

Event Transcript:

February 24, 2021

The Backroom: A Conversation

Andrea Valencia:

Hi, everyone. Hola. Bienvenidos. Maybe let's give a couple of -- maybe one minute to wait for other attendees. The event will have -- will be bilingual, and you can choose -- we have simultaneous interpretation, so you can select the world icon in the bottom of your screen to choose the language of your preference.

We will also have closed captioning in English and also in Spanish. For English, you can see it also in the bottom of your screen. [Speaking Spanish] Muy bien. [Speaking Spanish] I invite you to visit the microsite of *The Backroom*. You can find it and the museum website. And you can also find it on the chat. Very well. Let's begin.

In this event, we're going to be talking about *The Backroom* project. Since September 2020, it lives on the website of the Tamayo museum as the first online edition of this project of this great trajectory that started in L.A. in 2005 with the founders Kate Fowle and Magalí Arriola. This research project gathers material related to artistic practice without direct reference of the artifact or artistic device or work. What's around it, rather, what's around this part of that is artistic practice. This digital interaction in the Tamayo website took place with valuable collaborations with international curators. And we're extremely grateful. This joint effort has been fed through different perspectives to amplify the work done by both in such a complicated moment of this pandemic, COVID-19. I want to thank the artists and participating curators in this project, particularly, I want to thank the designers of the website, Marco Ramirez and Estaben G3rman Bordes who has been implementing this design. He's built each one of the entries of the participating artists, Monica Terrero of ICI has been fundamental support throughout this process, and I also want to thank her so much for her support and well.

Before we start this event, let me introduce you to a brief tour on this website. Let me share the screen with you. Let's see. Give me a second. Right now, this is the microsite of the backroom. There you see how it is built. These are artists, so each participating curator has chosen three artists, and there's a dialogue among their work through a mini curatorship. Each one of the lists of artists has an introductory text describing the reason for the selection. It also includes the bio of the participating curator. Once you pick a particular artist, you'll see the name of the artist. This is the introductory text from the curators, and the different materials that artists and curators work done jointly to share with the audience. Something important about this site is it has the option of looking at the biography of the artist, and in most cases, it has a link for the artist's Instagram or website or web page so that people who visit this site can continue consulting the artists they're interested in and their work.

Let me also share with you today's agenda. The way we're going to have this event. First, we are going to have a brief introduction, a video, and Magalí Arriola the director of the museum

and director of ICI and also, they are going to tell us about the origins of the project, their initial intention at the beginning of the backroom. It was held in a physical space with physical materials, and the interpretation they are giving the project. As I said, Kate Fowle is going to be collaborating in this part of the agenda. And then we are going to have a panelist. Remember, we have simultaneous interpretation with two of the participating curators, José López Serra who is with us from San Juan and Jaime Ruíz. He works in education from the Tamayo museum in Mexico city. Both curators not only have curatorial practice but artistic practice. I would be participating in this panel. So we are going to be conversing about their proposals and what it means to have a project like the backroom at this moment. The second panel in English will be a conversation with Humberto Moro, the senior curator of the museum and she's working between central and South America, Laura August. And let me remind you, we have the option of writing your questions on the Q&A button you see on your screen and at the end of each panel, we're going to have ten minutes for the Q&A session. We'll be taking a few of the questions only, please. I ask you to participate with us. And thank you so much, everyone. Let me now give the floor to Kate Fowle. With the introductory video we're about to show you.

Video Begins

Renaud Proch:

Hi. My name is Renaud Proch and I'm joined by Magalí Arriola and Kate Fowle, Director of PS1 in New York. Today we're discussing the origins of the backroom, a project we co founded in 2005 in Los Angeles and from August to December of that year, *The Backroom* focused on artists' interests and inspirations rather than the final products of the practice. The contributed materials included documents, objects, audio, or film footage that had relevance to the artists and not related to their development. With the handful of artists contributions every other week, it grew to include over 60 artists and following this first iteration of the project in Los Angeles, it evolved and grew and toured places for five years. There was of course recently revived as an online project. Let's jump straight into it with a question. Magalí and Kate, how did you define *The Backroom*?

Magalí Arriola:

I don't think I had a very fine idea like when we first started. I think it really, you know, like it really grew like in a very kind of organic way, very soon, we started not only inviting, you know, like people that weren't artists, specifically, but also at some point like writers, film makers, et cetera.

And of course, you know, I guess the notion, what one of the things that was really interesting was that we actually made it visible, you know, like how everyone had like a different kind of notion of what their own archive was. And I remember inviting Jesse Lerner and like basically what he had was this huge, huge archive of 60MM of very old didactic 60MM filmes that he would sometimes use, you know, as material to do his own films but also to do his research. Those kinds of things were very -- had a very specific kind of status where someone like Walead Beshty would bring up tons of material, like very different materials like images, texts, other films that would inform his practice or inform his writings, also, you know, in a very broad way.

Materials he would have access to would be completely different. For me, in the long term, I guess the backroom was more like a kind of -- I would say this is like a long conversation Kate and I have had for a long time. It became much more like a footnote in the way to the artists' works, more. You know, in a very strict way. I wouldn't really think about it as an archive. But then again, I guess one of the interesting things is that it would really open like a way into artists' practices and into their heads and the process.

Renaud Proch:

That's a really nice term I think, the idea of a footnote rather than the archives. As I still remember it, it was such an L.A. moment, because of that environment of Culver City. It was a reaction to the development of that new commercial gallery district in Culver City. It was also a sense of how much the studio visit was important in L.A. There were fewer museums than there are now. There were a lot of commercial galleries, there has always been a lot of commercial galleries in L.A. that showed incredible programs. Then every artist had great studios, and that was part of how you knew about art in L.A. You would go to artist studios. I think much more than was the case in San Francisco or London where we had -- maybe Mexico city. I'm not sure, Magalí. That aspect of the studio visit was learning about an artists' work through what they look at, what they collect, what they obsess over, but that may or may not enter the final work. I think those conversations with artists, that was very much, I think, for me, what *The Backroom* was built on.

Kate Fowle:

For me, it was basically the excuse to have a conversation, because there are a number of people that approached, like, I'm thinking about Dennis Compton from Archigram for example, that I had been interested in for a while. This was the perfect opportunity to start a conversation. I knew so much. I wasn't about to show his work as an architect, but digging into all of that stuff, all of those kinds of influences that he had. And he got so excited about the fact that there were all these -- he used to record stuff off the TV, like day and night and then edit it together. That was his kind of research. So being able to share that. Or I think about Stephen Kaltenbach and the fact that in talking to him, it was Lee Lozano who was his relationship with Lee, the work, so he was -- do you remember he was giving us instructions to recreate works that he remembers Lee making in his apartment when they were together. And we would just have to reproduce them. So for me, it was very much about a conversation, but what I also loved is that it wasn't a permanent archive.

I remember people used to come and say oh, I hear you've got so-and-so like -- can I see what they're interested in. It kind of was a studio visit, Renaud. Do you remember when people used to show up specifically and curators would show up and look at artists.

Magalí Arriola:

I spent so much time there. I was more or less in charge of putting up and down things. I would actually, you know, be able to sometimes, you know, like relate one thing to the other because there were so many crossovers, between different artists that are completely remote in time and space. They would have interests. That was for me, of course also through my curatorial

practice, it was really interesting to be able to put things in relation to one another as I was moving things up and down or you know, like, as you said, when people came in asking for something specific, I sometimes would orient them to see other things that, you know, would have like -- like a similar kind of feeling or similar interests in that way. So that was great. That kind of mobility and like physical access to things. I think that was really important. That was very beautiful. And that's something you would never get to have when you're working with an archive with a proper archive.

Kate Fowle:

Yes, exactly. The huge conversations we had when New Langton Arts said they wanted to present it, because then it became an exhibition of a process. And do you remember, it was just like -- how does this work? What actually is it? Then we came up with this whole idea of let's select works from the original *Backroom* and then keep inviting people. It was almost as if we turned into a collective to be invited to do something, and so *The Backroom* is on exhibition, was being exhibited rather than being in conversation.

Renaud Proch:

I think you're right. I think that's how people began to understand us. Because that's also, then, how we got invited to the California biennial by Lauri Firstenberg, the exhibition that Drew Heitzler curated at QED. And then Magalí, you brought us to KADIST.

Magalí Arriola:

Yes I did, to KADIST in Paris and then -- I think it was before Perros Negros in Mexico city and then --

Yeah, outside in so we could -- and that happened a lot. We would work with local people, of course, like to make it and create some dialogues between the former iterations and the locality where it was being displayed. And I guess that's like what we did, like individually but also what many people did as soon as we had the project. There was really nice in a way that it became like an amenity itself. The project in itself. And as you said, there was always this discussion which was really interesting, you know, like about authorship. Not always but at the very beginning, no?

Kate Fowle:

Yeah.

Magalí Arriola:

So we were to be considered the others or not, or like the owners or not. I guess what one of the very interesting things about the format was exactly that.

Renaud Proch:

Stuff on display defined ownership. It wasn't anyone's work. It was, you know, it was someone's practice. It was sometimes other people's work. It was -- I remember trying to label what everything was. It was a bit of a nightmare.

Kate Fowle:

Do you remember Michelle O'marah?

Renaud Proch:

Yeah.

Kate Fowle:

That was really interesting. Then she had that front line video.

Renaud Proch:

Yeah

Kate Fowle:

With that sent up a whole thing about the Black Panthers for me. And I started to understand and make connections between that and what was going on with some of the footage that Dennis Compton had given us from London around the same time. Understanding the differences and similarities. So I think that -- because she had the front line and then she had a couple of other films, didn't she?

Renaud Proch:

I can't exactly remember, but she shared the front line video and then a whole lot of research that she was doing around that front line--

Kate Fowle:

But with women.

Renaud Proch:

And then -- yeah, aimed to restage it, which she eventually did, and it became a video work that I think she probably did a year or two later.

Magalí Arriola:

That was one of the highlights I remember. People were coming to look for that front line video.

Kate Fowle:

Yeah

Renaud Proch:

So funny. I guess this was the beginning of YouTube, because now that front line -- now you can find it on YouTube whenever you want.

Kate Fowle:

It was a video.

Renaud Proch:

We were distributing it proudly.

Kate Fowle:

Yeah

Renaud Proch:

Building on this, I guess, after the last presentation of PS1 in 2010, *The Backroom* goes silent, because all three of us become very busy doing other things.

Kate Fowle:

Just to mention the PS1 one. That was using *The Backroom* as a process, because none of the original -- I was asked to -- I was one of the rotating curators. I think there were 4 or 5 curators over the whole time we were going to New York. I've invited every artist who was in New York to give some of their research materials that then went into one room so people could come and find out some of the backstories behind the artists in the show. It goes into a verb kind of thing.

Renaud Proch:

So it's the first time that *The Backroom* is presented without any items in the archive belonging to the previous situations in *The Backroom* until ten years later when Magalí, you started again at Tamayo.

Magalí Arriola:

Yeah. I guess that -- like it's really like -- a big jump. We're talking like about the importance of all this materiality in their -- it's very iterations or at least for me, that was really important, again, because I was the one, like originally in charge of putting many things up and really, you know, I felt like super fortunate and, you know, like spoiled of having the opportunity of being the one in charge of putting everything up and down. And like so as soon as we got into, you know, like confinement and COVID of course, the museum shut down. I started missing that kind of materiality a lot. And I was and still am, I guess, traumatized by being forced to use, you know, all these computer screens like to -- channel everything that we're thinking, making, the conversations we're having. So I was really thinking a lot about, you know, how to use this media in a way that would make sense with the contents that we were working on. So like really -- for me, that was like a kind of, you know, like a way of resisting the fact of trying to squish everything into a screen and so like really thinking in -- like with my team, in curatorial terms, what does it mean to work on a website? I was horrified by doing these attempts to do online shows. It doesn't really make sense for me. It's image after image after image. At some point, I think it will be about -- like a curatorial formats that we could use to challenge that or make it more effective. It's not negating it but really using it in a proper way. I guess I came back to my own thinking of *The Backroom* as a kind of footnote, and maybe more in terms of like what the footnote became, you know, as soon as it was digitized which is a kind of hyperlink.

Renaud Proch:

The other thing that's really compelling about the digital version is, you know, as you were saying -- Magalí -- as we are trying to get used to accessing art online and just having that screen always, all the time and trying to translate the art experience online, this is very different in the way it functions. But also I think, and we've talked about this a little bit. How it shows things down. At least *The Backroom* was always something that was always meant to slow things down. And if we think about *The Backroom* as something that we thought of in reaction to the supremacy of the art objects in the commercial gallery white cube, and we really try to slow things down, to slow the viewing process, to, you know, yes, we wanted to label things clearly but it was also shrouded in mystery because it was impossible to label things clearly. And I think many people walked into that space wondering what they walked into and what they were supposed to do and what they were looking at. It took a while inevitably for them to even feel comfortable going through the material. I think we achieved the same thing with the website. I actually resists that sort of Instagram viewing of artworks that we've, I think, sadly become used to, especially in the last year. And that is something that I find really successful about that online migration.

Kate Fowle:

Just the event culture of the Zoom events and then move on. Just like something that you can take your own time with. It's still using the digital -- like we start to look at the computer to see it. But you can do it without having to have a conversation with somebody. You're having a conversation with the stuff.

Magalí Arriola:

One of the beauties of it is even if we bring it to a pause right now, it would still have its own legs in another six months independently from the pandemic or, you know, COVID or not COVID. Hopefully not COVID. But it could still go on. We could still kind of weave different relationships with the rest of the museum program. It's not that -- it's completely independent or dependent from whatever is going on there.

Renaud Proch:

I think that's a good place to leave it at. Thank you so much, Kate, and Magalí. To everyone, you can find the backroom at MuseoTamayo.org/backroom. Thank you.

Andrea Valencia:

How are you, José? Hello, Jaime.

José López Serra:

How are you? Hola.

Andrea Valencia:

Very well. Where do we start?

Jaime Ruíz:

Well, I wanted to first of all thank all these people who were able to organize this digital interaction. What a relevant thing for us to do at different tables in terms of investigation, research and conversations with the artists. Perhaps -- Well, I was thinking that -- I was think being concepts, ideas, that we all have in common in terms of the guests and the publications and our work in general. I was thinking how there's a notion of healing or relief. This is reflected, and the public -- publication of (Name) and the Dominguez study, and they touch upon aspects that are quite important in this context. Yes. Could we start with that?

José López Serra:

Well, yes. I think this is an approach on knowledge of western standards. There's like revisiting a struggle to revisit ancestral cultures. And there's a relationship between human, nonhuman.

Andrea Valencia:

Yes, something that I was thinking is that technological adaptation, digital adaptation, adoption of new technologies, in the past, we used to see something that would be happening gradually that we would be integrating gradually in museums. But I think this pandemic has made it mandatory. It is obligating us to translate absolutely and introduce absolutely everything into this new language. It is not gradual. It is just all of a sudden. We have so many questions on this, closing physical spaces of the Tamayo museum in Mexico City is closed. We have a second pandemic wave in Mexico. The backroom was an answer for this pandemic, definitely, and I think this is very important, one of the issues we're discussing is what Jaime just commented, healing, relief, rethinking and revisiting forms which we relate to each other.

Jaime Ruíz:

Yes. I think it's really very interesting in one of José's texts, he talks about how tragic the Atlantic is, the tragedy of Atlantic natural phenomenon and symbolic production. I don't know, from the times of the colony to our own times now. So there's a common line in our interaction.

José López Serra:

Yes, it's like the Atlantic common space among different sites, but at the same time, they're full of meanings and significance with different readings. A relationship with Atlantico and the gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic. Well, it's something like at random. It's not only at random, but there's a time span, you see, that covers a whole bunch of things.

Andrea Valencia:

Yes. I have a question. I wanted to ask you. And what I've been reflecting on in terms of my selection of artists, not selection, but collaboration, rather and conversations with the artists. What was this process like for you? Your working process, to look at the materials, to review the materials with artists. I know some of those artists are connected. Thank you very much for being with us this afternoon.

José López Serra:

The selection process for me was to have the first round, like a clear vision. I wanted to think about who I was approaching, to understand the working process, working with archives, and different practices to have a dialogue through the website. I don't know the first selection for me was concentrating on video, photography, fixed images, and I think there's a big problem today with image, physical image, and movement, motion, films, videos. As a relationship with truth in quotation marks. I think last year, in this pandemic, I met Bleue and connected with her so fast. This is the practice. And this is the ideal space, yes.

Jaime Ruíz:

In my case, I tried to do the selection like a global selection from the beginning approaching six artists with a relationship with objective epistemologies with a notion of investigation or research that they were doing on Indigenous narratives or some life experience, or territorial resignation or renouncing to the territorial aspect. And now, me and Pena, they have a migration affiliation, and that's part of their everyday practice. I thought it was important to look at this type of issues, the Latin American way of thinking things and the diaspora aspect. I think that's a very interesting set of things. And then also, in the selection, the foreign way of looking at things, like an outside way of looking at things externally and just to mention something that's nonterritorial in terms of the Latin American territory.

Andrea Valencia:

Yes. I participated with my first selection of the first three artists I approached dealing with corporeal themes. I didn't think of it that way at the beginning. I was just interested. But in hindsight, back in September, now I see it. It has to do with how everything now is experienced through digital means. And where do we leave our own corporeal experiences, our own body experiences and then the second thing was mainly related to the pandemic. We were just going into one of the highest points of this contagion of this disease in December. So I was asking one of my questions was how can we heal? How can we see practices of artists thinking in terms of immunity, healing terms? Very much in line with what you are proposing, Jaime, that is creating ---artists that are creating epistemologies that are radical and they're finding ways to relate to others with those epistemologies.

Jaime Ruíz:

I find this wait interesting talking about confrontation behind the presence. It's interesting how there's a movement from this modern aesthetics of art, but also in the words of Rincón, where it's a kind of junk or very poor aesthetics. What I find interesting is how this possibility in the backroom can analyze or revisit documents going through those different aesthetics.

Andrea Valencia:

What really got my attention was one of the artists and the translation of his investigation and research and the website of The Backroom. This is like an inside story, an internal story that we open a new possibilities also in our own design. We realize that we could have different levels of information. There was a main image, and there was a footnote, which is the material itself. Could you, perhaps, share something on this publication?

Jaime Ruíz:

With so much -- weight to it, I think this participation was important, crucial, because there was this intimacy when the files and the archives were revisited in the computer, like sharing the screen through the Zoom sessions. Well, it was a way of virtual studio visit, opening the virtual part of all of this, like a very erotic version. Magali mentioned that, introducing those other positions that open up in this same direction or sense. The interesting thing is this process with Mariechen, this is what she's wanted to collect images to understand the comprehension of the body for different cultures that has been for 500 years. This is an obsession. It allows her to organize this in a compact, remote fashion. This can be generated in links, liaisons, associated tools with digital tools of a different type. So it was looking at her way of approaching this archive through her computer.

Andrea Valencia:

Yes, something similar happened with Nibia, right, José? We had a certain layout. I must say that each one of the artists and their participations were doing it in a very artisanal fashion. That means the curators and the artists were proposing certain content or contents, and one of the designers of the Tamayo Museum would help us think about internal narratives for each one of the participations, and Mariechen and Nibia's was also very important. She wanted to break the rules rather than the aesthetics of the web page, which is quite an orderly process. Like a reticular type of presentation. She wanted to show in her participation a way -- the way in which she works. I find that so interesting.

José López Serra:

Yes. For me, this was a really curious and strange thing, the first one. But the second delivery, I started thinking about the depth of the screen, how profound it was, and the material and the content of the archive. But at the same time, how can we do the display or the, you know, the staging? One image overlapping another image, and you can show another one in the back. So it's also been interesting for me to think how this experience may be translated in this sense, like the object itself, for instance, to bring artists that are mainly working in objects like Ramon or how can this be translated into practices that become objects? But this is a process. This is a very deep or profound archive the computer allows you to collect so many things. A numberless amount of things. And it's really the same experience of the object in *The Backroom* like the portfolio file, papers. It's really strange to a certain degree, because we have Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, a dancer, an artist. His research and his display is stories and dance improvisation and performances. He's looking at all the archive material of people who have done so much research on this, so many documents since the 80s and 90s until our times. And he's there. He's a dancer. He is still dancing. And he continues doing this type of research. I find that very interesting.

Andrea Valencia:

Yes. I think it was Kate who mentioned in the video, Kate Fowle. Yes, in this case, in the original *Backroom*, I don't think it was necessarily so. They were not archives of such. We had the footnote, but invariably, when this is translated on a web page we're creating archives or files we're storing them, we're accumulating them, you can visit them. Although we're also designing

narratives. So, then, I believe that something Kate was also saying is that this archives that mark a certain seasonality, temporality, because these are the archives or the documents -- general materials or materials in general, that are being used by artists, but necessarily they're not going to continue. So perhaps just to close our conversation, it's reflecting on this. What are these materials marking now? It's a difficult question, I think, yes.

José López Serra:

Rather, no, I think it's an interesting question. It has to do with the conversation that I had with a designer, and this is like -- it's not like an archive you can visit in x amount of time physically. This may be something eternal you can revisit and go back and see it once more. I think what's really interesting is how this allows you to do some type of mapping of the references you have and thus, be able -- the artist, how did he reach the results? What did he do for those results?

Jaime Ruíz:

Yes. I also think it's interesting to look at this type of negotiation to synthesize information, because there's digital anxiety or anxiety anguish right now because of this possibility of not having any limits in the digital space. It was like a complex situation to synthesize those things to create the discourse as of what you could integrate or not integrate. I think it's interesting to look at this tension, especially in our selection process. And to think of this process, how it happens through the digital platforms that may suddenly have particular specific access to certain groups and communities. On the other hand, we are alluding to things that are colonial, perhaps, or of some other type of discourses that are not hegemonic discourses at the same time the platform becomes a hegemonic platform. I think that's very interesting, the artists in this condition, in the case of Guelatao, it was a sort of recognition, different type of acknowledgement, they rupture a breaking away to reach other audiences, other publics.

Andrea Valencia:

That's interesting, this rupture part of it all. This is one of the last publications and is the most visited right now, that publication. Two weeks, for instance, in two weeks' time, it's had over 500 visits, only that section. I think it also talks about the audiences we are reaching.

Jaime Ruíz:

Yes, right. In this particular case of Agenda Guelatao, well this is a project with the Diaspora character into the United States. As I said, it was a type of campaign of find yourself and Guelatao in *The Backroom*. That's why people are really visiting this. In the United States, all the migrants were visiting this project. And I find that it very interesting about the platform.

Andrea Valencia:

Very well. I do not know. Do you have any questions? From our participants? There was one question. Are we going to be recording this event? Yes, we are recording it. And we hope to publish it soon. So that you take that into account. Yes, we do have a question, Doug Winter, How are the artists selected? That's the question.

José López Serra:

In my case, all the artists I selected are familiar to me. I know them. And I know they had a vision -- my vision was that I wanted -- unlike Jaime is the big internationalist, I want to be a regionalist, especially like the Caribbean and the second one was particularly for Puerto Rico. And for me, the second vision was more clear. It was the selection but I was also thinking, perhaps, *The Backroom* and how these are artists that can hold a dialogue in that -- even with a physical relationship or with a physical presence, it's like a hybrid, and I had a clear vision, for instance, if there was curatorship with them. I wanted very clear pieces. So how can I have this conceptual relationship among -- especially with the second one. It was really quite a strange situation. It was a selection rather, understanding different modernities in the Pacific, things outside of my control. For instance, complete loss and the burning of the house and the outside world. Things that are related to each other.

Jaime Ruíz:

Yes. I think that's also very interesting. Each guest defined their own forms, conceptual forms to do the selection. I knew some of the artists. I had been following their work for sometime. Some I discovered throughout the process. It was clear to me that I wanted to invite artists with this territorial condition and community affiliations. Maria and have pedagogic practice, Agenda Guelatao is also part of that community work. Patricia Dominguez, she's an individual author, but also she does studies on socializing her own research in Chile. And I - Rincón also has this type of nonbinary migration and movement that they post in their artistic expression. That's how I did my selection.

Andrea Valencia:

In my case, I think that it was a direct answer or response to the situation. In my case, I knew some of the artists. Others I got in touch with them for this project. And in my case, I wanted to directly respond, more directly, respond to this pandemic. As I said a few minutes ago, I wanted to respond on the corporeality with Galia Eibenschutz, Priscila Fernandes, Karina Aguilera, and I also wanted to work with artists I knew had interesting research and investigations. For instance, in the case of Priscila Fernandes, I think her research is so fun, so much fun. It has to do with idleness and the body. It has to do with capitalism. It has to do with how we understand our own time at home now, and times of this pandemic that was very important for me. And how we relate only through this digital interface right now. And Shraddha Borawake and Antonio Monroy, what I was interested in was that they had very concrete questions, and how to overcome this disease or what leads to the disease, the root of the disease. And that's why it I was so interested in their practice right now. I wanted to respond vis-a-vis the context we live in.

Jaime Ruíz:

Something which is found in the platform is the accumulation of artists that are being invited. You can partner with the curators and the artists. I think that was very playful. I was revisiting the web page for this presentation. I found different association access of partnerships that the curators or implicit ideas among artists and curators.

Andrea Valencia:

Well, I think we are going to be closing this panel, and thank you so much. José and Jaime. Now, let me welcome Laura August. Let us go into English.

Humberto Moro:

Hi.

Andrea Valencia:

Something really interesting about *The Backroom* and about the way we have been working is that we're not together, no? That's something -- (Laughter) and we have been in different places. The dialogues are always very interesting, but there's a distance implicit in all the work we're doing. In the work you chose, for example Laura, because there's like a longing. I think your selection was very particular in the way you are relating and communicating the artists' work and the artists' materials and on the other hand, Humberto, I think that you're thinking -- Well, please correct me, but my interpretation of what you've been doing is you've been interested in certain artists, and there's one selection from you that is about to come -- well, for next week. And you are also thinking a lot about the format, no, our platform or the web to curate these materials. So I don't know if you want to talk about the way in which you have selected, maybe, just to continue with the question of Doug Winter. Maybe we can start there.

Humberto Moro:

Do you want to go first, Laura, or should I go first?

Laura August:

Sure. I'm happy to start. What you say, Andrea about longing is so important because so much of this project was about not being together, and I've been thinking a lot about this poet Natalie Diaz who talks about relationality and sensuality and how we make relations across places, even when we aren't in the same place. And in the past, my practice has been so place based. So to be away from the place I work has kind of changed the questions that I work with. So how do I make relation from distance? And I was so interested in the idea of these as footnotes, because for me, they were letters, at least the first selection. I thought I want to write letters to these three artists. My term was that I didn't want to work with anyone who was in the same place. So the first selection was Helen Ascoli, Thuy-Van Vu, and Manal Abu-Shaheen, and I thought about these constellations of women and how I would love to have them over for dinner, but instead I'll write them letters from my garden. I thought the work would be beautiful together. But all of a sudden we were talking about gardens and plants and yards and we had this kind of long-distance conversation that was connected to the work but was also about the places we were in. So that longing was an important aspect of this for me. Humberto.

Humberto Moro:

Well, first of all, I want to say thank you to Andrea Valencia from Museo Tamayo who has coordinated this effort. I think no one really had the opportunity to thank you publicly. So thank you, Andrea on behalf of all the institutions for coordinating this incredible effort also thank you to Esteben Herman who is dealing with a lot of issues, technical issues really diverse in criteria

to really creating and delivering environments in which artists felt really comfortable. So thank you, Esteban. Also shout out to Barb Smith and Kate Fowle for coming. You are somewhere there, I see you girls. I think for me, this conversation is really about thinking about how we experience this from inside the institution and from outside. And that's maybe like a follow-up question for Laura. Because both Andrea and Jaime and Magalí, Renaud, Kate, we're part of institutional formations and I think that changes dramatically how we experience this format. I was interested to begin with in the challenge, as Magalí was saying in her introduction about how we can extend the program of the museum into the digital realm without these sort of like very hectic pressure of creating content, which is something we experience right off the bat when we went to lockdown in the pandemic. There was this pressure of producing content, of entertaining, of educating. And it was funny that when Jaime was talking about the tragedy of the Atlantic, I couldn't help to think about the Titanic and the band that was playing in the very end, the last minute. That was a powerful image for me to think about, because we were sort of committing to create all this information without really thinking of what it meant to live online, so I think *The Backroom* in that way was very amazing opportunity to really have a deep dive in terms of the format and the conversations with artists and also, you know, just thinking about how this idea that originated with Magalí and with Kate and with Renaud years ago could resonate with different communities with different generations with different sets of parameters with different institutions. I love the idea of inheriting this from them and extending this conversation from them. I really love to think about things that have a really long tale. In my personal selection had to do in a very personal level with people that I already had a relationship with, with people I had a conversation with, that were part of my practices as a curator. There were also people that I had very interesting conversations with, you know, in that sense. My first projects for *The Backroom* happened with Barb Smith who lived in New York City and with Tom Burr who also New York City based with Jorge Mendez Blake who is based in Guadalajara. And these are artists that I work with a lot and that I have constant conversations with that there's an understanding of the practice because of this conversation and because the length of the conversation, and I also -- I was very interested in the notion of the mistake and the discovery for that first iteration. Barb presented a video of her explorations in a Greek island and for Barb, her process is really about discovering imperfections and details in objects and how these objects can be animated in a very different context and how the politics of display and how we display them and for Barb, displaying things becomes a very big question. And I think that *The Backroom* brought that question into the fore. For example, with Jorge Mendez Blake, he did like a really deep dive in all the mistakes he had made while doing pieces on the typewriter. And you know, like this idea about these efforts, these failed efforts to become into something was very interesting to us. And also on the other hand, it was very interesting to think about a different format. So we put together a PDF that you could print in your house and have a new book. So the notion of possessing something, that is entirely disseminated online was very interesting. Yeah, those were kind of like the ideas that were circulating when I was working on this first iteration. But also, you know, again, the really challenging situation of thinking about an exhibition space that has to have everything bought and finished work of art in a space that's digital. They're were various hoops to jump through and various parameters to work around, and I love that situation in which you have to put yourself in front of a set of rules, and you can operate within those sets of rules. I think it's very generative and formative, and allows for you to

have conversations that because of that limitation, flourish. So I don't know how you feel about that, Laura? Do you experience this from outside the institution, if you will, and having, I guess, your point of view can be a little bit different.

Laura August:

After the first selection went up, one of the artists wrote to me and said this is exactly how you work. This kind of platform where you're thinking in conversation and about process and about relationships and writing letters and having dinner and the act of conversation over a period of a long time is how you work. It's so nice there's a platform for that. Because I think for me, often, the struggle is how you make that kind of intimacy visible within the parameters of an institution. In the parameters of a website, with the kind of incredible work of Esteben and Andrea, it was all of a sudden this intimacy can unfold in really interesting ways. And the design could reflect the strangeness of the materials with a sensitivity that didn't require space and didn't require institutional kind of approval also in the same way. Right? So for me, it felt like a very comfortable space actually. It felt actually like there were so many possibilities. And that's how I most like to work. But I think like you, Humberto, also, I work with artists for a long period of time. I go back to them. We have friendships, and we have long conversations about, you know, over years. And the advantage of being outside of an institution is that I can make exhibitions with them over and over again. And kind of bring other colleagues into the conversations to see, then, how those connections are enriched. So for me, part of this, the play of this collaboration was who do I want to bring into a conversation that's been going on for a long time? So in each group of artists, I had at least one person that I had worked with for 6, 7, 8 years, and then the others, I wanted to bring into that conversation. And I could you all of a sudden do that because there were no restrictions institutionally about where I was working or what kind of budget we had to bring people in.

Humberto Moro:

You know and something that is important. Oh, sorry, Andrea.

Andrea Valencia:

For me, something that was important these projects or these iterations, and the website changed a little bit of the initial intent of *The Backroom*, because many artists and -- I want to talk about something that Humberto was saying just moments ago. Because we're sharing this intimacy in *The Backroom*, no? So sharing this intimacy was not only about reviewing past materials or past works, but actually, in some cases, it worked almost as a commission, no? Because in the case of Humberto, for example, we have this book of Mendez Blake even if it's not an official artwork, quote/unquote.

Humberto Moro:

And it is in a way, no?

Andrea Valencia:

And it is. Exactly. For example, Shraddha Borawake, this Indian artist. She wanted to share her practice, and she makes like daily rituals. For *The Backroom* specifically, she started doing

certain rituals and making notes about them, and then she shared the materials. So it was a different way of working to a certain point. So going back to what Laura is saying, for me, I think that the intimacy aspect was something super super important.

Humberto Moro:

For me, it was more about the notion of the specter of something that returns and you know, Magalí has been working with some of these lately and this idea of a body that resuscitates and comes back to the world. For me, the idea that *The Backroom* resuscitated and was brought back to life was very interesting and also I wanted to mimic that in terms of bringing artists in which there was this idea of return in a way, or they were returning into something. For example, Tom Burr opened an archival box he had closed in his storage for years. For him, coming back to this box, and discovering the archival materials he had around the specific project, it was a discovery, you know. He was sort of like rediscovering something that was hidden for so long that it sort of like became like a new thing. And I think that's how experience of *The Backroom*, you know, even looking at those images from the physical space and how they were narrating, like the physicality of it and the challenges of putting together these shows, and so for me, it was very interesting to take on the challenge of thinking about that in the cyberspace and to, you know, like extend that conversation with the artist within their own practice, and like have them so they rediscover some aspect of their own practice and share that with our community.

Andrea Valencia:

One of the initial questions that we had a short discussion the other day was how do you see *The Backroom* as a research tool for our audience? I think that's a very important question.

Laura August:

Humberto, do you want to respond first?

Humberto Moro:

Sure. I see *The Backroom* sort of like as the possibility of initiating academic work. For example, I totally see someone diving in the archival material that we're presenting with Tom Burr specifically and then that can lead to something. So I think in terms of research, it can be a tool, but I think it shows a provocation, because most of these materials have not seen the light before, so it definitely will shed light in terms of an artistic practice and it could even derive into something else, into something new. So I'd like to think of these are provocations for people that are out there and they're particularly studying, like queer politics or the relationship between literature and art. There are many fields, and I don't know, at least, for example, when I was, let's say, in grad school, I would have loved to have seen some of these materials that might have provoked an essay or different piece. So I think, yeah, we're inviting people to use the materials too.

Laura August:

For me, there were two important things, probably more, but two that come to mind in terms of research. One was the significance of translation for this project, because so many of the artists that I include, Mario, for example, I don't think has any writing in English about his work yet. So

to have that movement across language, Welsh Chandler didn't have any writing about their work in Spanish. And I think the act of writing alongside a body of work is always a generative practice for future research. Because of that attempt at translation, both through language -- across languages and through language. And then I also think, again, I'm going to turn back to place. I think that the chance to put Mario in conversation with Akira, for example, just wouldn't happen geographically. It's not an obvious kind of conversation to bring together. So the chance to kind of let them sit together and think about humor and about walking through a city and ways that we understand things, was, opened up questions for them that I don't think had been asked about their work yet. So it gave space for questioning at least.

Humberto Moro:

I think that's very interesting, Laura. Yes, translation is a big element here at play. Now that you mention it, for example, with Tom Burr, we translated into Spanish a letter from Peter Fend. It was a direct reaction to the show that we were addressing, and these materials, you know, have not been available in other languages than English. And the other way around, now that we're doing -- We're doing the last iteration of *The Backroom* which is going to be available next week. So please keep your eyes open for that. I'm working on that with Ana Tiscornia from Uruguay and Isa Carillo from Guadalajara and Faivovich & Goldberg based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, a Specifically, for the iteration of Faivovich & Goldberg, we are translating documents to English that they -- like otherwise, would not have published such. So I think that exchange has very rich possibilities.

Laura August:

I'll just mention one other thing, which is that a Akira's work, he had been making these paintings collected from photographs of works in the MoMA collection. He's working through everything online at MoMA, for example, and at other museums in New York as well and thinking a lot about the way we understand those paintings as they're framed specifically in English, specifically by a certain museum, types of writing. Pulling them out of that context and then making these kind of wonderful paintings where the coconut heads are playing through these classic iconic MoMA work. And when he presents those paintings in a gallery space, he prints out the MoMA pages. So you can see the references in a pile of paper. And in this case, with Esteban's incredible design, that collection of resources sits in a very different way beside the painting. And I think that for me, at least, that ability to scroll through all of the MoMA references he's making, opens up how we can see the painting even though we can't see the painting in real life on the website. It opens up how we can see all of the footnotes, all of the research behind that work in a really interesting way. Quite different than that stack of paper.

Andrea Valencia:

Yeah. I also think that -- I mean, every post has like an introductory text explaining what the materials are. But there's not a lot of mediation with the materials. Like, we're not saying exactly what everything is or giving necessarily -- yeah, an explanation to every single photograph. It really depends on the artists, but I also think that that's a positive thing in this project, because we leave it open. We leave it open for interpretation. We leave that open to the audience to also tell or to make these relational exercise to their own thinking or to other artists or just -- it's like a

provocation as Humberto was saying to delve more into the artist's practice itself and maybe going through the website to understand something more about those references. I don't know if you have any final comments. If our audience here has any questions, please send them so we can select some. Doug Winter is saying, *The Backroom* is all about relationships. What is the best way being an artistic relationship with a curator?

Humberto Moro:

I think I'm going to quote Maria Lind here where she says you have to connect the dots and you have to see what's around you. You have to connect with your community. Like you have to start with connecting with your fellow artists that are part of your neighborhood or your city or your museum system or your gallery system. I think you know, like the notion of community is fundamental when you think about expanding your network, and there are things that are really close to us, and those are, I think, sometimes the most hard to see. So yeah, I would recommend for you to just look around and see what type of conversations you can establish with people that are close to you. Maybe you don't necessarily know them or haven't spoken to them before.

Laura August:

Yeah I think it's a very delicate ecosystem that we move inside of so there are writers, and curators and artists and all kinds of folks that move in and out of that space. I always tell artists that I'm talking with, we're always talking about shows and always talking about what we're seeing and talking about studio time and what we're reading and what we see on Netflix, we are building conversations together based on daily experience, now through Zoom and maintaining a conversation in a generous and generative way, where it's about who you are as a human in the world is probably the best thing you can do as a human in the world, I think.

Andrea Valencia:

And maybe more in this particular context of the pandemic. There's a responsibility, I think, to relate in that way.

Laura August:

I think the pandemic throws it into relief but I think it's always a responsibility. I think we lose it sometimes because we are so busy.

Laura August:

Thank you, Doug.

Humberto Moro:

Thank you, Doug.

Andrea Valencia:

Thank you.

Are there any more questions? Remember you can submit it directly as a chat in or through the icon of Q&A.

Humberto Moro:

I mean if you are on Facebook too, a colleague of ours is helping us with Facebook questions too.

Andrea Valencia:

Well maybe not. Well, thank you, Laura, thank you Humberto. I want to thank ICI, Monica Terrero who is here and Jaime, José, and of course Renaud who is also here. Thank you for all your support. Remember that you can visit *The Backroom* at MuseoTamayo.org/thebackroom. Thank you very much for this conversation.