

## Event Transcript

December 1, 2020 - A Discussion on Maria Rapicavoli's New Film *The Other: a familiar story*

Sara Reisman:

Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, The 8th Floor and Independent Curators International to celebrate the completion of Maria Dominica Rapicavoli's new film, *The Other: A Familiar Story*. Tonight's program centers on Rapicavoli's newly commissioned film, *The Other: A Familiar Story*, followed by a conversation between Rapicavoli, with activist, Maria Canela, moderated by Srimoyee Mitra, Director of Stamps Gallery at the University of Michigan.

Rapicavoli's two-channel film installation premiered in October at The 8th Floor with the opening of *To Cast Too Bold a Shadow*, a thematic group show which examines entrenched forms of misogyny in our culture. The film charts the haunting story of an Italian woman who's forced into marriage, leaving her family in Italy behind the United States. Loosely based on a true story, the film prompts questions about the ethics of art-making and curatorial practice, the draw lived experiences specifically at the frame of immigration. ICI and the Rubin Foundation have brought Rapicavoli, Canela, and Mitra together to discuss the ways in which trauma informs artistic practice and the tensions between ethical representation and artistic license especially in an era marked by political instability.

I'd like to extend special thanks and recognition for the Italian Council Program to promote Italian contemporary art in the world, by the Director General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, and Tourism. The Italian Council's generous support for this project has enabled the production of a complex film project that Rapicavoli miraculously realized in the midst of the pandemic. So kudos to you, Maria.

Before we begin, please note that this event includes ASL interpretation and captioning. Please look to our ASL interpreters, Grayson Van Pelt, who can wave, and Gloria Vargas will tag in later. They'll take turns starting with Grayson. Our captioner is Cory Dosti. To enable captioning, click on the CC button at the bottom of your Zoom pane. You can opt for a full transcript to be visible or just subtitles, please refer to the chat section for accessibility resources.

A few points of introduction. My name is Sara Reisman. I'm the Executive and Artistic Director of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, which is based in New York City, where we have supported art and social justice through grant-making for the last 25 years. Since 2015, at The 8th Floor, we've been organizing exhibitions and public programs that address themes of social justice and political import.

Tonight's program will feature several excerpts from Rapicavoli's film which is installed in on view at The 8th Floor where we opened *To Cast Too Bold a Shadow* on October 15. With its title borrowing a line from the late feminist poet, Adrian Rich's 1963 poem, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, *To Cast Too Bold a Shadow* examines and trenched forms of misogyny in our culture, to understand how feminism, misogyny and sexism intersect. The exhibition is open by

appointment through January 23rd and features works by Aliza Shvarts, Joiiri Minaya, Yoko Ono, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Anetta Mona Chisa and Lucia Tkáčová, Furen Dai, Maria Rapticavoli, Rajkamal Kahlon, Tracy Emin, and Betty Tompkins.

Appointments can be booked by visiting The 8th Floor website, [www.the8thfloor.org/visit](http://www.the8thfloor.org/visit). Or is it forward slash? Before turning the floor over to Renaud Proch, Executive and Artistic Director of Independent Curators International. I'd like to take a few minutes to recognize our respective relationships took place with the land recognition. We're gathered virtually in many locations at once, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Toronto, Zoom and other places, which are all unceded lands.

As this event is organized by the Rubin Foundation, I've opted to address the specific site where our offices are located, near Union Square, thereby acknowledging the Lenape Community, past and present, as well as future generations. The Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation and The 8th Floor acknowledge that we were founded upon exclusions and erasures of many indigenous peoples, including those whose land where the foundation is located.

This acknowledgement verbalizes a commitment to beginning the process of working to dismantle the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism, a commitment that's become all the more poignant in this time of political upheaval and resistance that have already resulted in transformative activist engagement across the country. To this, I'll add a virtual land recognition language was devised by Jill Carter, who's a professor in the Indigenous Studies and the Drama Theater Performance Studies Departments at the University of Toronto.

Carter writes, "Zoom has erected its headquarters in San Jose, California, while Skype has erected one key arm of its operations in Palo Alto, California. This is the traditional territory of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribal Nation. Current members of this nation are direct descendants of the many missionized tribal groups from across the region. We who are able to connect with each other via Zoom and Skype are deeply indebted to the Muwekma Ohlone as the lands and waters they continue to steward now support the people, pipelines and technologies that carry our breath, images and words across vast distances to others. Thank you."

One more note about questions for the audience that's here, and we have a good audience. I see the numbers are going up, please submit questions using the chat function at the bottom of your Zoom screen. When we open up the discussion to questions, we'll pull questions from the chat and call on you, giving you the option to speak. Or you can have us read your question, that's up to you.

So now, I'd like to quickly connect the dots between Independent Curators International and the Rubin Foundation. Back in the spring of 2019 Maria Rapticavoli applied with the Rubin Foundation for support from the Italian Council. One of the stipulations of the grant was to promote the completed artwork in other venues that with other institutions. So Maria's project will travel to a number of venues, including the Westfälischer Kunstverein in Munster, Germany, and the University of Buffalo Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York.

Additionally, we had been planning to collaborate with ICI to consider the sensitivities required and curating artwork that reflects the political conditions based on personal experience. I think

that's very present right now in the world. So Renaud and I have been in discussion about this event since February of this year. Here we are on Zoom in a very different reality. So thank you, Renaud, for continuing to work with us in spite of so many unknowns. I'm going to pass the floor over to you. Thank you.

Renaud Proch:

Well, thank you so much, Sara. It's been full of unknowns, like you said, but a pleasure nonetheless. It's been great to work with you and your team on this event, we're thrilled that it's finally happening, even if not in the format that we had originally planned for. I also want to start this, introducing the speakers this evening by connecting some additional dots. Start by introducing Maria Rapicavoli by mentioning that she participated in an ICI exhibition a few years ago called the *Ocean After Nature*.

With a video work in the form of a slide show that reflected some of the psychological impact of migration, narrative of people trapped in deregulated waters and deregulated economies, a kind of very moving and powerful work, which I think for us, foregrounded this event and her latest film, *The Other: A Familiar Story*. Maria is originally from Italy, and currently based in New York City. Her work has also straddled the Atlantic in this way. She has been featured in exhibitions from San Francisco to New York and from London to Palermo, and, of course, currently at The 8th Floor. So we're thrilled to have Maria with us this evening. Thank you and welcome.

Joining Maria Rapicavoli for this compensation is another Maria, Maria Canela. Maria is an artist and writer, an activist who's been deeply involved with the Queens Museum for many years previously, and involved with their New Yorker Mentorship Program. She also worked at the museum's educational department for several years. Recently, she published a book called *Marias*, which I thought was relevant for this bringing of two Marias. The book itself published two years ago, regroups stories of struggle and loss among women who all shared that first name Maria. She is a member of *Mujeres en Movimiento*, and is currently the community coordinator at DCLA in New York City's Department of Cultural Affairs. So welcome, Maria. Thank you for being here with us tonight for this conversation.

Moderating the conversation will be our colleague Srimoyee Mitra. Srimoyee is a curator and the Director of the Stamps Gallery at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. As a curator and researcher and writer, Srimoyee has been interested in migration for years, as well as narratives of globalization and decolonial aesthetics. When she was a curator at the Art Gallery of Windsor in Canada a few years ago, she developed an impressive exhibition cycle. I was able to see the first one of them called *Border Cultures*, which was presented in I think three acts, three consecutive exhibitions between 2013 and 2015.

Those shows investigated in depth and through the work of artists issues of migration and the impact of borders on societies, culture and individuals. So we're very grateful to Srimoyee for her role in moderating the conversation this evening. Without further ado, I would like to welcome Srimoyee, Maria Rapicavoli, and Maria Canela. Thanks. Go ahead and try and get started.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Thank you, Renaud. Thank you, Sara. It's such an honor to be here today. I'm very excited to be in conversation with the Marias. So without further ado, I'll just start with a little framing of our conversation and then we'll dive right into it.

"So some stories never end. The sole purpose of violence is to affirm the power of the attacker. The damage caused by violence is permanent. What is a woman? What is authority? How is authority exerted?" So here, I'm quoting directly from Maria Rapicavoli's film. As these sentences, some of these sentences and questions is sort of how the film, the really powerful film, *The Other: A Familiar Story* begins with.

It is the story of a woman, an immigrant, a survivor of domestic violence, and male economic hegemony. It is the story of a Bread and Roses striker who demanded better wages and writes, making the invisible struggles of the working class more visible across America and beyond. Maria Rapicavoli's timely film comes to us at an urgent time. As the pandemic has gripped our nation, radically transforming everyday lives, it has laid bare the deep roots of racial health disparities and violence that continues to disenfranchise and dehumanize communities of color and LGBTQ+ people.

At a time when the American democracy reckons with its own saliency, while we witness injustices at personal and societal levels, this film invites us to ruminate and interrogate how can we break the cycles of oppression that are indeed intergenerational, colonial and intersectional. To explore this further, I'm deeply honored and humbled to be here with two incredible women, Maria Rapicavoli, artist of the film, *The Other: A Familiar Story*, and activist and writer Maria Canela. Welcome.

Maria Canela:

Thank you.

Srimoyee Mitra:

For our conversation today, we will watch short excerpts from the film, and then dive deeper into the themes of migration, domestic violence, labor loss and our shared futures. So without further ado, I'd like to invite William to please take us off, start us off with the first excerpt.

[Film Excerpt Plays]

Srimoyee Mitra:

Thank you. Maria Rapicavoli and Maria Canela, I'd like to invite you to introduce yourselves to us. Maybe we'll start with Maria Rapicavoli. Introduce us to the film and sort of the research and the process of developing it and the impetus behind it.

Maria D. Rapicavoli:

Hi, everybody. Thank you for coming. Yeah. The film is called *The Other: A Familiar Story*, because it's based on a true story, a story that I'd been told. It's a story that at one point, I decided to bring up, I decided that needed to be narrated. Yeah, it is a story of this woman who was related to my family. She moved to the United States because she had to follow her husband. They were living in Sicily, in my village, actually. They had four kids, and they moved to United States. But the story starts, as you saw in the film in a different way, with some sexual violence. So this is the beginning of the story.

Yeah, it's a story that is been always there with me in a way, because there is a reason I think why I've been told this story. The reason is that this is a story that really still exist, because it's a story that could be related to a lot of women. I actually started the project with what I had. What I had was personal memories. Then I knew that there was a family here in the United States that I didn't know, I never met. I knew they were living somewhere near Boston. I decided to do some search, I wanted to find them. Then I found them, I literally started a conversation on Facebook. Then I found the woman who is the granddaughter of the woman I'm talking about in my film. She's 94. She still uses Facebook, she's amazing.

With her, with expectations, because we could finally talk and combine the two stories that we had, because I had a story from the Sicilian family, and she had the story, she's sort of this woman when she moved to the United States. Finally, because they speak English, she doesn't speak Italian, she couldn't speak to any of the Italian family. But I could connect the two stories because we could speak the same language in a way. Then the story became completed and it was finally ready, yeah, to be narrated.

So that's how it started. It was a little bit complex, because, of course, all of this personal memories, we shared memories and also brought up, especially for her, yeah, some memories that are not very, very nice to remember. So for me, it was also a way of trying to build a story that is based on that, but it's not really the real story.

In my film, when I say, "This is not my story." It's because I mean, in the script, what I want to say is that the main character, this woman I'm describing, I mean, it's not her story, because she was never able to tell her story. This is a story that I build up because of memories and because of filters, like memories that were filters. We know memories is based on what we want to remember somehow, right? What we keep and what we don't keep, it's very subjective. So this is not really her story, because she was never allowed to speak. She was never allowed to say anything. It's only based on what we know, what we try to understand of also what her granddaughter saw. So yeah.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Thank you. We'll get into sort of that sort of complexity of bringing personal narratives and archives into the public forum. So thank you for bringing that. I'd just like to ask Maria Canela, if you could. I'm really excited to hear your actually your take and response to the film because you've spoken a lot as having arrived in the states and your experience here. So could you tell us a little bit, introduce yourself and your work?

Maria Canela:

Sure. Hello, and thank you for inviting me. I'm honored to be part of this conversation because watching this video and listening to the history, it's like every person has something inside their history. Once we came here, we bring a lot. As I mentioned, in the past, we bring a lot from our country, we bring a lot of dreams and pain, and sadness, and all those goodbyes that we never want to remember, but are part our all lives.

So yeah, I arrived to United States in 2006. In 2008, I decided to move to New York because I found that Queens Museum has art class for free. So I was like, "Oh my Lord, that's free, I can do that." I was living in New Jersey, working and just being like another immigrant, fighting every day to do something. But I need something else, I need something that connect me with my soul. So I need some art in my life. In the place, I live in New Jersey, I didn't have that. So when I came to New York, that was like a big open door for myself. Oh my Lord, I can practice my photography, learn other skills, and I never imagined that that simple decision will change my life forever.

So coming here, I connect with so many immigrants and then I find out that I'm not alone. I wasn't the only woman that left the children behind, the family behind to come in here and trying to find a better life for them and for me. So that was beautiful at the end, that was almost three-year crying and the rest of the life, just being myself, finding inside me something that I can share with the people. When I first came to Queens Museum, and I started taking classes, and I decided that I can learn English also by taking classes at the museum. So that worked for me in different ways because I change my work, I changed the life I used to living here. I learned English so that opened more doors for me, even though that I was an undocumented woman for about five years in United States.

So facing the reality that is painful, I have something to balance the difficulties to be an undocumented woman. At the same time, improving a my life to connect and to do better for me or for my community. So when with museum open, or I don't know if I'm too fast for the people that is translating. I'm okay?

Then when Queens Museum support the immigrant movement with other institutions, so I met Tania Bruguera and I met all the amazing people that were going to the place. So at the beginning, that was a place created to offer people ways to express themself, to fight for their rights using art. The people were coming to the door saying, "Hey, do you have English classes? Do you have citizenship classes?" Tania was like, "No, we work with activists, as art."

Soon, she needed to change that to offer the people what they need, because immigrant came here. We love art. Now in the past four years, I think that many people learned how to be an activist, and they never imagined that they had no opportunity, but necessity to fight for their rights. So I think that's the good part of the dark times we're facing now, is that a lot of people find a way to express themselves, to break their voice. By the time I arrive here, there was something that not everyone used to do. That was like the organizers fight and some people go to the March.

But now, I think that everyone, even children, all the people that never in their life imagined that they will be fighting in the street for something for immigration, for housing, for education, for health of that, that's incredible. So all those changes that we are seeing now in New York, I think that I had the opportunity to enjoy that from the beginning. At the moment, I started working, after the museum, working with carwash workers. They were afraid to speak and fight for the rights.

We were here helping them to express themselves, and we find a way to make them be present in this fight. Then in 2016, I was crying almost every day, just watching the same people being afraid to go out to speak, to fight for their rights. So I was like, "Oh my Lord, all that work, it's just missing somewhere." That is something that at the end, would be good for all of us, I think, because now people know how to fight. Now people know that they are not alone here. Now they know that they have a voice, they need to make everyone to listen to those voices.

So it's the bitter sweet of their life, that. I have mentioned the Mujeres en Movimiento women. This is an amazing group that was born in the Immigrant Movement. The leader is Veronica Ramirez, a Mexican woman that was facing depression by the time the Immigrant Movement opened. So she approached Tanya and asked her to find someone to do some exercise classes, because she listened in the radio that if you exercise, you can cope with depression.

Tania was like, "Okay, you can put the videos and start. You can start." Then she saw more women calling saying, "If you bring 10 women, I buy the videos for you, and I put the videos in the projector." She did it. After that, Tanya sent her to take Zumba classes. Then she was so happy, but she was conversing like, "Zumba doesn't fill my soul. It's not what I want." So she created something that is dance therapy. It's like you have a song, that means something for you. Then you dance in that song, you exercise with that song.

At the same time, you are thinking, and singing, and dancing, and sharing all your experience. Sometimes we made workshops that you are learning how to make flowers, but we were speaking about domestic violence, we are speaking about how to educate our children, how to ask for help when you are living under domestic violence situation.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Thank you.

Maria Canela:

Now, it's like all those things together, one thing put together. So I have one minute.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Thank you. Yeah, I see there's one minute. But you know, I just want to hold this. Thank you so much for that and that insight. We'll get into it as we get further. But one thing that strikes me from what you're sharing, Maria Canela, with the film in terms of a parallel with the film, Maria Rapicavoli, it seems like it was a very deliberate decision for you in terms of the way in which

you've portrayed the woman, the sort of the protagonist in the film.

She's strong, she's telling there is a story. I want to also after this next excerpt, talk a little bit about the landscape, and your decisions, and how to pair the emotions and the text and what we hear in the voiceover and the images. The one that really struck me is violence is permanent. Destruction is permanent, and the imagery with that, and then this motif of the water. So let's hold this thought, get into the next excerpt.

Then when we come back, Maria Rapicavoli, if you could talk a little bit about how your decision and how you came to ... Because you're working with this really difficult story, these really difficult narratives that you've obviously patched together, right, how the decisions you made about representation and how you represented the protagonist and the relation of the protagonist with the overall, within the environment, there's something very seamless there. Then from there, we'll go deeper into the narratives of Maria Canela. Okay, thanks, William, if you can take us to the next one.

[Film Excerpt Plays]

Srimoyee Mitra:

Thank you. So let's start with talking about the figure and kind of how you chose to represent the protagonist. Yeah, there's a lot there to unpack. Thank you.

Maria D. Rapicavoli:

So first of all, I want to say that you're seeing two screens because the film is a two channels film. The idea of having two screens, one next to another is because this was my idea of representing dualism. It goes back to the title, the title is *The Other: A Familiar Story*, "The Other" is taken from the Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, which refers to "the Other." The woman is considered like "the Other" compared to the men, which is the absolute in a way. In this sense, the woman I'm talking about is "the Other" because somehow she's the other compared to her husband, because she's in a position somehow with him. But also as an immigrant, she is a stranger in a foreign country. So there's a second level of otherness in a way.

Then also, this idea of ... So the reason also I have two screens is to describe this as the other notion of the uncanny, which is the Freudian uncanny which is like where the estrangement and familiarity coexists in a way. So this is what I wanted to recreate because I thought that the experience of this woman through her whole life was really experiencing constantly dealing with this familiarity, unfamiliarity.

Dealing with a man who was supposed to be familiar, but he was a stranger her whole life because she never really could connect with him in a way. So this is why you have two screens. Of course, I mean, in an exhibition space, the idea of having a large screen, like wall projections is to really invite the audience and the viewer to really embrace, enjoy, in a way that is very sensorial way. So you have to imagine really in a too large wall projections. Also the sound, yeah, the sound, there was a lot of work in the sound designing. Because, again, I wanted to

recreate this video, very sensorial work.

So saying that, the actress, Mishiaka Malari, she's a Sicilian actress. I on purpose picked her, I mean I think it's very interesting to have this woman who is Sicilian, but at the same time, she has red hair. It's not really the stereotype of an Italian or a Sicilian woman. Although she's really 100% Sicilian, and also the voiceover is her own voice. I like this because I wanted to use ... Italians can really a little bit here some Southern accent. That's what I really wanted to have.

But at the same time, you cannot really locate her because it's not really a Sicilian accent. You it's kind of a boggle, you don't really know, cannot really locate this woman. Of course, she's white, but again, it's like she could be Irish or any nationality in a way. That was on purpose. About the ocean, I mean, I decided to use ... I mean, the ocean is very important in this film. Initially, when I presented the project, the initial idea was to travel. I wanted to travel and take a boat from Sicily to the United States and film it. Also trying to experience what the woman talking about experience. But then it was kind of complicated. In a way, it was complicated because there's really not a boat that goes there anymore. It's not easy to travel by boat from Europe to the United States.

But in the past, when all the immigrants moved to the United States, to Ellis Island, there were a lot of boats that were going to the United States. It taking 40 days, it was like a long trip. I'm using the ocean a lot in this film of because somehow my understanding, the ocean is a gate, is a temporal and geographic gate. It really describes the separation for me. I've been thinking about it. Maybe it's because I grew up in an island.

So for me, every time I cross the sea, I leave home. I mean, that it. It's like I used to live an island. I'm living in an island now. I don't think it's a coincidence. I don't know. I've been thinking about it. I'm like, yeah, well, even if I go to Brooklyn, I cross the bridge. For me, that moment when I cross the bridge, it's a moment for myself. It's somehow really a passage, like really a bridge. That's why I'm using a lot the ocean. That water you're seeing in the film is water from ... I filmed it in Sicily, but also in Ellis Island. Well, there's more. I mean, I can also talk about the object that she's using and her mannequins, there is a lot. A lot in interpreting so...

Srimoyee Mitra:

Yeah, so thank you. Yeah, I mean, definitely, it's like brimming with water in terms of there's also this set of ... Which I think this film, also in terms of the pace. There's this sense of a release, and then and then a constriction, with the breath. I felt especially that scene of the sense of arrival, right, which in migration and immigrant narratives, also, Maria Canela, when you arrive, you're bringing a lot with you. Memories, pain, imagination, dreams. It's this incredible moment that you really captured.

Maria Canela:

Yeah, it's like that. We need to bring everything in your mind, in your hearts because you bring nothing here more than you. Only you and your experience. So yeah, separation, everything is difficult. When I saw the part of the video that the women were saying about the men that the

only plate in the table was his. So a lot of women are facing that situation even here. They think that they're coming here. They have a new life or they find it same situation in here. It's complicated, and it's complicated to explain the other people, to people that doesn't know what we are living in in other country, back in your countries and here too.

Because sometimes they are like, "They don't have right because they don't have documents." I say, "Yeah. Well, they have the right to work for \$4 per hour, for you to pay \$9 for plate of food in the restaurant." Somebody told me one day that the immigrants are stealing their job. I say, "Yeah, sure. The woman that get up at 3:00 AM to go and clean floors and come back to another part of the city at 9:00, and eats something, cleaning up another house, go back, and ride home around 10:00. That woman is taking something for you? You know where we need to take? You know her job?"

So I use those examples for people that I know, and I mentioned that people with names, just to put something in context. Immigrants are facing a lot here. These separations are inhuman. You are going bed every day, imagine your kids in the bed because your kids are not with you. I wish to have those mannequins with me. That's amazing. If you have the mannequins, you can maybe simulate your kids better. For me, that's powerful.

It's powerful because we construct our life every day with nothing, nothing. Just you are working on creating something just to be alive, just to continue going and going and doing everything you need to do to go back. Yeah, it's a lot, we can say, yeah. Every time is safe.

Srimoyee Mitra:

I want to come back-

Maria Canela:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Srimoyee Mitra:

Yeah. Just the notion of the uncanny. Because we have this moment of the water, the ocean, the sort of deep movement that's so much bigger than us. Then you sort of pair that with the image of I think capturing the personal, domestic violence of that situation, paired with the patriarchal, the hegemony, right, that she's also up against. Right? I think the puzzles, that's a really powerful moment in the film, and the questions, this scrutiny from moving from that to the figures. It'd be great to hear about how you conceptualize that scene, and then we will move to the last segment of that.

Maria D. Ropicavoli:

Yeah. So the puzzle you saw, those puzzles are the real puzzles. I mean, not the real, but reproduction of the ones that we're using at Ellis Island. They were testing people's mental health, we'll say, in a way because they were like timing them. They had 10 minutes to make the

puzzle, and it was like a face. Then with that puzzle, they were able to define if this people could move in or not, and then if they were not able to do it, they were sent back home. So that was a very, very important moment, they went through a lot of tests.

To me, when I let her say like in the voiceover, she says like, "I wish there was like a test to measure cruelty," because in a way, maybe that could have been the only way for her to go back home or to just escaped from this man. Another thing I want to say is the location, that is a brutalist building in Boston and is a mental health center that was made by Rudolph, the architect. Sorry. That's why I decided to use that location in a way because somehow ... There was a travel also, so symbolic of place. I put her on this alter, in this chapel, where she was trying also to combine pieces of her life in a way with this puzzle. Another thing about the separation of the ocean, and I want to add, she had to leave four kids in Sicily when she moved to the United States.

So the separation for her was really like ... Also one of the kids was two years. She really didn't want to, she was forced to. So that moment of the ocean, I imagine is a moment of really a moment for her of big separation. As a Sicilian and again, Renaud was talking about the work I made, a few years ago about migration. The ocean is also considered like the place where a lot of migrants are now dying, all these people, a lot of poor people traveling by boat from Middle East and North Africa to Sicily. I mean, I imagine the ocean is really related to movement and migration and this transitory moment. Yeah. Sadly.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Yeah, well, let's go to the last, I think this will be our last excerpt. Then we can continue.

[Film Excerpt Plays]

Srimoyee Mitra:

Oops. Okay. All right. That was a little bit shorter. Call him.

William Furio:

That was the whole video.

Maria D. Rapicavoli:

Yeah, that was.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Okay.

William Furio:

That I received.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Okay. Well, I wanted to take a moment to talk about that scene where the protagonist is playing with the bed frame. She talks about how she imagined herself moving the bed, when she's been forced to, during this moment of repeated, recurring violence. So I wanted to just take some time into talking about agency. Also, we sort of left off talking about the prison in which you in which the previous scene, that sort of arrival moment, between the personal and the systems of power. At this moment, maybe I should let you, Maria, to tell us a little bit about this is the moment as well when we learn that the protagonist was part of the sort of historic strike, right, or worked in the mill, and decision of where this was filmed, and her being caged in, which you've captured within this huge space. Yeah.

Maria D. Rapicavoli:

Yeah. So the location is the stone mill. It's the textile mill where the protagonist was working for real. So last year, when I went to visit my family in the United States for the first time in Boston, near Boston, in Lawrence, Massachusetts, Thanksgiving, and it was a really nice moment. Then they showed me also this place which is the mill where for real that a lot of people were working in Lawrence.

This is an incredible ... Some other meals are already ... They are converted into residential places, but this one is abandoned. It still exists the same way they left it when they dismissed it. So I decided to use this location as a very strong important place. In this scene, so the scene before the ones we see is there is a woman who's like moving this bed, moving from one room to another one. Then it ends with her like trying to put it in that corner and tried the bed frame, I would say and then just leave it there.

This bed frame is empty. It's just the bed frame. In the scene before she says something related to the fact that she had to follow her husband every time he wanted her to go to the bedroom with him and she didn't want to. She was somehow trying to imagine to move this bed frame from one room to another one to escape from that, and also to dream trying to escape from that situation where she wasn't.

In the end, she tries to fit it also into a very narrow place, but it doesn't really work. So it's somehow a metaphor of something that you really want to try to make it work, but it doesn't. It cannot work in a way. It's very, very restrained. It's also related to the fact that she experienced the Spanish Flu. So she experienced the pandemic as well as we are experiencing that.

I was imagining her being in a very restricted place and just being unable to escape. Then what a lot of women, like most of women were like victims of violence, domestic and sexual violence, they always say that they feel like they're mice in a cage, they cannot really escape. So I wanted to recreate this idea because of course, violence increased during pandemic. We know that domestic violence is increasing now a lot among women. Somehow this was my way of kind of also describe it. Also that mill, the textile mill is a very symbolic place because it's where the

strike, the Bread and Roses Strike started.

It started from women, women were the ones who were starting the strike. For the first time, there was a big strike in the United States, and they won in the end. They were on strike for three months. Then in the end, they won. They got some rights, they were paid more, they got what they asked for. It started from women. Although not every woman would be allowed to go on strike. She wasn't, she couldn't go on strike I think. I mean, I don't know, but I can imagine. I was considering the life she was living, I don't think she was allowed to go on strike. But that also part of the film, like the last part of the film? Yeah.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Thank you.

Maria D. Rapicavoli:

Yeah.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Maria Canela, when you were sharing your anecdotes and your stories, there's a lot of pride and the agency within these really difficult circumstances, having to leave your children and then coming out, now them being here with you and after this time, when you were undocumented for a little bit. So can you speak a little bit to some strategies that you have used for yourself and also the work that you're doing working with other women, immigrant women, I imagine, helping them empower themselves, helping them.

Maria Canela:

Yeah, for me, I used to say that the most difficult thing to have when you are living in an uncomfortable or abused relationship is to have distance, to think because we are in the situation, the people don't understand that you cannot think clear. You don't see the things the same way the other people see it. I used to say that you need to go out. At least one day, you need to be far from that person for a little bit. You need to do something different.

With the Mujeres en Movimiento, that is a beautiful place to be because all those women are normal people, that are working, taking care of the kids. Sometimes some women came with this complicated conversation about domestic violence. So we are like, "We need to be careful the way we speak with them." Because usually when you say, "You need to go out of the situation. You need to do something you need to leave the man," usually the women go back. They go back to the home and they never come back to you to speak or to find help.

So I think that with Veronica, the leader of the group, we are always thinking about how we speak with this specific woman or this specific situation or how we find help with them. So we used to say, "You need to do something, you need to go out, but you need help. You cannot do it by yourself. You need to call this place. You need to go to this app, to speak with these people."

I have a specific situation with a woman that was married for 30 years and living in domestic violence for all those years. So when I call her, she said like, "You don't call me. You send me a text message saying hello. If I answer you, you can call me. If no, say nothing. Say nothing in this message. Don't call me."

So for me, that was like, ah. I want to go there want to just face the situation with her, but we can't. What we used to do is just explain them. I use my example. I was in a domestic violence situation. Nobody hit me or things like that, but another kind of violence, psychologic violence, and it's more terrible. When I was far from the person for three days, I was like, "Okay, I can do this." I understood my situation. So that's the reason I say by my friend, some women that are living in the situation, "Please just go off for one day."

When women go to dance with Mujeres en Movimiento, they are breaking many, many things. They're breaking the rules of violence because there are rules. You can go out, you can speak with nobody, you cannot have friends, you cannot bring friends to the house. Those women are going out dancing in the street, in the park, everywhere. They start little by little, little by little, and then you find out that they are just free, free, really free, and their children.

So another things I used to do, when I have this conversation about domestic violence, I used to mention that you are teaching your daughter and your son how a relationship is. That's not right. You need to teach your daughter that she has the right to be respect. You cannot put your daughter in that situation that she sees you like that's normal that my husband treat me like trash, that's normal. It's not.

So when you mention somebody that is living under domestic violence situation, when you mentioned them, the children, it's another way to see the life. It's like, okay. Because they don't see for themselves. Those women don't think that they are ... They say, "Oh, he's like that, then he say, 'I'm sorry,' he's a good man, he's a good father, he works. He bring money to the house," all those things that everyone, at least someone wants.

So when you mention the children, the daughter, basically the daughters, the sons too, because they both are taking the same information. Both of them, the girls and boy are going use that information in the future. So I think that's the best way, but there are many ways. All the women react to different stimulus, I think that the most important part is to have a place to go and a place to go for help, somebody to call. For me and for Veronica, it's important to have a phone number to give them, a phone number with the institution that help women with domestic violence. The city has places too, but sometimes women that don't want to go to the city, they don't want to go to something too public because they are afraid, and we need to understand that.

Yeah, we are learning every day. I think that women and men, all of them, because violence is for everyone. When they learn something new, when they practice something new, when they improve their own life, they just go out of those situation where it's a natural. Maybe I'm too optimist. Maybe I give a lot of power to the process of learning or practice art, because I think that the soul and the heart, they speak out. So when you are related to art, I think that everything else is easier. I need to say that museums and all those cultural institutions, they don't imagine the power they have to change the life of the people. Not just to teach them how you appreciate

artwork or something like that, but changing their life, you know, giving them the tools to just start seeing life in a different way. So when a museum opened the doors, when a cultural institution opened the doors to the people, you don't need to make a plan. You just open the door for the people that came, for immigrant, for women, for everyone just came and that simple step change people's life.

So I'm always saying this, every time I have the opportunity to speak in public, I like to say that because for me, the magic touch is art institutions and community, all together working and doing something for all those immigrant, LGBTQ community that are suffering every day, that this craziness that we are trying to make them to be like us. Nobody asked me if I am straight or whatever. So I don't need to go out and say, "I'm straight."

But I expect them to say that? That's unfair. So I think that we need to work together. We need to find ways to tell stories, like this is only that Maria Rapicavoli is showing us, it's amazing. For me, it's something here special inside me. So altogether, we can do a lot for our community. We can at least stop a big, big number of abusers in every situation, not only abusers from the home, but abusers in the institutions, abusers in politics, everywhere, we can do it if we work in an intentional way. So combining all those things. So yeah.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Thank you, that was a really good sort of summation as we sort of start getting ready to take some questions. I guess what I just wanted to take a moment to consider and put back is summarizes the sense of space, right, creating this idea of a safe space, what does that mean. What does that mean in the context of the pandemic? It's an incredible, urgent film, and also the fact that it is taking place in our sort of present moment, I hope maybe we can talk about that. As we for a few moments, Maria, your thoughts on, as you mentioned, at the beginning, she was living during the Spanish influenza, and for you to bring it to the present was very important. After that, we'll open it up to the public, to them for questions.

Maria D. Rapicavoli:

Yeah. Yes. It's kind of a coincidence, because when I started planning to start the film, of course, I didn't know we were going to experience the pandemic. Then I was working on the film, and then I was experiencing isolation. I was staying home and I was watching and listening what was happening, and the more I was building it, and the more I was reading a lot about that, if you Google Spanish influenza, the first images that appears are from Lawrence, Massachusetts, where the mill, the textile mills is. I was like, "Wow, oh, my God, this is like ..." So I started thinking about that.

Of course, I didn't experience any domestic violence. I experienced isolation, but I was experiencing the restriction of being in a very small place. I was thinking about it, and I thought that that's something that we all are experiencing in a way, which is not just this physical space, of course, but it's also mental, we cannot travel. It's really a moment of, yeah, restriction. I thought it was kind of important. Then I start thinking about all of the domestic violence that that is happening is increasing in an incredible way and think about what is a safe place.

Then if we go back to what I was mentioning before, this idea of familiar and unfamiliar, home is supposed to be a safe place, but it becomes completely the opposite. It becomes like a prison actually. So that was what I wanted to bring up. Then it's also a scene in the film where I filmed inside a cave, like a natural cave. Also, when I mentioned the natural landscape that you saw in the beginning, it's a volcano, it's Mt. Etna.

It's where I grow up, but it's also where the woman grow up. So it's very familiar place in a way. There's a scene inside, this really small cave. She's walking into this cave, and you see this hole getting smaller and smaller. This absence of even breathing, there is no space even for oxygen, like anything that is oppressing. That's what I wanted to recreate in a way in the film. Yeah.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Thank you. Thank you. So with that, I will turn it over to William and Sara. I believe we want to reserve some solid some time for questions and to continue from the public. Yeah.

Sara Reisman:

Right. So I just want to remind everybody, if there are questions from the audience, please feel free to use the chat function and write in your question. I don't see that we have any just yet. So I thought I would start with a couple of questions. So the first, I think you addressed it a little bit, Maria Rapicavoli. But you mentioned the other comes from this excerpt from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, right?

The quote, I just want to see if I can find it. I just wondered if you could talk a little bit about that, because it's this idea of working against ... There's the one and the other. Can you talk about that? How you came to that? I mean, I can read it. I can read it out loud if you want?

Maria D. Rapicavoli:

Yeah. Thank you.

Sara Reisman:

"It is not the other who defining itself as other defines the one. The other is posited as other by the one positing itself as one. But in order for the other not to turn into the one, the other has to submit to this foreign point of view." So it says dance between the other and the one who's defining the other, other. Right?

Maria D. Rapicavoli:

Exactly. Exactly. That is the point. Because there is the one, there's also the other. It's already wrong already from the beginning. There shouldn't be a one and another. That's the point. This is really the key, the focal point of the film, the starting point, thought of it is this one, in a way.

Sara Reisman:

Right.

Maria D. Rapicavoli:

Yeah.

Sara Reisman:

With being at this disadvantage as the other and continually having to kind of navigate the lack of agency in that position. I have a question for maybe the two of you that I was thinking about, as you were speaking earlier. For Maria Canela, you spoke about Immigrant Movement International, which is, at least partly based or comes from some of Tania Bruguera's engagement and investment with Arte Útil. Right? this roughly translates into English as useful art. It also refers to art as a tool or device.

So I was thinking about that, and it's also about ways of thinking, to imagine, create and implement tactics that change how we act in society. So for both of you, I think this is just an interesting question. Maria Canela, in the work that you're doing at Cultural Affairs, you work at the Department of Cultural Affairs, which supports art in New York City. I wondered, I'm going to ask both questions, and then you can each respond, that split. But in your case, Maria Canela, you have a view of the city, I think that a lot of us don't have. Being in the seat of cultural funding and cultural policy, and I wonder how does the agency think about art's role right now, if you have any insight into that from the work that you're doing day to day.

Maria Canela:

I think that all the time we think that art is the most important part of the city. Art and culture is like people's life. Support art is the main purpose of the institution. Now, my new boss, I have two finger print before, he came for Queens Museum. So we work together in a beautiful way. Now, I have Gonzalo Casals. I'm like, "Yay!" Because we can speak Spanish and we sing in the car. But I think that this moment is very difficult for all things the institutions. Cultural affairs is working hard, trying to find ways to work and support the art in the community. Let's say, offer the opportunity to the community to participate the art and culture. This is very complicated now, but we are doing something.

I think that there is a lot, a lot of information related with economic support. I don't have that information, I'm sorry. But I can say that the whole institution is working hard every day trying to adapt, imagine, all the life working in one way. Now we have everything broken. It's like every day, a new thing, a new way, a new intent to make art and culture accessible for the community in general. My part, I am a connection between the Spanish speaking community and the commissioner. Now we need to do a lot by phone and videos because I cannot all the film show. I can visit groups in ... Basically corona because closed, and all institution I know, I'm working over there, like Queens Museum is doing a lot. I'm participating in events they are doing. We are planning to do things together.

The Mujeres, they are always doing something because they do everything outside, even the workshop. Yeah, for the Cultural Affairs, I just want to say that I'm always proud to be part of these parts of history, because I know by next year, we'll be just laughing about this craziness in 2020, and creating new, amazing ways for the community to just enjoy the art and the culture. That's it.

Sara Reisman:

So there are some questions coming in. I'll ask quickly, Maria Rapticavoli, how do you feel about this notion of useful art and art as a device? Can this film be a device? If it can be, and maybe you don't think it can be, but if it can be, what's the impact? How do you see it affecting the viewer?

Maria D. Rapticavoli:

Are you asking me or ...

Sara Reisman:

Asking you.

Maria D. Rapticavoli:

Yes.

Sara Reisman:

Rapticavoli.

Maria D. Rapticavoli:

I don't know if it's a device, I think it's a story where maybe some people find themselves or they can just ... How can I say? I had the urge to tell the story, right, that was my main thing. Then the more I was building the story, the more I was adding historical and together with personal memories. That made a story that could be more global, I think more universal. In this sense, yes, it could be. It could be some kind of device in a way that a lot of people no matter what nationalities or what ages, they can find something that they can use to just think of their situation in a way.

Sara Reisman:

So somewhat as a reflective space.

Maria D. Rapticavoli:

In a reflective, yeah, okay.

Sara Reisman:

Yeah. There are two there questions from Liz Park, who we can start with, and then Jajan Lin. Liz, if you would like to ask your question directly. It's a question about safe space. Maybe William can open up the microphone or the sound. Liz, are you-

Liz Park:

Hi, Maria.

Sara Reisman:

Hi.

Liz Park:

Hi. I scream my "Hi, everybody." My question was prompted by one of Srimoyee's comments, which she was talking about a safe space. I wanted to know if you thought of the ocean as a safe space at any point as you are making the film, because it's represented as the space of the bits that divides the protagonist's life from her past in Sicily to her new life in the US.

Maria D. Ropicavoli:

Yeah, interesting. I see the ocean more like a transitional place, which is also mental. In this sense, yeah, you can be just carried by the water. It can be in a way, I think, well, safe. It's more for me related to movement than to being transported from one place to another one. That's more. It's related to the time also. It's something that you want to take a plane, you just move from one place to another one very quickly. You cannot really experience the traveling., But when you take a boat and you go on a boat, you experience more of the traveling. In that sense, you could be saved because it will help you to heal and just accept and get used to the separation, maybe in a way. It's just really a transitional moment. Yeah.

Sara Reisman:

Should we go to Jajan? Are you here with us still?

Maria D. Ropicavoli:

Yeah, I can read this out.

Sara Reisman:

I can read it out, just if Jajan is here. Okay. So the question for Maria Ropicavoli, Jajan says, "I really like how you transcript the moments of violence physically and psychologically into the

movement in the film. I'm wondering if you feel like you need to have a layer of protection for the privacy of the persons when you describe their stories?"

Maria D. Rapticavoli:

Yeah, you definitely do. Absolutely, I think it's totally important. I mean, also, it's also about privacy. Okay. I never mentioned the name of the woman of my film. That's also because, yeah, it's a matter of protection of privacy. But it's also because I think in a way, that's also a way to just not identify specifically to someone, but it could be anybody, any woman in a way. So yeah.

Sara Reisman:

Her name is revealed in the essay for the exhibition.

Maria D. Rapticavoli:

Yeah, in the essay, but not ...

Sara Reisman:

We were careful about that.

Maria D. Rapticavoli:

It's okay.

Sara Reisman:

Then there's a second question also from Jajan which is to Maria Canela. I'd like to say first, how I personally respect you a lot for the work you've done for the immigrant communities and families. I'm with you about domestic violence and the support that is much needed. I'm wondering if you would see yourself as the father and the mother in your direct family, kind of a personal question.

Maria Canela:

No. A lot of people used to say that, but I say no. I'm a big mama, I'm a good mother, but I'm not a father. My kids have a father. I'm not the father. I like to test the father. I appreciate that he put the half of my kids, but no. I'm a mother. I'm not a father. I don't see myself like that.

Sara Reisman:

Are there other other questions? I wonder if there any questions from Srimoyee as we've been talking or just final thoughts about the conversation and the film.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Yeah, I mean, I wanted to sort of ... Nice comment there. I wanted to come back to the beginning of the film, and how you sort of opened the film, Maria Rapticavoli, with the questions. What is a woman? I thought I would bring it into what is a woman in this moment of the pandemic? If there is another question ...

Sara Reisman:

Yeah, yeah.

Srimoyee Mitra:

How do we ... No, no? Okay.

Sara Reisman:

Where can we see the entire film? You can see the entire film at the foundation gallery space, The 8th Floor. I'll send a link to everybody. That's 17 West 17th Street. Go on. Srimoyee, I'm sorry I posted here. Yeah.

Srimoyee Mitra:

No. I think through this discussion with Maria Canela, you also bring the role of cultural institutions. Perhaps what we're also talking about is the role of artists as storytellers. In this moment, how do we create a public space, a safe space, to envision perhaps an alternate, a different future that isn't linked, that can break the chain and cycle of oppression that plagues us, right, as a population, populations across the planet. Yeah, I want to thank you for a really evocative discussion and for sharing your stories. I wondered if you have any last thoughts on those that you'd like to leave us with, each of you. Now, we have two minutes. So we got one minute each.

Sara Reisman:

I think no more questions. It's just chatter.

Maria Canela:

Yeah.

Sara Reisman:

Yeah.

Maria Canela:

You can see.

Sara Reisman:

I think with that, we can close the conversation. I want to thank everybody for being here. Thank you so much, Srimoyee, for facilitating this conversation. In a way, it's a heavy lift because it's like two ends of the spectrum in terms of art and activism, I think. But also the content is quite heavy, and I appreciate the openness with which both Maria's have spoken about their work respectively. I wish everybody a good night. Thank you.

Maria Canela:

Thank you.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Thank you. Thank you.

Maria Canela:

Bye, bye.

Srimoyee Mitra:

Take care. Bye, bye.