstandings, more thrilling than understanding could ever be."

This thrill, of words transforming into spatial ideas, Suzanne is a connoisseur of it. An expert at closing the gap between our bodies and our language. Or, perhaps it is not quite correct to say Suzanne closes this gap. It is more apt to say that her work takes place right in this gap, in the beats and pulses of how we inhabit words and letters. Suzanne's lush, sensual, animate surfaces open up a universe of feeling between signs as they appear, and signs as we live them, asking us to connect the pieces for ourselves across disparate registers.

Over the last ten days, as we have all met each other and had our first verbal interactions, I've been reflecting on everything that takes place between us as we speak, beyond the meaning of our actual words. Our facial expressions, hand gestures, physical proximity, pacing, and eye contact, signal our degree of openness to one another. So much so that it sometimes feels to me like the words we speak are simply an occasion for all of these other nonverbal interactions to take place.

As I delved into the universe of Suzanne's work, I found myself researching all that occurs below the surface when we use language, beyond the words themselves. Social psychologists have long documented what they call conversational synchrony, which describes the ways we echo and mimic the material aspects of one another's speech. Below the level of consciousness, we connect in conversation by taking up one another's verbal pacing, speech patterns, intonations, facial expressions, and gestures. On a microscopic level, we co-create a shared physicality that belongs to neither of us, and reflects our degree of connectedness. The more mutual mimicry, the closer we feel. Even as you listen to a lecture, your body microscopically echoes the linguistic rhythm of the speaker, and their way of being a body. Looking at Suzanne's paintings brings this multitory sensory

process to life. Asking us to read words, but also to see them and feel them, spatially, emotionally, politically, even meteorologically. As she has said, 'Words function simultaneously as guides and as obstacles, operating more like a weather condition, something much bigger than us.'

Suzanne has exhibited extensively in the US and abroad since the early '90s. She's had solo exhibitions at the Aldridge Museum of Contemporary Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Philip Morris, the Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia, and the Orlando Museum of Art, among many others. Suzanne has participated in the 1993 and 2014 Whitney Biennials, and her work has been presented in numerous group exhibitions, such as at the Met, the Wexner Center for the Arts, and the New Museum. She's been honored with many awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, an Anonymous was a Woman award, and a Nancy Graves Foundation grant. Her work is held in numerous public collections, including the Brooklyn Museum, MOMA, the Met, the Norton Museum of Art, the Walker Art Center, and the Whitney. She was represented by Team for a decade, and is now represented by Marion Boesky. Suzanna was resident faculty here at Skowhegan in 1999, and we are extremely fortunate to have her back here again with us this summer to share her intelligence, creativity, humor, and kindness. Please welcome, join me in welcoming Suzanne McClelland. {applause, cheering}

Suzanne McClelland: [changes screen to slide show] Hi. I'm really glad that everyone's here, I think, tonight, together now, and I'm really excited that we started visiting each other in studios, because now I feel like I can put together who you are as a person, in conversation, with the work that I've seen in reproduction, and now it's all coming together, so.

I'm gonna, I was gonna read this introduction, and I'm, I am gonna read the first part of it, but I just want to point out that I started as a photographer in the darkroom, way back in the '70s, and when I came to New York, I helped Kyung Park start a place called Storefront for Art and Architecture. There were a lot of people that helped make the place start. It was ten by twenty-one feet, and it was on Prince Street. We had a performance series called A to Z, and each night it was, the street was occupied by a different performer. And, many of whom you all would know if you look at their archive now, they're historical figures. And I am showing you these images because you can't really tell what's going on, but it is one of those things that, that experience of taking photographs of performance, in an architectural space that was too small to fit anybody was what drove me to painting. So, I will read this, as you look at that one image. And then I'm gonna move pretty quickly through all my images, because the older ones are not in good condition, and I don't think you need to dwell on them.

"Linda's discussion circle from Wednesday night created vibrations that I hope will continue to flow throughout our summer. The sounds you were listening to when you came in were Kurt Schwitters, who made this poem "Ursonate" over a ten-year period of time, from 1922 to 1933. It's his response to the seeds of Fascism that were growing at the time, among, I'm sure, many other things. It resonates for me as something between reading and singing. I'd like to start with a quote from Pauline Oliveros. 'Deep listening is listening to

everything all the time, and reminding yourself when you're not. If you're tuned out, then you're not in contact with your surroundings. You have to process what you hear. Hearing and listening are not the same thing.'

The reason I start with Pauline is because I met her and her partner IONE in the early '80s. Her practice has informed my thinking for the past forty years. Speech is an act as a gesture is an act, and I am focused on how speech is felt, how it lingers in the air, or passes us up by, depending on tone, volume, phrasing, and rhythm. And actually, Gordon said everything that {laughing} I wanted to say, even though it was shared with me that, that was so heartening, that you absorbed these forty years, and was able to say something about it. (00:10:10)

Many feminist histories have had to focus on bodies, but voice is an integral part of our being. Speech comes from our minds and hearts and finds its way out through our bodies. It lands and often lingers inside the listener. So, for many years, I've focused on this method of observing sound and translating what I hear into things I see. Translation itself, I think, provides territory for imagining and for projecting, and I think is open territory for visual artists to work with right now. Why do we question what we hear more often than what we see?"

So, tonight I'm going to just show you fragments of these forty years. Early in life, I spent most of my time in the wind and the woods and the water, to avoid walls. This aversion to walls invited an investigation of three aspects of the world as I lived it. Frame, line, and field. [begins slideshow]

I'm gonna share this with you, because even though it's a bad picture, it is something that also had a huge effect on me. Creative Time had something called Art on the Beach, which they started in the mid-'70s and this was a project that David Hammons did with Angela Valerio and the architect Jerry Barr. That happens to be a performance of Sun Ra. And it was a, it was the last exhibition of, that Creative Time did with Art on the Beach, on the space on Chambers Street that was a landfill that was created from the World Trade Center. It was a location, and it was a real conflation or collaboration between architects, artists, and performers. And I feel like there's now a new recognition and exploration of that, that you all are, are reviving, and growing tremendously, so.

This piece was the first experience I had working with a curator in a museum. Thelma Golden was the curator of the Whitney Museum, and it was called the Philip Morris branch. So, it was, Whitney Museum had branches that were funded by corporations. It was a square room on 42nd Street. Some of you – nobody here is old enough, I don't think, to have been in that room, but what she did as a curator was she actually gave me not only space but time, and it was the time, we decided it would be a studio, and we would do workshops with teenagers, because at the time, I was making, most of my drawings were a response to a particular surface, and I did these series of newspaper drawings following particular stories within one year. So, the workshops were just held in that space, and we decided to basically use it, it was all building materials. I wanted to dissect the word right, R-I-G-H-T. It was, it was a kind of exploration in framing and reframing, and the, and

addressing the fact that a painting doesn't ever have to be finished, and that it is actually a series of decisions that one makes.

I used red, blue, red white and blue, black, and drywall cardboard. No hinges, no nails, nothing that could be actually joined. And everything in there had to be something that I could move by myself. One of the reasons I focused on the word right was that it was, it was a time when people were, the religious right was very loud, which, I think it's clear that it's still trying to run the country. And these notions of right that are so subjective, and I think people assume that they agree when they use the term right, was just, to me, the perfect subject matter.

The only thing left of that installation are the Polaroids that I took. So it was all taken apart, and dumped. But I did make five paintings out of that installation that were then shown in the '93 Biennial. And these are Janine Antoni sculptures from the same exhibition. They're eight by eight feet tall, big, wide, square.

And these are, I'll just show you a couple of the, these were what I considered to be unbound books. This was at P.S. 1, so P.S. 1 was a space that, before MOMA took it over, it was an old schoolhouse, and I actually was lucky enough to have a studio, they had a studio program. And this is what, what they look like close up. This particular piece was focusing on this terrible thing that happened outside of the White House in 1995. Marcelino Corniel, who was actually an artist, was living in the park, along with a lot of other people, and he, the police were harassing him, and he, they were taking his possessions, and other people's possessions, and he, in his rage, he was surrounded and shot. And that was a piece that does nothing, in an activist sense, but for me it was a way of commemorating or saving this, this event to remember.

The other work that I was making outdoors were on wood panels. I spent as much time as possible looking for surfaces to respond to, just like language is a series of responses, painting is a series of responses, a series of decisions.

This was a, a more formal presentation of them that was in the Aldridge Museum exhibition that Amy put together.

So, we're still in the realm of the frame. So, the frame is a word that establishes a contained view, but also could carry a more nefarious meaning. As an adult, I took to the camera, to photography, to capture experience, and was utterly seduced by the darkroom. But lost the surprise of direct experience once the print was all, was made. All peripheral vision felt eliminated for me, and the expanse of the experience cramped it. This piece happens to be on sandpaper, wow, that looks terrible. These are old slides. {laughs} I should go quicker through those.

This was at Art Omi when it first opened.

And this is a more recent piece. And it is continuing my questions around the frame. And joining, linking how things are built. This particular piece was, I started to make after I

didn't have a studio right after 9/11, because we lived right below those towers, so I was working out of a duffel bag. And I went shopping, and I went to the, I think I told a few of you this story earlier, but the NBA store, the big megastore on Fifth Avenue, has every possible kind of gear you could care to find. And I was looking for WNBA jerseys. This was 2002. I think Kota mentioned that Bush invaded Iraq, or, you know, that war started in 2003, and this was a, kind of a response to that aggression, as well as a nod back to the feminism that I had been trained in, and taught. That had to do with the collaboration of quilt-making, which I still believe is one of the fine arts of, that we have.

I was really interested in the, the contrasting fabrics, the sports fabrics, that were, you know, really kind of coopted by the fashion industry, I think from, basically from hip-hop. I think that is where a lot of the, the materials came from. (00:20:04) And I think I saw that happening in the '80s, but the sportswear is something that, you know, is really designed to function like a flag. As opposed to to reveal or conceal the body, so.

This piece has been shown in a lot of different places, and I think this is, this was the first place, at Feldman Gallery, an exhibition called FACE OFF, in 2003.

Josef Albers, I bet many of you have had Josef Albers put in front of you. I just wanted to mention him, because that was my training, when I was a photographer, about, it had to do with finding color. So I've also taken a lot from those years, of making color studies, looking for transparency and opacity, which are things that I see in language, as well. I think there's transparent language, there's opaque language, and in the realm of blue, there are many blues; in the realm of red, there are many reds, so we try to identify things by categories, and color, you know. We don't all agree about what's blue and what's green. We actually were talking about this in a studio yesterday. So I carried that forward, into my paintings. I was not told anything about Annie Albers, until twenty years after college, which is kind of shocking, and I just wanted to include her practice in this, because the way that color is used in textile is, to me, one of the most generative teaching tools, you know, it's found, it's material that doesn't get blended or blurred, it maintains its identity when it's woven.

Kurt Schwitters was the only artist that my, my teachers, who had been Albers' teachers, students, had been Albers' students, Schwitters was the only person, and Paul Klee, were the only artists that they considered using the Albers thinking. So I wanted to include him here. And then I will also have, I wanted, I also wanted to include the Merzbau images, which Kota also {laughing} had in his lecture. But I love this photograph of the house in the countryside of England, where the last Merzbau was made, and just since we're all here, in the countryside, working in these little spaces, I think it's, I have been sort of beginning a mission to find out more about his wife, if anybody has any information about her.

Rauschenberg was another person that – 1972, '73, the way he uses material and form and the wall was also absolutely essential to my thinking.

This is, these are some images that, from James Nachtwey's film *The War Photographer*, which was also something that altered my thinking about painting, and how, for me, it can do things that I wasn't able to make photography do. Christian Frei made this documentary, and, many years ago, and he attached a film camera to the outside of the, Nachtwey's still camera. And it addressed some of these issues that I have about peripheral vision and how to include peripheral vision in ones work.

Joanne Leonard was my teacher in college, and she was a feminist who really helped me understand that the domestic is, is a landscape.

So, this is a project, and I'll call it a project, because it actually, I'm still working on it a little bit. There, there's a section on the FBI Most Wanted website that is for domestic terrorism, and for some reason, when I started this in 2012, there were seven people on it. And all seven of them were either environmentalist activists or, they were activists. And they were, I guess you could say left-leaning. They weren't the six hundred people that, that found their way into the Capital on January 6th. So I started a sort of parallel research adventure, I guess you could call it, looking at the Southern Poverty Law Center, which has kept a very rigorous archive of all of the hate crimes in this country since the Oklahoma bombing. And so what I did was I paralleled these two worlds, and these two forms of history, these two ways of reading history. And there's a poster, which is attached to the books – the books that I have in the library, that are on that shelf, are for me, sometimes even more – they're the only thing left from an exhibition, so I, I care about them as works. The poster dissects this history.

And I made seven portfolios, and in each portfolio, there, each one of these seven people were, I researched them, and I took the language from the wanted poster and, and cut and pasted and dropped this material into wet pulp. So I was lucky enough, and you should all know about all these residencies, that you can go to, I think many of you here already do, but Dieu Donné paper mill is a place that gave me a year-long residency that was unbelievably generous, and I was able to make a huge body of work there. And I knew nothing, at that point, about how color is, you know, how you infuse pulp with color, and how you can, you know, I could continue to work flat, like I do on my paintings, with text.

My sister is a poet, and she did a series of poems, seven poems, one for each person, taking apart the language on the wanted poster. So I was interested in these people because they're missing. And because they are only known through the descriptions. And so you know how when somebody has been described, you form an image in your mind, and I felt like this body of work was a kind of portrait, series of portraits.

Wow, I can't even read that text, I don't know if anybody can. I lost my glasses, by the way. If anybody sees a pair of aviator wire-rim glasses {laughs}, they're mine.

So, since I said there were three kinds of sections of thinking in this talk, the frame, the line, and the field, this begins the line. This particular piece is glass, it, it was a, another very generous residency that came from Urban Glass, which, you know, was just an incredible thing for me because it was like going back into the darkroom, but with people

who knew so much more than I knew. And I love that kind of collaboration. Dorie Guthrie was working with me for probably nine months. It was during, it was 2015, so it was the year before that election, and it was a very, very challenging time. I think everybody, I mean, it has been since then, but I think it was a particularly wrought time, and I have a collection of running people, and I installed ninety-nine of these glass pieces that are kind of the size of a large iPhone in this hallway, because it's a, I don't know if any of you have been to that museum, but there's a long ramp, and there's a whole wall of glass, facing the outside. (00:30:09) So it's almost impossible to see anything, from a distance, until you actually are right up on it. And I wanted to just find a kind of rhythmic way of reading and walking, cause I think some of us think really well sitting still, and some of us think really well moving, and I think well moving, so I wanted to deal with the fact that we also project onto each other. When we see someone running in a, in an urban, in the middle of the streets, in an urban environment, and they're not wearing running clothes, we have automatic projections, and we had just also been through the stop and frisk phase of New York City, which was, I think, a period of time where it was on paper that people in uniforms could stop other people based on their subjective projections.

There's one, this image happens to be, I inserted these near the end. There are three images of Kathrine Switzer, who was the first woman to run a marathon in 1967, and she was attacked by the judge, who jumped off of the truck and ran back, and tried to pull her number off of her body. And the images are, were particularly interesting to me, because they don't really tell you, it's really hard to tell what's going on, it looks like some people were ignoring it, some people were actually protecting her from him. That's a slightly better – and here's another installation of it, in a two-person project with my friend Alix Pearlstein, who's gonna be here visiting, I think, in a few weeks. Those are her animals back there, and then these are the clothes that we collaborated on, which I'll show you near the end.

There's another book in the library called *Cede*, which is a collection of images from peace treaties. We have drawings and photographs of those moments when, when peace treaties are, are noted. I guess I feel like many of them are not concrete. And they often contain a lot of lies. There's traditionally a third party in a peace treaty situation, because there's a third language that needs to be present to make sure that the translations and the communications between people are, are honest.

This was an installation, so this is an archive that I exposed at University of Albany, upstate. It was a two-person, it was really two solo shows, but Kate Gilmore was the other artist, who, I think, is a really amazing artist. She was also here a few years ago, right? Yeah. So this is also, even though this section is about the line, it's also the framing, and how framing, you know, the overlapping of images really ends up not only obscuring but it kind of creates a third image, for me.

A year ago, I started a list. It was a during the pandemic situation. I have a lot of memories of music that drove me, basically, because growing up in the Midwest, radio was everything, and Detroit, Toledo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Chicago, all had great radio. And that was how I learned. I made a playlist, that's what this exhibition was called, and I

paired people – this is Yoko Ono and Björk. This is Pauline Oliveros and IONE. Diamanda Galás and Junglepussy. And Tierra Whack with Tribe 8. Nine Simone with Meredith Monk. Mc Lyte and Jozzy. I was making connections between people based on what I heard, where I felt they had an affinity. It had nothing to do with categories, it had nothing to do with how music is organized and sold. It came, the list came first from these maps, *Who's Afraid of Red Yellow Blue?* I had three large, these larger canvases in my studio at the beginning of the pandemic when we were not moving around very much, and the drawings, they started as drawings, and the painting became more of a framework around the names. Because these are all people who identify as women, and they are often not in the mainstream history. So it was a way for me to bring those names back and re-listen to them. So for the exhibition we made a playlist, and it's, I don't know, it may have a thousand songs in it now. It's on the Marianne Boesky website, if anybody's interested.

This was the unbound book that I made from that exhibition, and part of the collaborative installation that I did with Alix.

If anybody has questions as we go, I'm fine with that, by the way.

These are part of a group of paintings that I called *Rank*, and they are the top ten highest paid actors, who happen to all be men. Portraits.

Every Inch of My Love, at Team Gallery. These were portraits of bodybuilders.

And an exhibition I did with Dave DeBord during the pandemic was another form of measurement that I think we're all controlled by, which is time. And I had been making these clock paintings for a number of years, kind of as palette paintings. They were the things that I made when I was finished with the larger work, the leftover. And I toss a pair of dice, dye, to get the numbers. There was a painting by Sigmar Polke that I saw in 1992 called *Solutions 5*, I don't have an image of it here, I wish I had included it, but there, it started, I started to think about it just a few years ago, well maybe ten, ten years ago, and I started to make paintings called *Solutions*. So this is $0+0=0$, and $0/0=1$. And this is 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, $0/0=7$. (00:39:52)

And this is one of, this is the last exhibition I did with Team Gallery, and it is, I would say, still part of line, because it's an alphabet. They're called *Mute*, and I made these in 2018. It was 2018/19. They were just made with various forms of pouring, and wiping, and staining. Gravity.

The last section is field. I, in the '90s I had sort of decided to walk away from painting, which of course I didn't, since I just showed you work that I made since then. But I was, I did these ten by thirty foot drawings on canvas, and packed them up and sent them to friends in four different corners of the US, and I asked them to bury them, and to record the instructions that they were giving each other to, to do this, and to videotape it. So I took then the transcripts of them giving each other directions, and Drew and I made some sound work from that particular piece, and that's all that exists of that, other than the photographs that came from, that they took.

This is what, what the work looked like in the studio. And I had a practice of plein air painting that I did in, on canvas, out in fields, and at people's homes, so it wasn't a way of making a scene, it was a way of basically marking a particular time, and visiting the location, and these are all a series of works that I still do, but these were particularly, these were mostly from the '90s. And here are some of the glass works that became a part of a portrait, and homage to Shirley Chisholm. Again, something that I was doing in 2015 during that election cycle. She was important to me as a twelve-year-old, the first woman to actually have the courage to run. And, in this country. It seems like we can elect women in a lot of other countries, but, not here. This was how the piece ended up. It was made for that window, at the Aldridge Museum. She was speaking – the photograph comes from a photographer, I think his name is Michael Lean, and he passed away, but he was a reporter that traveled with her sometimes and shot this photograph from behind, and she was speaking to Vietnam vets at the Washington Mall. I don't know if you notice the upside down flag, but this was a very important native statement at the time.

The paintings that you saw in the Aldridge that were next to the Shirley Chisholm, it was called *Third Party*, that piece, are blind contour drawings that I did after the Jasper Johns maps. I had been traveling in the south, when I did the exhibition, which I don't, I'm not showing images from the University of Virginia exhibition, but there were pawn, there were pawn shops all over the country, but the particular, the pawn shops – and I had visited those that were in Florida and, and I have been in a few in New York, but in Florida and Virginia, the weapons that are sold in pawn shops were of particular interest to me, so I hung out at the pawn shops and did these blind contour drawings of them.

And I drew up in areas where people had guns, I went to a lot of funerals; I think that, that it's something if I were to take time out of my studio I would be, I will be working on finding a way to stop people manufacturing automatic weapons. This is still part of field, it's aerial views of, these are silkscreens, they're large silkscreens, aerial views of Evangelical homes.

And this is the last section. In 1969, the Cuyahoga river caught on fire, for the last time. It is the river that empties into Lake Erie, and I lived on Lake Erie when I was a kid, we used to swim in it. It was called a dead lake. But I, I wrote, a few years ago I wrote a proposal for Creative Capital about this particular project, which, I didn't get the Creative Capital, but I'm still gonna do the project. It is, it is a, it is something that I care a lot about, because the industry that fed the whole rust belt, basically fed off of these rivers, and the great lakes. And there has been, it's kind of an amazing story, the Cuyahoga river, because the mayor Stoke, mayor Stokes, was the, the person who was able to go to the federal government and help start the EPA, with Nixon, of all people. And he came from Cleveland, and it was because of this last fire, and the river has been catching fire for a hundred years, but it was the last one. So, these are, these are just the maps where the, some of the dams that have been removed exist, and where some of the fires have occurred. The Maumee river, the Detroit river, and the Cuyahoga river all feed into that particular lake.

I just came back from eastern Turkey, southeast Turkey, where I went to see these amazing mosaics that were rescued from a dam project on the Euphrates. And I just wanted to share a few of these pictures. They basically submerged, they built the dam, the Birecik dam – I'm not sure that my pronunciation is right, but people from, archeologists from all over the world got together, and rescued these mosaics. And there's a, an incredible museum there, now, there near Zeugma. It's in Gazientep. If any of you ever get to, get to see it, the things that are rescued from these projects are, are, I mean, it's an amazing place to go now, for an archeologist; there's still so much work to be done.

And the cuneiform, which was rescued. The translation, I think, is really poetic and beautiful.

And the posters that I've made, of, one of which is one Sarah tonight. And I'll just end with a few images of this collaborative project with Alix Pearlstein. Okay, that's it.
{applause, cheering}

This is Black Smith, he's my son-in-law. He's wearing both, he was the model. And you recognize Sarah. Oh, good, no questions. Let's go. {laughter} (00:50:02)

Audience #1: Hi, Suzanne. Thank you. You spoke briefly about, I think it was a hypothetical, if you were to leave, I don't know if it was making, in some way, to challenge weapon manufacturing, and then you kind of started talking about something else. I'm just wondering if that is something that you're actively thinking about? Or if you'd say more about that.

McClelland: You mean you want to know about my activist tendencies?

Audience #1: [INAUDIBLE] I just didn't know if it was, again, hypothetical, if it was something that you're thinking about in this moment, in terms of a departure of some kind.

McClelland: Well, it's something that requires a lot, it's going to require some support of an institution, because I, what I want to do is find the people that – so, I was looking at the years between 1960 and 2020. As being years when I can remember unbelievable clogged water and air, to the point where we had to wear, you know, scarves over our faces, and turn our headlights on with our cars. And to now go to Pittsburgh or Cleveland or Toledo, you don't have to do that anymore. So I'm looking at the people who lived through these periods of time, and who helped make that happen. And I know who many of them are, but I think it isn't something that I can do so easily on my own, I, it's something I want to do with people, so, it's gonna require a little more effort. But it's something that I've been kind of writing about privately for years. Mostly cause I swam in those lakes.

Sarah Workneh: Hi. You talked a little bit about *Playlist*, but I know from hearing you talk at other moments that music has been kind of central to your practice throughout, and I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit more about how it enters into the painting practice.

McClelland: Well, I'm surrounded by musicians, and I feel like I, there's a way that when musicians get together in a room, they often don't talk, but they converse with their instruments. And Drew, I've learned a lot about percussion through him, and my first husband, Peter Bradley, was close with a lot of jazz musicians, and in the '80s, jazz was, the clubs were kind of empty, and so people, we went to shows all the time, and the shows were like rehearsals, you know, Gil Evans and Art Blakey were older, it wasn't the jazz age, it was a time though when younger musicians were brought in to play with older musicians, and it was a learning experience publicly. And I've just, that's never left me, that – my sister's also a composer, she studied with Milton Babbitt, twelve-tone music, and I learned a lot about electronic music through her when she went to Columbia and at Electronic Music Studio, which had opened in the '50s, was fully functioning in the '80s, and now it's sitting there like a dinosaur, which I, I think I mentioned Kelly and I were, I mentioned it to Kelly, because she went to grad school at Columbia, but it's there, in Prentis Hall.

Anyway, that's a wormhole, but yeah, I mean, sound is, in, sound is how, is how I learn, and there's a lot of pleasure in it, and there's a lot of ways that music connects your mind and your body.

Audience #2: Just, could you talk about how fabric has, like how your use of fabric has changed in your practice over, over time?

McClelland: Yeah. Painting, paintings are made on and of and with fabric. And I, I think that, historically, I mean, fresco is a material that receives pigment in that very particular way that you're all, hopefully, playing with, because it's, it's an extraordinary way to touch the, you know, and feel what it is to, to let a surface and a material merge. And fabric is something that, you know, when I was a teenager I taught, like, batik workshops to make money, and so, fabric I think is something that we, we use to protect ourselves, but we also show who we are with it, and there's a lot of joy and sensuality and, I find it, you know? I, I don't use it in my work in a way that a lot of amazing textile artists use it, but every time I start to paint, I think really carefully about what that surface is, and what that weave is. And I love it. {laughs} I just love the, what, the slipperiness or the roughness or the, you know, what the edges do with each other, what the cut of something is, what it does to someone's body. Yeah. I don't know if that answers your question, but.

Audience #3: Oh, oh it's me, okay. Yeah, I was - thank you for this - I was in a lot of beautiful transitions with the work, and I'm just curious on how do you know when a series or body of work is done to move onto the next, and do you go back to any of them? Cause I'm seeing like a lot of different transitions, so I'm just curious.

McClelland: Well, I'm actually glad you asked that, because I, I definitely go back. I, I didn't read my whole introduction, but there is a way that I have spiraled both up and down and treated this making life as a kind of spring, so I'll return and cannibalize my own work. I know that's a term that has been used a lot in recent years, but I definitely do that to myself. I take, I take things, and there are always these threads that get left behind, or thrown on the floor, and I go back.

And, you know, I mean I think you could, you could probably see some of them, but, you know, forty years {laughs}, there's, it's kind of paralyzing, actually. This was the hardest talk I've ever done, because I've had enough time over the last couple years to think about what should be in the world and what, what I don't want in the world. And I don't want my friends and family to have to deal with things that are not, that shouldn't be here. So, I definitely go back now, and I look at the things that should have been done another way, and then I'm doing them.

Audience #3: Okay.

McClelland: Yeah.

Audience #3: Thank you.

Audience #4: Hi. I guess, given the context of today, the heaviness of the news today, and your work, which, across many years has looked really closely at I guess politically what is happening, I'm thinking about something that I find fruitful, at moments like this, or comforting, in coming together with artists, is to think about when, when we encounter something in the world that is deeply painful, and maybe art can feel maybe like inaccessible, or become useless, or maybe is not the way, and I know a lot of artists that are kind of both artists and activists in this, you know, like I think actually constantly we encounter these moments. And I guess, do you have a story about a moment where that happened for you, and how you overcame it, or is there kind of a routine or ritual that you do in, as an artist, to kind of maintain your connection and need to make art, in moments that feel too heavy? (01:00:03)

McClelland: Well, I am, I'm hoping that I, this wasn't a big downer, you guys, cause I am really, for some reason, today just took me apart. And, and, so, I'm not an activist fulltime. I have moments, periods of time where I can use protest as a way to participate, but I'm trying to find, well, I have found very particular ways to work directly with people, and something we talked about today, in that circle in the library, had to do with listening and acting on what we hear with individuals. And so if one person can take some pleasure out of one thing that I put in the world, and if they have access to it, then I'll, I can feel a little tiny bit of piece. You know, museums should be free; art galleries are free - commercial art galleries, weirdly, are free still.

Some people stand in line to go into stores to shop, which I don't understand. I get, I guess it's a little bit because, like, the fact that clubs used to be places that you had to be let in, by a bouncer. Hopefully there's a little less of the bouncer action going on now, but, you know, making art and making it available and giving it, letting it be this third thing that we can share our thoughts around is, is satisfying, to a certain extent. I do think that when people can dance in the same room together, or when they can share, when there's music, there's a way that people can be with each other that's super important, and powerful. So, I don't know if I'm answering your question, but.

Audience #5: [INAUDIBLE]

McClelland: Oh, okay. Well it's hot. Isn't it hot? Are you guys hot? No?

Okay, well I'll just tell you, okay, this, yeah, because I was kind of thinking that Alix Pearlstein and I, I was making posters, and my first poster was this. And it was about ten years ago, and I started to just create that archive of memories of the names of people who fed me in my lifetime. Just musicians that you can't always find, even in Spotify. Maybe a little bit better now, but ten years ago it was harder to find, so I was making a kind of memory list. And I then made a poster of the text from the hearings, the Christine Blasey Ford hearings. You know, there's something about hearings, where you're listening to a person speak, and everybody's absorbing that tone, and phrasing, and analyzing the appearance of that person, and a, you know, actually hearing or adjusting to what is being said is, is a navigation. I mean, I think Gordon expressed it better than I can, it's that gap between what you see and what you hear.

Amanda, I don't know if you all know who Amanda Nguyen is, but she is an activist, and she wrote a bill, she got a bill passed, called the Survivors' Bill, and she liked this, this coat that we made for Christine Blasey Ford, and Alix saw the posters I was doing and said, 'Okay, I want to wear that. I think that needs to be activated.' And she's an amazing performance and video artist, and sculptor, who you guys should all know about. She and I worked out the design, and we had the piece made, and then Amanda, after wearing it, she created this survivors' fashion show at MOMA last fall, and asked us to design this ao dai for her, which is a traditional Vietnamese dress. And it, it, it was a process of finding ways to use aspects of the bill that were, that she wanted, well, we designed it, but she wore it, and we found ways of sort of putting forward the sections of the text that we thought could be read when moving. And right in the middle there is Obama's signature, it's something that he signed right before he left, so, we were really happy that that happened.

This is actually the very first idea that I had, which was Anita Hill's hearings, which, the Clarence Thomas hearings were a major rupture in television history. And what she says is in, on this dress. It's her opening statement, so it's her voice. And if you want to read it more closely, you have to cozy up to Sarah. Yeah.

Audience #6: I wanted to ask you about your relationship to, like, painting as a medium, because in your work, you paint, but you also did a lot of other things, and I'm wondering if you have, like, a kind of love and hate relationship with, like, history of paint, and like what's outside of your practice? Or, like, how do you relate to painting – oh, sorry – as a general, as a medium, not just in the personal of what we see in the images.

McClelland: Yeah. See, this is where, I'm better in conversation than in the lecture thing. And I'm glad you said that, because the thing that took me to painting was that when I showed up in New York in 1981, I was using a camera, and I didn't have a studio, so the camera did not ever deliver what I wanted it to deliver. I still go to photographs to read, basically to learn and to absorb, and the beauty, the beauty in a photograph is just still the thing that kind of gets me going, especially in book form. I happen to love the, I love

photographs as text, in a way. And I found myself wandering around the city going to, I mean, I had many jobs, but I worked in a photo lab, Duggal color lab, and it was just starting. And I, so I spent a lot of time with photographs and with photographers, and I worked with fashion photographers, I did sets for them and different things like that. But it was what, when I really had time, what I did was I visited paintings.

And one reason most of the people I knew from the Midwest went to LA in 1980, '81, '79, LA was, felt very wide open – it still does to me – it felt like there were a lot of possibilities, ways of living there, but in New York I could walk around, and I could walk in, and I could sit in front of a painting, a Lucas Cranach, and just be there with it. I didn't have to own it, I didn't have to, I wasn't even thinking that I was necessarily even going to be part of its history, but I just fell in love with the, the physicality of paintings. And the fact is that those auction houses and the marketplace are driven by painting as currency, and I know that. And I also know that when I was, when I was in art school, there was nothing that I was taught that said that I would ever be a part of that. So I wasn't even thinking about it.

And, yeah, I do have a lot of inner conflicts about it. But I still, I still, like, up there on that hill, I'm making paintings. They're easy, they're direct – they're not easy, I don't know why I'm saying they're easy. {laughter}

Audience #7: Oh --

McClelland: You can touch them, they're there, I don't need any, I don't need many tools. I mean, as you see, I work outdoors a, I work outdoors, I work – I think that a lot of things function as paintings. (01:10:02)

Audience #7: I would like to hear more, you were just talking about painting as capital, I want to hear more about you – ugh, how do I say this. You seem to be very inspired by Black culture, and the music, and I want to say the, like, it clearly gives you joy to create these paintings, and yeah, I just want to hear about your interest in Black culture.

McClelland: Okay. Well, American culture is Black culture, in many ways. And I think a lot of people that, a lot of the, I think, are you responding to *Playlist*?

Audience #7: Yeah, I mean, [INAUDIBLE] super formal abstract painting environments --

McClelland: So that's *Playlist*, then, you're talking about.

Audience #7: Yeah.

McClelland: Cause that would be, I mean, I showed you a David Hammons piece at the very beginning, he's Black. And *Playlist* can't exclude Black artists, because that's what American music is, so, yeah. I don't know if it goes further than that. Are you seeing that in other work, or? I mean, Anita Hill is Black, also.

Audience #7: I was interested in like how it inspired [INAUDIBLE]

McClelland: Well, the thing about the music is making *Playlist* was a memory, a memory trip, and I went way back, and like I said, I grew up in places where radio in the '60s and '70s was kind of ev, everywhere. It was in our cars, it was in our houses, and we all heard the same music. Also, by the way, there were no choices. You know, you turned on the radio, and you heard music from Detroit. You heard it from Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Toledo, Chicago.

And jazz is, was created by Black artists. And, so, to not recall those names, I think, would be false. For me, naming history is super important. And to me it's as valuable as reproducing a body, or reflecting a body. And in a way I think that the voice, you know, is the thing that hasn't been as clearly addressed as the body in, maybe even in art realm, in recent years. Yeah.

Audience #8: Is this working, yes? I want to ask you if in your work where you use the word, there was the intention to manifest the particular relationship that exists between meaning and signifier. And if you had the intention to show how one object or a word decontextualized from its area of use acquires a different meaning. Even the form in which the word is written will determine – sorry for my English – its contents and the perception and the, as told by [NAME UNCLEAR] to the artist Josef Kosuth, as, just as an example, thank you.

McClelland: [INAUDIBLE] I didn't hear very much of that.

Audience #8: Okay.

McClelland: I'm sorry.

Audience #8: I repeat with or without microphone. Okay. This, I hope it will work, okay? Maybe it's also theoretical issue. I, it's simple to understand what I want to say. So I repeat, I wanted to ask if in your work where you use the word, so like, the written things, there was the intention to manifest the particular relationship that exists between the meaning of something and the signifier. And if you had the intention to show how an object or a word, decontextualized from its area, like you do, maybe, putting words in a dress, so, from its area of use, acquires a different meaning. Even the form in which the word is written will determine its content, and perception.

Blah blah blah, and the rest is just [WORD UNCLEAR], it's like {laughter} the idea that if I say, you know, I love you, or, I LOVE YOU, like, in a crazy way {laughter} the significance, the meaning is deeper. And also, to use everyday words, in paintings, it acquires a different meaning. Or maybe say, I don't know, ten thousand times, repeat the same word, or a letter, like you did in the, in the Lucky Strike, not Lucky Strike, sorry, what's the cigarettes brand? The place you were doing – Philip Morris place, no? You were repeating the G, no? You were, many times. So I was interested in the meaning of the words that you bring in painting, and if you were putting different respected normal use of the

word we used to when we write something or read something in newspaper. I hope it doesn't --

McClelland: [INAUDIBLE]

Audience #8: Yeah, okay. Touché. {laughter}

McClelland: Thank you. Thank you, Carlos. That, I think you said it. You're asking about form.

Audience #8: [INAUDIBLE] so it's something different.

McClelland: There's a lot in there, and you can I can talk later, because I think this will be the, the last. {laughs}

I, if I'm understanding what you said, it has to do, your question has to do with whether the, the language itself is separate from the thing that it signifies, and its delivery. These are all, you know, components of how we are with each other. And I would say, yes, that's the material that I work with.

And I'm happy to talk with anybody about anything, but I think it's done. Thanks.
{applause, cheering}