

Conversation with
ALISON BURSTEIN,
Curator, The Kitchen, and
REBECCA CLEMAN, Executive
Director, Electronic Arts Intermix
(EAI)

I is for

Institute

What's in a name? This is the question underlying our investigation into ICA: how it came to be, what it means now, and how we might imagine it in the future.

In a field so often defined by precarity, this project is grounded in a spirit of collegiality, a looking outward that aims to facilitate self-reflection. As such, we have engaged colleagues primarily from small- and mid-scale contemporary arts organizations to discuss their institutional histories and how they understand the stakes of their work. The *I is for Institute* website acts as a repository for these ongoing conversations, as well as archival material relating to ICA's history. We thank our many colleagues for their generosity, enthusiasm, and frankness. Their thinking has in turn energized our own.

— Alex Klein,
Dorothy & Stephen R. Weber
(CHE'60) Curator, Institute
of Contemporary Art,
University of Pennsylvania

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Alison Burstein is a Curator at The
Kitchen. Rebecca Cleman is
Executive Director of Electronic Arts
Intermix (EAI).

With Alex Klein

ALEX KLEIN

Welcome to the I is for Institute Podcast. My name is Alex Klein, the Dorothy and Stephen R. Weber (CHE'60) Curator at ICA, the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. In this series, you will hear from our colleagues working in contemporary arts organizations around the world about their individual perspectives on the work they are doing to shape and imagine different institutional models. At this critical moment when museums and their infrastructures are being reevaluated, these dialogues highlight pressing concerns for artists, art workers, arts institutions, and their publics. We invite you to follow these ongoing conversations and to access the archive at our website www.iisforinstitute.icaphila.org.

In this special episode recorded live in front of a studio audience at The Kitchen in New York, I sat down with Rebecca Cleman, Executive Director of Electronic Arts Intermix, and Alison Burstein, Curator at The Kitchen, to reflect on their shared organizational missions to support intermedia art forms and their co-mingled origin stories. As both EAI and The Kitchen recently celebrated their 50th anniversaries they discussed how their foundational moments rooted in an alternative arts ecology are crucial to their institutional roles in the present.

AK

Maybe to start with, I think it would be wonderful to hear a little bit about the foundational moments for both of your organizations and maybe a little bit about how the missions have evolved over time.

REBECCA CLEMAN

EAI was founded in 1971, hence 50 years. There was an event in 1969 that was a catalytic event for EAI's founding and it was the exhibition "TV as a Creative Medium," which the gallerist Howard Wise, who was a highly regarded supporter of artists experimenting with technology throughout the 1960s—he had an important gallery that represented a lot of major artists, Marta Minujín, Hans Haacke, Bruno Munari (it's incredible to look at the history of exhibitions he had at that gallery) —and in 1969, he opened "TV as a Creative Medium," to really look at how artists were experimenting with television. He was so inspired by what he saw; Howard had spent the majority of his life as the president of the family business, which was an industrial coatings company based in Ohio. The truth is, that company contracted with the government and likely supplied paint that was used for wartime efforts. I've recently learned that Howard had actually originally wanted to be a diplomat before inheriting the role of president at his business. So, I think that there was always something in him that wanted to commit to a political effort, a countercultural effort, an anti-war effort very definitely, and to embrace everything that was happening in the late 1960s and 1970s. So, he was very excited about what

was happening around the emergent technology of video, which was on an artistic level, but was also happening within collectives that didn't necessarily consider what they were doing art. I will say that for Howard art was tantamount, he was very influenced by Marshall McLuhan, among other people, but I think you can hear McLuhan in a lot of his writings of that time thinking about the role of the artist societally as being this provocateur. And this person who kind of keeps us aware of all of society's ills, and maybe looks to a better future.

It was a landmark exhibition. And you can learn more about it on our website, www.eai.org. He, through the experience of that show, which involves artists taking televisions apart, artists working with closed circuit video, artists creating situations, Paul Ryan, for example, who actually had studied with McLuhan made a piece that was like a video confessional. So he was interested almost in the social experiment of having an audience engage with their own taped image fed back to them on television. And keeping in mind too, that 1969 was really like the apotheosis of television in this country. And in fact, I love pointing out that Howard's gallery on 57th Street was a few blocks away from the CBS studio that broadcast the moon landing just months apart. So you had the moon landing, which was like the major televised event I think, was the largest television audience that had yet been corralled, Howard staged this exhibition. So it was very much meant to be in response to commercial television and providing an alternative to commercial television, but also providing an alternative to the commercial art market.

Howard's artists were not necessarily the kind that were selling work all the time. In fact, Nam June Paik, who was a good friend, and an artist that he worked with, from very early on, said, "Howard Wise is a really good gallerist, who never sells anything." So that was sort of his role, and he recognized that. Inspired by the exhibition and the groups that came together, he realized that he needed to close his gallery and develop something new. We've recently unearthed, among other things, a response letter from Amos Vogel who wrote Howard very concerned, I think very supportive, but also kind of concerned, that this might have a negative impact. It was not a negative letter, but just saying "you are a major figure, and this is actually kind of a tragedy because your gallery plays such an important role." I believe it's in this letter that he envisions that the video artist has to work in another space, not in the white walled gallery space that had been defined by Clement Greenberg, but to go out into the world. And he even says, "even into outer space," so very much picking up on the Space Age moment, then EAI was founded as an organization in 1971. And in 1973, we formalized our distribution program, which is our core program.

ALISON BURSTEIN

Thank you for that context, Rebecca. The Kitchen's history intersects in many respects with the founding of EAI from the personnel through to the structural. So just to say The Kitchen was founded by two artists in 1971, Steina and Woody Vasulka, both of whom cite "TV as a Creative Medium," as a life changing experience. So they were artists who came to America with interests in experimental art forms. Steina was a violin player herself and Woody was a video maker. Woody was working in a commercial context and they started to use the equipment that Woody had access to through his day job, so to speak, to experiment at home. Having seen this exhibition, and as they were getting more embedded in the milieu of New York City, they developed their practice and were interested in video, the many different potentials of video as a medium. In many ways, the idea for The Kitchen was birthed out of their artistic interest to have a site to continue their experiments. And as they describe it, a community started to form around the equipment and the experiments that they were conducting in their loft space. And there were too many people to fit at a certain point. And they both knew Howard Wise and through their relationship with him and EAI, were able to secure funding for both an artistic project which was called Perception in collaboration with Eric Siegel and other artists, as well in tandem for a space called "The Kitchen" that they would conduct the experiments they were interested in. That is what became The Kitchen.

The space of The Kitchen was found by another artist named Andres Mannik. And it was in fact the kitchen of the Broadway Central Hotel, which had been turned into the Mercer Arts Center right on the threshold of Greenwich Village at the time. In parallel with this great support of EAI through applications and grant funding via NYSCA, they founded this space in 1971 as a site for experimentation. As they describe it, Woody and Steina were thinking of this as filling a gap in the ecosystem at the time. Interestingly, even by 1978, they in an interview kind of self-correct to say we thought we were filling this gap, or we talked about it as if we were filling a gap when in fact there were many spaces that were supporting video art, but not the kind that we were interested in. So, they were specifically interested in the image processing capacities of video, using video really as a performance medium, and that interdisciplinarity was really embedded at the founding, for example, Andy Mannik who found the space was interested in dance, so he brought in an interest with performance. Michael Tschudin was also involved in those early days and he was a musician. So, from the opening of the space, The Kitchen, as the Vasulkas describe it, it was a space where the media gods were conducting an experiment on you, it was a space of the percolating of that energy to test out this medium in real time was there from the outset.

Another term that I think is evocative to describe those early years, Steina talks about, they were interested in it being a live audience test laboratory. I will jump ahead there is much to say about these early years. But I think it's important to note that there are in some ways two founding moments of The Kitchen. Between 1971 and 1973 this was the atmosphere in which it was operating and others became involved in the running of it as a collective, including Shridhar Bapat and Dimitri Devyatkin, they called themselves the cooks in The Kitchen. The Mercer Art Center was home to many different arts organizations. And they called it "a polluted environment." It was not a high art environment. There were, famously one of the theaters was the space where the New York Dolls was performing on a regular basis. There were bars and social gathering spaces, they were having their events and the cooks were running the space from 1971 to 1973. In this very, as you might imagine, from the kind of romanticized image of those years, it was very experimental, very scrappy, there was no... as Steina and Woody described it, the idea was to... "our idea of programming was not to select or curate, but to mediate and accommodate. No one was turned down and no one was served either. Since there was no stuff, there was only a payphone by the door, there was no way to reach people." But the programming was incredibly rich and densely packed. In those years, the kind of signature programs in this area were open video screenings where anyone was invited to bring in their material and screen them as well as electronic music concerts on Monday nights that were organized by Rhys Chatham, who was 18 or 19 years old at the time and performances and screenings on the weekends as well.

After this period of prolific output and quite a lot of energy being built up around this community, by 1973 there was a key turning point which is that the Vasulkas were offered positions in Buffalo to teach in the Media Studies Department. At the same time, concurrent with this time, the rent of the Mercer Arts Center was going to be raised significantly. This is where the relationship to EAI comes in yet again. The Kitchen had been operating under the umbrella of EAI at this time, the Vasulkas were leaving, as Robert Stearns describes it in his oral history, Robert Stearns was a young person working for the Paula Cooper gallery and a roommate to Jim Burton, who was working as the music director at the time, Howard Wise approached him to become sort of the administrative lead of the organization after the Vasulkas left. And as he describes it, Shridhar and Dimitri were more interested in the programming than the practicality. So, it was Howard's decision to choose Robert, given his gallery background and ask him to, in a certain way, bring order to the organization. So, with this new position, Robert played an integral role in identifying the next space for The Kitchen. They found a loft space on the corner of Broome and Wooster Street and in moving into that

space through conversations with Howard, again as Stearns describes it in his oral history, it became clear that Howard had a different set of interests for what the space would offer than what he and the others were interested in. So, at that point, that was one of the reasons why they decided to break off and incorporate on their own as an organization. That, paired with the fact that by that time, he says The Kitchen's operating budget was equal to all of the rest of what EAI was doing. So, this shift in scope, made sense.

It is at that moment in 1973, that the organization incorporates formally as a nonprofit. And interestingly, they were working with the lawyer from Volunteer Lawyers from the Arts, and they were told that The Kitchen was too generic of a name to incorporate. This is when that organization took up its DBA, which is Haleakala, Inc. which Stearns describes as one of the names that he put on the list sort of on a whim almost, it's the name of a mountain in Hawaii, where his father was stationed for work, he was an aerospace engineer, and he had just been out there visiting. And in Hawaiian, the word means "house of the sun." So there was an irony to it, given that the activities all took place at night. I point this out, because I think in many ways, those two founding moments are really key to note the origins as the collective, which I think in some way persist into how The Kitchen is remembered today. But that moment in 1973, when it incorporated, I would say, is equally important. And the two are really entangled in interesting ways. And in thinking about this context, the fact that Howard was right there, their relationship to EAI was crucial to both of those pivotal moments. It's something that I'm excited to think about.

AK

I mean, 1973, it's interesting to hear you say that, because it's a crucial moment for EAI's history, because that's also when the distribution catalog starts, right. I'm always interested in names and what they say about organizations, when I originally had learned that The Kitchen was not just because, you know, artists getting together and cooking up recipes and making things, that's what I initially had assumed, but understanding it was actually the location that it was originally housed in was really interesting. And Electronic Arts Intermix, you know, thinking about these intermedia forms, which I think is a really crucial part of both of your organizations' histories. But another thing I stumbled upon in some of the literature you sent me is that in some instances, you see The Kitchen listed as "The Kitchen Center for Video and Music," which I thought was also an interesting way of understanding the way The Kitchen understood itself at various moments.

So maybe just to backtrack with both of your organizations thinking about the different roles that they served, Electronic Arts Intermix with Howard Wise almost starting as like a granting body, thinking about supporting other forms. The Kitchen is not the only organization or activity that was supported by Wise—Charlotte Moorman’s festival was supported by Wise at some point and a lot of other activities. But you also had an editing bay for artists before you had a distribution catalog. And so I’ve always been interested in how the production of artworks, of video, providing resources was a really key foundational moment for your organization. And I know likewise, The Kitchen also had production facilities. I was really interested in the video collections roles in both of your organizations. Because The Kitchen describes itself as having a video collection, a viewing room, a touring program, and in house video production, which is not so different from maybe the way that EAI would have described some of its activities at the time. So I was really interested to hear a little bit more from both of you of how your organizations differentiated themselves from each other.

There was a really beautiful quote from Bob Stearns, I believe, where he said that “video was an instrument to be performed and not just a finished product,” whereas maybe I would think of some of the things that EAI was doing is really a shift to single channel video, and maybe more of the finished product. I’m not sure if you would agree with that. Maybe the two of you could, could reflect on that.

RC

Yeah, I’m really enjoying this, because I’m learning a lot that I was not aware of, and maybe should have been. But you know, just as this is wonderful, and I’ve enjoyed the materials that Alison shared. I think one of the things that’s so interesting is that there was this shift. Just to provide a little bit of context, Howard Wise was very hopeful, again, inspired by the culture around TV as a Creative Medium, there was a lot of hope in the late 1960s, early 1970s in television as a new platform, not just as in something to interact with and make art out of, but really as a way of reaching the public in a new way. And there was a lot of thinking that cable access was going to provide this. Alison can maybe speak to The Kitchen’s role, important role, with cable access. We both share that as well. It obviously did not work out in the way that everybody hoped. And there was an important event at MoMA in 1974 called Open Circuits, a dreamed of exhibition context that was never realized for Open Circuits, which brought artists, scholars, thinkers from all over the world to talk about video art and its potential situation, you know, whether that was on television, or its institutionalization. And in some ways, it really defines this moment of recognizing that TV wasn’t going to work out and that actually the

art institutions were probably the best hope for the future of this kind of art making. You know, you've got 1973 and you've got 1974 as these pivotal years. But I do know that Howard Wise had a lot of belief and a lot of hope, caught up in the idea of the distributed work, and in video art representing the best that artists could do with the technology. And so that's where the finesse comes in, right? And he really did want there to be this thing that was called "good video art," which is, the term "video art" to me is very difficult to use right now, because it just doesn't... I don't see artists defining themselves that way anymore. Howard really believed in it. And that, I think, when that started to change, in the 1980s, Lori Zippay -- who has the wonderful oral history in the catalog -- took over as the ED in the mid-1980s. You know, she was sort of right there. And I don't know if she would like this, but Lori talks about the influence of MTV. And that is a really significant cultural moment that changed everything. And you could see it in the work that artists were making, and certainly in the way that we thought about television as a space. And it wasn't just MTV, of course, but I sort of see Lori as coming out of the MTV moment and carrying EAI forward, as Howard was stepping away from the organization and really taking his focus elsewhere away from video art, per se. It's really interesting to hear about The Kitchen having a moment to kind of rethink about its priorities as an organization.

AB

Yes, absolutely. I mean, and I'm also learning so much, I think that the parallel tracks of our organizations and the ways that they do and don't overlap, are quite telling about many different dynamics that are at play in the alternative field. I think picking up on your question and some of the things you're saying 1973 shift into The Kitchen's own space, which I'll pull up an image, I think it's also really relevant in terms of the programming and as the origins of these various programming arms that you referenced, Alex. So, I think in many ways, you know, not only was the organization formally incorporated and operating in a different way, under the directorship of Robert Stearns it also started to think about itself differently. I think this is a really fascinating time where coming out of the ethos that I described it, you know, community oriented and experimental, which Robert himself was part of, he was taking tickets at the door and things like this before he became the director. He also started at this point, after moving into the loft and beginning programming in this space in Wooster street, he was crafting the institution as an institution in some way. Interestingly, depending on... there are people who refer to his work as perhaps even looking to MOMA as a model, like he was building an institution that took itself seriously, even as it was doing this work that was deeply experimental. And they were as committed to supporting the kinds of

artistic practices that were, you know, bubbling up in that original Kitchen space. Throughout the time of those early years of programming that interdisciplinarity that was seeded in the original Kitchen defined the program, there were, you know, interdisciplinary experiments using video, performance, dance. And I think that the name as you point out, I think is a fascinating way to kind of track this over time. It was at that time called, well, it was incorporated as Haleakala. But they were referring to themselves as The Kitchen Center for Video and Music. But, specifically, the way that The Kitchen described itself I have here it's evolved over time to take on different aspects of programmings. It went from being called the "Center for Video and Music" to 1978 "Center for Video, Music and Dance," that was to mark the beginning of the dance program which emerged organically out of the interests of Eric Bogosian, who was working as an administrative assistant at that time and then went on to become The Kitchen's first dance curator. Then, interestingly, as you track forward performance appears in the name in 1981, then film in 1983, and then video in 1993. And literature, video and literature appeared at the same time in 1993. And then we just added visual art in 2021. So, the tracking of the center, the center's name does not map to the introduction of those disciplines. But in some ways, it sort of retroactively describes the interdisciplinarity that was there from those earliest moments. And that's something that I think is really fascinating, and also reflective of the organic way that the programming evolved. And I think that's something else that I think was there from the outside of following the artists. So, you know, Steina and Woody had a sense of what they were interested in. But then as people came in to interact with them, they brought their own perspective. So with, you know, Rhys Chatham, coming in and taking up the electronic music series on Monday nights, that was an integral part from the outset. And then like I said, Eric Bogosian does something similar in 1978. And you can find these moments everywhere along the history where, you know, something emerged, and then kind of on a different timescale becomes formalized in the programming.

AK

And I think what's interesting in both cases is you're also kind of circling around like, what is your core ethos, right, and that it's not as much about a kind of medium specificity. I mean, maybe a little more so in EAI's history, but even so I mean, you're working with digital forms, now internet-based works, that I think that fit within the single channel frame, but that are not really being... they don't have to be like "video" in the classic sense. So I think it's really interesting to hear you talk about that evolution in language, because I think it's also talking to a kind of art practice that doesn't fit maybe comfortably within the market as it stands or thinking about support systems for artists and trying to help them to either produce new works or get it out into the world.

You know, I wanted to pick up on that question of television, because it was something that we really thought a lot about in our exhibition, but also, because in terms of this aspiration to reach the broadest audience possible, I find that so fascinating, because when I often think about alternative arts institutions, or maybe subcultural forms, I don't think about that kind of mass appeal, or that that desire to reach the broadest audience possible. And it's really baked into both of your organizations, this really firm belief that what artists were producing in these new forms requires new institutions. And I thought that that was such an interesting idea that it wasn't just about creating something that's outside of the mainstream, but that was really creating a new support system, for artists to be visible.

I love the kind of anecdote of The Kitchen, also having the cable running through the building itself, so that you were able to also throw your images out into the world on cable television, public access is such an important history. There's these great anecdotes at EAI of artists coming in, but also demonologists, who were coming in to record their public access shows using the equipment there. And then later on, you know, Rebecca mentioned the clubs, but thinking about how some of the videos that artists are making in the 1980s are showing up in like Danceteria and things like that, places where people are mingling. So also thinking about other avenues that are outside of the traditional, or what we might understand as the traditional spaces for art. There was this great quote from Alex Kitnick, when he in writing on your 50th anniversary, he said "television would be the primary delivery device, but it had to be backed by new or reimagined institutions." And I just thought that was wonderful. And also this idea of EAI as an alternative paradigm, just to kind of throw some more things out there.

But picking up on all of this, I'd love to think more about both of your organization's commitment to supporting artists and supporting them in a way that is not already readily available to them through maybe the gallery system. I mean, maybe you, you end up creating a market for some of this work, it feels very ahead of the curve to me in terms of conversations we have today around artist's compensation, like organizations like WAGE that really, you know, make sure that artists get a fee for their work in institutions. And these distribution services, for example, were saying, "Hey, if you're going to screen our work, you have to pay, you know, this amount to the artist and this format, and this time." I mean, you really developed a kind of way to structure that. So I don't know if either of you want to reflect a little bit on that question of artist support in its many different forms.

Yeah, it's interesting. And as earlier, Alison, and I were casually chatting about it. And just this moment for EAI certainly is one of thinking about our role, and how we can support artists uniquely, it's very different now than it was in 1971. And how do we do what we need to do to recognize that change? I think that our mission, there's so much that carries forward with the mission. But there's also inevitably a very different context. Howard was part of the art and technology vanguard, but "art and technology" now means something very different than it did in the early 70s. You know, we're adapting, we're needing to adapt, frankly. And as Alex has said, artists did not have widespread access to technology in the 70s. Even though the Sony Portapak, which was consumer grade in the late 1960s, provided easier access to video equipment, which had been kind of professionalized for a long time, it wasn't like that meant everybody could just run out and get a Sony Portapak and it was great. It was a big piece of equipment. It was as expensive as a car, and you had to then have access to an editing facility to do anything with your footage. You know, EAI played a crucial role then, which is very different than the current moment. But something that one of our artists said has really stuck with me with respect to thinking about our institutional identity, which is that EAI has become a canon over time. But we are a canon of work that is not classifiable. It is to a certain extent. You can say, "Oh, well, it's media art, it's video art," but what we want to celebrate is the artist who resists classification, which is definitely a big thing we share with The Kitchen.

And frankly, you know, what I admire about The Kitchen is the embrace of dance and music and performance, which these are all aspects of work that we represent: Merce Cunningham and Charlie Atlas's collaborations, for example. But we have become this canon and I think that we're really thinking about what that means moving forward. We represent a really important history, and there are ways in which it is super specific, you know, coming out of the context of the late 1960s television. And I do always want to talk about communication platforms and how artists are experimenting with that. And I think moving forward, we're really excited by software-based art and artists who are doing things online. And you know, continuing really, there's such a continuum with the earliest experiments with video and computer technologies... the computer side has kind of been left out a little bit of this history. We recently celebrated another collaboration with The Kitchen: the early Computer Art Festivals... There were three of them. And they were really important moments to look at how artists could use computers experimentally.

AK

Alison, before you chime in, I just want to maybe build on what you're saying, Rebecca, because I think one of the things that I'm personally really interested in EAI's history is all the many artists who've worked for you over the years, like in structural roles, and I feel that there's a kind of transfer of knowledge between generations in a way. So you see, you know, artists who were hanging around like Josh Kline, or Sondra Perry or Cory Arcangel, you think of more as kind of maybe internet or digital artists who were fundamentally influenced by their time working at EAI and going through the collection. Cory Arcangel has this great anecdote of watching public access TV and seeing Tony Conrad, you know, Night Flight, like late at night making this kind of relationship between the screen that he's seeing in the form of television to then when he goes to college and having the internet on his computer. So there actually is a direct lineage with those histories. And so I just wanted to highlight that because there's also a kind of transfer of knowledge that happens in the editing bay, where you have younger artists like here, you know, Trevor Shimizu here with Tony Ramos. So, you actually literally have that in action right here.

RC

Yeah, the intergenerational which we really focused on in the exhibition and in the catalog, the intergenerational dialogue is also really key for EAI. And the editing suite was a place where that could happen. So we want to preserve that too. And just think, how can we nurture that, it's really important.

AB

I mean, I think it's revealing that I pick up on so many of the different things that have been said and run in so many different directions, I think the amount of overlap is really exciting to be getting into between our organizations. But one piece that I didn't talk about that I think connects here is the way that The Kitchen was invested in resource sharing and equipment sharing in a slightly different way. And I think this speaks to this question of the proximity but also divergent from the earliest grant that the Vasulkas received the Perception group in tandem with The Kitchen, some of the money went toward buying equipment, and the base was founded as a way to make that equipment available to other artists who entered into The Kitchen. And they talked about that, again, is like in those earliest years is this kind of dual pronged interest in this audience testing that I described, and then also like this kind of research and development of equipment, and that carries forward through the history in in many different ways that I think yet to be explored fully.

But one, for example, is the video viewing room is a space that originated in The Kitchen as early as 1975. And that was originally a space for equipment sharing. So there were different tape decks that people could come in, bring their own videos and view, while they could also check out videos from The Kitchen's library. And then only over time did that space develop into a curated site for video programs. And so that kind of push-pull between production and resource sharing and presentation, I think is something that also is present at The Kitchen from the outset and possibly is one distinguishing characteristic from EAI—that way that they were always walking that threshold of presentation. And again, at this 1973 moment, when it's transitioned, I would say they leaned more into the presentation models. Woody and Steina reflect on the fact that when they were leaving, they were already feeling like maybe that was not the direction they wanted to go. And they wanted to be focused more on the practice and not on the formalization of a presenting organization. That's something that I think traces and even into the present day, you know, it remains a question, how much can we support the production of new work? What does that look like? Is it what kinds of equipment can we share now, what kinds of space? All of these things that I think you can track at different times throughout the history where emphasis was put on residency, it's, for example, to develop new work, which is something that we've picked up recently.

Another kind of offshoot of this, I think, is the ways that The Kitchen developed programs that were resource sharing in terms of the artistic resources that they were supporting. So, I think TV is a big avenue for that even early on, there was this sense through Cable TV SoHo, the cable lines ran right through The Kitchen, and it was an organization... Cable SoHo was a conglomerate of organizations in SoHo that were coming together to offer public access programming. This sense that bringing it to the widest audience, bringing the avant garde experimental art to the widest audience. And then that's something that reappears in the late 70s under the guidance of Carlota Schoolman, who was the first video director after The Kitchen incorporated, that she comes back in 1978 as the video producer for what becomes "The Kitchen Presents" which was a series of experimental productions. The first one was Robert Ashley's seven-part opera, "Perfect Lives" and then later "Two Moon July," which is a really phenomenal presentation that is now in EAI's collection and distribution. So I think that too, in 2000, there was this moment where we came together to think about what this question of resource sharing could look like and made a selection under the guidance of Stephen Vitiello who was the archivist at this time at The Kitchen, but had previously been the Distribution Director at EAI. So he had another really rich crossover point where a selection of The Kitchen's archive was made available through the EAI's distribution program.

And I think that tracks forward into the present day, this sense that all of these experiments that have happened at The Kitchen, and all of the artistic energy, and these milestone moments, while they were meant to be ephemeral and noncommodifiable, as we know, they were also they contribute so much to a wider cultural dialogue. And being aware of that, that's something that I think is really fascinating and worth tracking to in the history. The awareness, the self-reflexivity that says "we have something here that should be shared and what are the means of doing that." I think TV collaborations with EAI, there are many others that we can track but just pulling those out as a few examples.

AK

That shift to exhibitionality I think is really important, because there's also a moment in EAI's history where, you know, artists are starting to work more in video installation. And there was a decision on your part that you were going to stick to the single channel, whatever form that might take, or what kind of medium, but that it would be single channel and not like you think of like, you know, Mary Lucier making these big installations, which is also a shift in the market and gallery context as well for video work.

RC

Yeah, it was the artist Jaime Davidovich who pointed right to 1984, and said 1984 marks the year that it all ended because Reagan was re-elected, a lot of arts funding was cut. Through the 1970s there had been a generous amount of government support for artists. I've heard other artists say, "Oh, yeah, we would just get a check in the mail for \$5,000"—a lot of money back then. "And we could go buy equipment." And that's why you have artists like Mary Lucier, Nam June Paik destroying their equipment, because they were getting the money for it. And that was an important part of experimentation. But yeah, according to Jaime, it all ended in 1984, which is also connected to other things that were going on, and there wasn't that same support structure. So, artists really had to think about other ways to support what they were doing and look to the art market, make work as installations. I think they were exploring... not to make it all sound bad. Like they were exploring installations in interesting ways. But we did actually kind of double down on this idea of un-edited video, which I have to explain now. To me, that's its natural state. It's not like a weird thing that video is un-edited. But it's something that people always ask about. "What is unedited video?," and I'm like, "That's its natural state." It's the video edition that you have to actually really understand what that means, that has to be defined very specifically and that circulates in certain contexts. But we are committed very much to this idea. We do represent some work that is edited. We are very flexible in terms of how we work with artists, but this idea of representing the work that can circulate broadly, be broadcast in a new way, is still really key.

AK

I mean, and also part of your charges is making sure that works continue to be accessible. So that's migrating through different forms and formats. Right. So I mean, I think Lori has said something like there's over 100 different...

RC

I'm the one that always quotes Lori saying that she counted over 100 video formats. And then she told me that it was actually a little bit less.

AK

It's still way more... there are all kinds of like beta tapes with an A, B, C, D, 1, 2, 3...

RC

There are countless, yeah.

AK

But I mean, that's but that's also a huge part of what you have to do. So that's a different kind of storage.

RC

Well, and we're a small nonprofit that can't necessarily and doesn't want to keep up with technology change, especially when there's designed obsolescence. We don't have infinite resources, we have finite resources. So we need to see what we can do. And in this hyper-commercialized environment, that's honestly kind of hard. That's the difference between the early art-and-technology moment and the current one. We want to be able to work with artists who are pushing the boundaries and experimenting with the latest thing, whatever that is, but our role is also, out of necessity, kind of shifted in that way.

AK

And Alison, I love to kind of just go back to that moment of the video collection, how that shifted within the organization, because I think that leads to the question of how your organization saw itself within the arts ecology, right, and how your institutional relationship maybe changed over time, which you gestured to a little bit.

AB

Yeah, absolutely. And it's been interesting to revisit these aspects of our history in relation to this panel. Like many aspects of The Kitchen's history it was rather organic. As early as 1975, I believe it is. We have here these

yearbooks that The Kitchen produced to summarize their activities in these two periods, 1974 to 1975, and then 1975 to 1976. And as early as these documents, they reference a video collection and an archive. And there's this question of the archive and the video collection being slightly different. The archive is documentation of events that happened at The Kitchen, the video collection being works created to be artworks, videos. This accrues and develops over the years, again, as we understand it, relatively organically. The video collection catalog that we have here was produced in 1993. And at this point, the emphasis was on the video collection. So, the artworks that were being distributed, and they reference in this, at this moment, discovering, rediscovering the archive, and at this moment the attention shifted to uncovering the archive, preserving those materials. And as we are sort of uncovering through oral histories within our organization, there was a decision made to in some ways put more energy and resources toward preserving the archives, because that is what was unique to The Kitchen and to perhaps phasing out the emphasis on the video collection. So that's what happened around the early 2000s era. And one of the reasons cited internally as we've been uncovering is that there was an awareness that organizations like EAI and Video Data Bank, were already doing that work. And in many cases, there were redundancies of the work that we were distributing, and that our master copy wasn't the best. So, what was unique to us was the archive.

So an ambitious preservation project for the archive was started in that early 2000s period under the guidance of Stephen who I mentioned before, and that is where that takes us sort of to today. But again, this, like self-reflexivity, and awareness within the ecosystem is something that I think tracks throughout and that sense that there was an opportunity for The Kitchen to support artists, you know, in one article cites, you know, the collection that we had accrued wasn't carefully curated in the same way that EAI's was. You know, we were not bringing in every work by an artist and really representing their practice. It was in some ways, it seems kind of happenstance, perhaps it was a video that was shown in the video viewing room that then ended up in the video collection, perhaps it was videos that were brought in by artists on a one-off basis. But, you know, this sense that there was an opportunity to do this work and there was an interest in having those work circulated, but at a certain point, realizing that that wasn't what we did, that wasn't as central to what we did as these other areas.

AK

That's fascinating. And I'm seeing we're kind of running towards the end here. I have a couple more questions that I'd like to throw out. You know, thinking about being organizations that kind of come out of this, maybe alternative

arts ecology, even if we've already talked about how there was aspirations to be part of the mainstream, whether it be television or MoMA... Thinking about the realities of New York real estate, that's something that I think in both of your organizations, there's shifts in locations over the years, and also shifts in relationships to other organizations. And so, I want to kind of bring those two things together and talk a little bit about the way that your own organizations have moved through New York City in relationship to a changing real estate market and art world. And then also reflect on the different institutions that you've had, I guess, other relationships with and how that's maybe forged some of your own identities.

RC

EAI has kind of come full circle, not fully, but we had a location for a long time on Broadway, just a couple blocks away from where we have currently relocated to on Canal Street, we're sharing a space with Triple Canopy. And we left... so we kind of fled SoHo in the 1990s and thought Chelsea was the great salvation, and it was actually a really wonderful moment. I think the overarching theme here is: strategic alliances are everything when you're a small arts organization in New York City. Dia was opening its space here and Michael Govan was the director at the time so we literally shared a space with Dia for a very fruitful period. Also, I think it manifested wonderfully in the Dan Graham Rooftop Pavilion and Video Cafe, which I know was a really important space for a lot of artists. This is when Wade Guyton was working at Dia, Seth Price was working at EAI, Bettina Funcke... Like it was just a really great moment. And there were heated conversations in the office about video art, and what video art was, and EAI's legacy and Dia's legacy, it was really fantastic.

But then things change. And obviously Chelsea has changed in significant ways. And I think it isn't a location for a small arts organization in the same way. Dia was growing their own footprint here. And during the pandemic, it just became necessary for us to look for a new space. And so similarly, it happened to just kind of pop up that Triple Canopy was interested in us becoming a roommate with them. And we thought, well, you know, we're organizations with actually a very similar operating budget. We're different but we also have these overlaps. We're getting a little more into publishing. We love the people that Triple Canopy works with, we've already done an event with Ilana Harris-Babou -- an artist who they commissioned to do a project for the last edition -- in conversation with Yasmina Price, and to me that was like the realization of what can be so wonderful about arts organizations sharing a space.

AB

Again, just so many parallels, the first of which is Dia, in fact, The Kitchen shares the relationship to Dia. But just backing up quickly to say that, as I mentioned, we moved from the village to SoHo in 1973. And even at that time, there was some criticism that that was maybe becoming too establishment, because SoHo it was, you know, where the established alternative spaces were, and not the light, gritty energy of that original polluted Mercer Art Center. After being in SoHo for 12 years, The Kitchen kind of outgrew that space and located this space in 1985. And the reason The Kitchen was able to move here was because it was a Dia property that was being maintained as an artist studio, and they arranged with The Kitchen to make this affordable option for us. So, we moved here in 1985, and started programming in January of 1986. At a time when Chelsea was a very different neighborhood, there were very, very few art institutions here other than Dia, you know, it was very industrial, there were nightclubs. So, I think this relationship and the embeddedness of The Kitchen's activities in its place is another thread that is really interesting to trace. But ever since being here in... well, I should say, so we moved in 1986, and then purchased the building in 1987. So under the I think really great foresight of the leader at the time, Bobbi Tsumagari was the executive director, and she, in collaboration with the board, they were able to secure a donor to make the initial payment. And I think in so many ways the history of alternative spaces in New York is a real estate story. You know, many people have said this, there are moments, and you can track in the records and press that like there were a couple of moments when The Kitchen was on the brink of closing. And there was a relationship to real estate. So at the moment when they were moving out of the loft, it was a precarious position. And if they had not been able to secure an arrangement like this one, you know, the institution might not have existed. And then similarly, you can trace forward into turn of the millennium where if there was a question of paying off the mortgage, you know, these questions are fundamental to the ways that these kinds of institutions continue. And I think like you said, you know, that interdependence of different organizations, the chances when or the opportunities where different organizations come together to support one another or sort of, you know, hinge on one another are really fascinating. And I think that's something that comes through very clearly in our history.

AK

I mean, even thinking about your relationship with Thread Waxing Space, right? That's really interesting, or the Electronic Cafe. So I mean, maybe that's also a bridge to the present of thinking about wider distribution, not just in terms of television, but now also the internet. And EAI also has this incredible

educational distribution service, kind of a viewing platform for schools that you can access online. And you were a very early website with an online catalog. I mean, there are a lot of different places we could go. But I'd really love to kind of bring us up to the present and talk about how both of your organizations have recently shifted leadership. So Rebecca, you're a relatively recent director, even though you've worked at EAI for so long, and Legacy Russell now recently took the helm here at The Kitchen. And now that we've spent this time having a very rich discussion about the roots, the kind of foundational ethos, the different ways that's evolved over time, I'd love to spend our last few minutes talking about the present and the future and how that past informs where you are today in a very different, I think, art landscape and real estate landscape in New York as well. How does that inform the vision for the future? And what are you seeing now and maybe even just those immediate effects of change?

RC

There's a lot that can be said, also coming out of the last couple of years, which I think have been incredibly hard for small arts organizations, small businesses, period, but small arts organizations. And you know, I don't want to sugarcoat it. I'm a little concerned about New York City's future in that regard. And we're not only committed to our future and our sustainability, but to those of our colleague institutions and wanting to really nurture this small arts ecology and find a way to work together to resource share to really do those things that you always have to do to get by. I've already mentioned, we're in the process of strategic planning for EAI's next 50 years, and wanting to think of ways that we can adapt to serve artists in new ways. I think there are a lot of exciting directions that can go in: publishing, for example, commissioning more writing, I'd love to figure out a way to commission works from artists and to get a little bit more in that supportive role again. I'm very inspired hearing Alison talk about The Kitchen's history, because it would be wonderful to find a way to embrace artists who don't fit. We've been recently talking to the artist Leslie Thornton, who I think is one of the great artists alive today, with work that has never fit neatly into any category. She's never felt embraced by the experimental film scene or the video art community or the visual art scenes. Like she's kind of always in the middle of all of these different scenes. And I think about her all the time and I think how can we do what we can to give her a space to work in and to be in. So, you know, it's still very artist driven in that regard, getting that feedback from artists and then figuring out a way to adapt to their needs right now.

AK

And constantly bringing new artists in for distribution too and think about gaps in your own history because collections and distribution models often

like mirror the kind of the times in which they were. So there's also probably holes to be filled and histories to be brought back into visibility. I think about even just the work with, Ulysses Jenkins. Yeah, bringing Ulysses visibility. So also supporting younger artists, but also neglected histories.

RC

Ulysses Jenkins has been, I also think of him all the time, because it's such a great success story where you know, he's been in distribution with EAI for many, many decades, and then Meg Onli and Erin Christovale curated this amazing exhibition for ICA Philadelphia, now at The Hammer, and it got all this attention. And Ulysses is being featured on Criterion, a week doesn't go by now where we don't get requests for his work. And to me, that's what it's all about, that change. Collaborating with others, too, though, it took a whole kind of group of people to work on that attention and support for Ulysses' work. And here's Ulysses in conversation with Sondra Perry, you know.

AK

As part of our exhibition in a television broadcast...and the gallery was also a public access station! that is interesting, thinking about things that are hiding in plain sight, things that are in the distribution catalog. You know, what you can do to kind of pull them out for more visibility as much as also bringing younger artists and creating new content.

AB

I mean, that's exciting to hear. And I think that parallels the way that we are thinking about our archive and our engagement with our history. We are thrilled to be now working with Legacy Russell as the executive director. And with Legacy joining us and with our staff, thinking about the 50th anniversary milestone that we just celebrated, this question of how to look to our history, while also how to both celebrate our history, but also acknowledging what we are missing, what we don't know about it. And looking to our archive as one that is incredibly rich, but also has holes in it and why those holes exist. As we all know, they are both practical reasons, and then perhaps structural. And what it takes to sort of tell a different story of The Kitchen. I think there's something there's a way in which The Kitchen means something different to many different people. And there are people who are very familiar with certain figures of Kitchen history, and maybe have one sense of what the institution is through that person. So, we've been in conversation as a team and under Legacy's direction to think about, you know, what would it look like to chart some sort of way through the archive that is both filling in those gaps, and then maybe speculating beyond or creating new, new directions to take us forward into the future. So very much this process that is often discussed at the time of a historic milestone,

like an anniversary, that looking backwards to launch into the future, that feels very rich right now. And then we are about to embark on a major building renovation. So that also, you know, in this real estate moment, as we are lucky to own the building, we are doubling down on our place here, we will renovate and reopen. But in the interim, we will also in some sense, get to go back to our roots and really lean into partnerships. You know, I'm thinking about that Mercer Art Center as the birthplace for The Kitchen. Alongside all of these other ways of working, we will be embarking on a series of partnerships with other organizations to work offsite, more to be announced in the coming months. But I think that will be an opportunity to kind of get back to those... maybe embed into the arts ecosystem differently now than we have in recent years, while we were programming on site. And I'm excited to think about, you know, how our reflections on our past and some of these early collaborations, these early entanglements with EAI, Mercer Arts Center, other organizations, might inform the ways that we're working with people in the years that we're off site.

AK

And even just thinking about the most recent shows you've had here, which has really straddled a lot of different media, and also reaching out beyond the building. I mean, think of the show that just came down now, where there was the whole kind of thing with your phone that you could broadcast out. So I think that that's also an interesting way that you've kind of moved with artists. And even I think, you know, it's fitting that we're going to conclude with Sondra on the screen because that's an artist that both of your organizations have had really... and also you prior to working at Recess... have had really kind of key involvement with. So Sondra being an intern for a long time and producing work at EAI and now in EAI's collection but also thinking of distribution service and then you know, thinking about the key show that she had here and the work that she did with you at Recess. So it's also interesting to track artists' histories through certain types of organizations as well and this crucial support, you've all given them.

AK

Please join us for our next episode, co-hosted with Pelle Tracey, ICA Curatorial Intern and doctoral student at the University of Michigan, in conversation with Mari Spirito, Executive Director, and Curator of Protocinema, a self-described ambulatory and cross-cultural art organization that commissions and

presents site-aware art around the world. We will discuss the complexities of working across geographies and ruminate on the importance of relationship building in the creation of an alternative art ecosystem. We look forward to welcoming you in person at ICA, please visit our website, www.icaphila.org, for more information about our upcoming exhibitions and programs. I'd like to thank Jason Moran for the original music and my colleagues at ICA who helped make this podcast possible. Derek Rigby, Audio Visual Coordinator; Jill Katz, Director of Marketing and Communications; Ali Mohsen, Digital Content Editor; Olive Martin, Social Media Coordinator, and Pelle Tracey, as well as collaborators former Spiegel-Wilks Curatorial Fellows Tausif Noor and Gee Wesley. At The Kitchen we appreciate all of the support from their team, especially Zack Tinkelman, Production Manager Tassja Walker; Production Supervisor; Kasey Price, Sound Technician; Kerry Scheidt, Associate Director; Susana Plotts-Pineda, Curatorial Intern; Rayna Holmes, Institutional Advancement and Special Projects Manager and at EAI; a special note of appreciation for Tyler Maxin, Communications and Special Projects Associate. Thank you for listening.