

Coastal Effects: Empowering Artists with Disabilities through Creative Communities [Transcript]

Paige Wery, Gallery Director, Tierra del Sol Gallery

Anthony Marcellini, Founder and Program Manager, Progressive Art Studio Collective (PASC)

Amanda Krugliak, Arts Curator, Institute for the Humanities [moderator]

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Jason Young: Hello everybody, how're you doing? My name is Jason Young, I'm the Director of the Humanities Institute. This is the first year that I've been in the role, so I'm really excited about all of the wonderful programming that we've been able to do. Today I just want to say a couple of things. First, you're home – that means you can eat the food, because I can't eat all of it by myself. Please enjoy as much as you like.

I want to offer just a moment of thanks to a number of people. First, I want to acknowledge the people that put this program together and have been working really diligently and hard in the Humanities Institute to make this work. Shaunda Bunton, in the back, who is in charge of our public programming. Amanda Krugliak, who is the curator for our galleries. Ed Diven, who does so much work to make everything possible. Without them this work wouldn't really be possible. It's great to see some of those familiar faces, and it's also great to meet new people.

You'll hear more from Paige and from Anthony in just a moment about their connections, but one thing I do want to say about their work is that – and Paige and I were talking about this earlier – one of the things that I'm committed to in relationship to the Humanities Institute is not just doing programming in a one-off way and starting something and it never coming back, but instead starting a conversation and continuing that conversation on and on.

I'm a historian by trade, which often means that I'm working in communities and asking them about their pasts, and I'm interviewing them about how they became who they are. And one of my advisors gave me a piece of advice that I carry with me in everything that I do. He told me that you can work in any community that you want to work in, but if you choose a community to work in, you may never leave them. And so, you can go anywhere you want to, you can join any community, you can participate in any place you want to, but you may never leave them. And so I've taken that in all the work that I've done. If I commit to people, I stay with my folks.

And so I want this to be the beginning of a conversation that continues on with PASC and with Tierra del Sol. This is a conversation that I hope we'll be coming to again and again and again. I invite you here, over and over again. If you've heard me make any kind of introduction, you will have heard me say this before – I'm gonna tell you what my father told me. You're only a guest once. After the first time, you're home. Please know that if this is your first time, it's the last time being your first time. Thanks so much.

(Applause)

Amanda Krugliak: That was fantastic. I also would like to thank Shaunda, and Ed Diven who worked tirelessly in hanging the installation behind us, and everyone that has been so kind and generous during Paige's visit – we were at Cranbrook, we went to the DIA, we met with Olayami Dabls, we were at the Heidelberg Project, we visited PASC galleries – and all the people we met who gave us their time and attention. It's a feeling of community and togetherness that is so deeply needed, particularly in this time, so thank you for everyone's generosity. Thank you to the Arts Initiative that made it possible for us to have artists with us today from PASC. We're so grateful for their collaborative energy and support.

And I want to give you just a quick overview of how this all came about. There was a show of Ericka Lopez, who is an artist from Tierra del Sol Gallery – that's Paige's gallery

where she directs the programming. This was in November of last term, and we worked with Ericka to create hook rugs with all the students that met with us. And at that time, Paige was not able to be here, and so we thought it would be great to bring Paige back and perhaps be in conversation with someone else that does this remarkable work at the interface of an art gallery and social practice and empowering artists with disabilities and mental health differences. And so then Shaunda, Ed, and I went to Detroit and discovered Anthony and PASC Gallery, and so all of these pieces came together in this sublime way. And I'm really just so glad to have you with us today.

Paige Wery: Thank you.

AK: Let me more formally introduce – this is Anthony Marcellini and he is the Programmer and Founder of PASC Gallery in Detroit. Also Southgate.

Anthony Marcellini: Yep.

AK: And there's a third location as well.

AM: Westland.

AK: Right. And he'll be in conversation today with Paige Wery. And Paige is the Director and Gallerist of Tierra del Sol Gallery, and that's in Los Angeles, CA. She works as part of a foundation that also gives opportunities to the same community. And her part is very specifically representing these artists and furthering their career and making sure that they are visible in art worlds that are all inclusive rather than something that is to the side of the arts community. We'll just go through a few questions – that's how this usually works – I have a few things on my mind, and then we'll open it up and you will be able to ask questions if you'd like of both of them. And Anthony did you want to just acknowledge the artists that we are so pleased to have with us today.

AM: Yeah, absolutely, we have quite a few artists – ten artists, I think – from the PASC, or Progressive Art Studio Collective, who are here today. A couple of them are artists who have artwork in this exhibition. So we have Bruce Rice, Lauren Williams, David Harris, Lewis Foster, and Thomas Saunders.

(Applause)

AM: So if you have any questions that you want to address to the artists, either here or after the talk I'm sure some of them would be happy to chat with you.

AK: And all of the work is for sale, you should know, so spend time with the work. Just follow that QR code to the gallery [website], Anthony has listed everything carefully for your perusal, so please do that after the talk.

Let's start with a question everybody must wonder, which is how did you find your way into this kind of work?

PW: So I'm an art school dropout. I was in art school and people were telling me what was wrong and right with my artwork. I was a little bit older [than most students] there, [so] I decided to drop out. I continued making art but I went to Venice beach boardwalk and thought, I'm going to sit here and see what the community thinks about my artwork. Me and a friend made a commitment to sit down there for a year. While I was there, I was meeting other artists that had never been into a gallery, never been to a museum, some of them were homeless, some of them had addiction problems, and they were all making this amazing artwork. They knew nothing about the Los Angeles contemporary artworld in this huge art city that was happening right across the street from them. So I started curating shows with the Venice beach boardwalk artists and I took over coffee shops and I invited them to show up Saturday morning. I'd [tell them] if you want to put a piece into the coffee shop, come bring [your] art, I will hang it in this coffee shop. We're going to have an opening and we're going to celebrate these artists that were completely underrepresented. And they would show up. They would take buses, bring

their families and show up for these coffee shop shows. I became completely enthralled and realized after dropping out of an art school that this underrepresented art world was happening. You do not have to go to art school to be making good art, you just have to have a piece of paper and a pencil, a passion and a love for art. So that is how I started showing self-taught, sometimes called outsider art. I like to call it self-taught even though some of my artists [at Tierra del Sol] have actually taken a couple of classes at college, but then maybe it didn't quite work for them so they end up coming to Tierra del Sol where they're more comfortable. That was how I started, and then from there I opened up my own commercial gallery in Los Angeles, [The Good Luck Gallery].

I ran [Good Luck] for five years. It's super difficult to run a commercial gallery space [especially one] showing only underrepresented artists. It was like, one good month, one bad month, one good month. [And after five years] I just thought, you know what, I need to get a job. This was not something a 50 year old woman with no money should be doing. I had already started working with Tierra del Sol. I was representing some of their artists in my commercial gallery space. So when I told them I was going to have to close my gallery, they hired me to represent their artists. At that time they had not been going to art fairs, they had not really been giving [anyone] a solo show. They hadn't been framing the artwork. They hadn't been reaching out into the commercial contemporary art world. That's who our artists are, they're contemporary artists. And that is how we ended up here.

AK: [Before you moved], your gallery was next to a row of other galleries. It was really a part of this vibrant LA Chinatown [art scene]. Now you have a bigger, better building. But when you first walk in, and you see this artwork, it's exactly how [the PASC artwork] feels in the [Osterman] Common Room, it's so moving just as art. And what about you, Anthony?

AM: Well I'll start a little earlier. I grew up with dyslexia and pretty severe learning disabilities. I did really poorly in school, until around my junior year when something switched and I was suddenly able to study. But generally my grades were terrible in

everything except art. My mother was also a part time artist. (She is also a survivor of polio, with lasting physical disabilities.) But art was the only thing I excelled at. So I went to art school for college. When I graduated art school, I was working on a project called *It Can Change* with another artist, John Hoppin. *It Can Change* would gather or commission artwork from other artists that would solve or address a specific situation. For example we did a clothing project where we had artists make artwork as clothes. We set up a flea market and gave the artwork away to people on the street, in order to see artwork everywhere. We were using art as a way to engage with people, using art as a barter system to talk about what art is, what art does.

A bunch of things happened between that time and where I got to starting PASC. I worked in museums, worked for the non-profit gallery Art in General as an assistant curator in New York, adjacent to the blue chip fancy galleries. Later I had a solo art career, and was also teaching for many years in art schools and universities. Somewhere in there I got a masters degree, in Social Practices, so I've got two degrees, Paige.

PW: I'm all for it, I'm all for it, but you do not need a degree.

AM: You absolutely do not. But through teaching and even through my experience as a student in university, I had teachers that would say, only one of you is ever going to be an artist, they would talk people down from actually making artwork, rather than talking them up. When I was teaching some of the best artists in my classes were the worst students. They wouldn't show up for things, wouldn't do assignments because they were in their studios making art. At some point in all of that, I thought, I need to get out of this space. And around that time I walked into a studio program for artists with disabilities called Soul Studio in West Bloomfield, outside Detroit, and I was amazed how vibrant everything was. And all the artists came over and started talking to me about their artwork. And it felt like when I first came to art school that this is my place, these are my people. And that got me really jazzed about that program, ran that for about 3 years.

Then I decided I really wanted to start a program in Detroit. Detroit has never had a progressive art studio before, or an art studio program for adults with disabilities, that, as Paige mentioned, helps them build careers in the art world. So I proposed this program to an organization called Services to Enhance Potential (STEP), a disability service provider across Wayne County. It was in Summer/Fall of 2020, the middle of COVID, and they were really looking for something new, to bring people back in, when they were starting to open up programs again. They said, yes, let's do it.

PASC started very small, just in one space in Detroit with about 20 to 30 artists. And then pretty quickly we started a virtual program for people who were not able to come in person. About a month later, we launched our Westland studio, also in Wayne County, and then about 11 months or so after that one in Southgate. And now our program has 3 studios, 2 galleries, and we work with over 190 artists a week. And it just keeps growing.

AK: Paige, how many artists are in your program?

PW: We have 140 artists. Tierra del Sol is a foundation that's been around for 50 years. And we are not just an arts program. We also help people get into college. We help people find jobs. And then we have this thriving art studio practice with two art studios in two separate locations. The gallery is the third location for our arts program. So my gallery isn't attached to the studios, which a lot of programs have, it's separate.

AK: Anthony, at PASC, the gallery is [connected to] the studio space?

AM: Yeah, for two of our studios, Southgate and Detroit. Our Detroit studio just moved into this new building called Lantern in May. It has a very nice gallery.

AK: Does every artist in the program exhibit artwork? Is everything equally shown or shared? How do you make those decisions or how does that work? I'm curious about that as a process.

PW: So, [Tierra has] been around for 50 years, but the studio arts program started 35 years ago. For my gallery programming, once a year we have a show where every single artist puts one piece into the gallery. Other than that, I curate shows and I see who's ready to have a solo show or who's ready to have a two person show? It's not easy to make those choices, as a curator. But we're having major collectors come through our space. We also do art fairs like the Armory, Felix and Nada Miami. In order for somebody to have a solo show, they have to be ready, to be collected on that level. Some of our artists have even been put into museums. So what I'm looking for is somebody that has found their voice, their individual voice. A lot of our artists come in copying other people's artwork. Somebody that has a solo show at my space, has found their own voice, an individual voice, and they've got a nice big selection of art that is from that voice.

AK: It does. And are the artists self-directed or is there an engagement with the artist over time in developing their artwork? Or what does that relationship look like?

PW: Some of the artists that come to us have already been making artwork, and some have never made artwork before. We do not review portfolios before you get in. Some people are learning how to make art from scratch. We have one artist in particular that comes to mind. When she first came in all she was copying My Pretty Pony over and over again. But she was putting them into all these beautiful different scenes. So we said why don't you try making your own character? We helped her take little steps and now she has created her own seven female superheroes and she's got her own story going. You can see the influences from her illustration past, but she now has her own characters. So we definitely encourage people to break away from copying somebody else's work.

AK: Would that be the same for you for PASC Anthony?

AM: Yeah, it's more or less similar, except we're only four years old, so we haven't had a gallery – or should I say permanent gallery – until this past May 2024. Well, actually that's not true. Our Southgate gallery was our first permanent gallery launched in November of 2021. But because of where it's located, we don't have a whole lot of foot traffic. When we moved into the Lantern building, which is in this new area cultural redevelopment area in the southeast side of Detroit. Once we opened in May this year, sales started happening in a very different way than they ever were before and we're finally able to actually do a lot more. We started doing two person shows there. But we have 190 artists, so we want to get as many people shows as possible, so we also do a lot of group shows. We will have our first solo show with an artist, Ronald Griggs, whose work has been collected a lot, really quickly over the last year. Ronald came in with a really advanced style. He trained a lot on his own before coming to us.

We did just do our first art fair in Miami recently at the Open Invitational, which is a brand new art fair for programs like ours and galleries that work with the same population. And we worked with another gallery White Columns who was showing at NADA Miami and brought like 100 PASC artworks. And we're going to try to do a lot of fairs every year, as they really help us get our artwork out to collectors, museums, galleries, and make a lot of sales, which helps build the artists careers and also helps the organization.

As for the studio, it's very similar. I think when artists come into our program we try to put a little bit of a cap on their first show. We give them about a six month window before they start showing. Because we find when people first come in either it's a situation like what Paige describes or their artwork just changes so much. But the key things that I've often talked about with our studio, the most important we do is actually develop comfort and confidence. When the artists come in, they may not be comfortable with the space, they may not be comfortable with their peers, they may not be comfortable with the staff. It can sometimes take a really long time to get to that point

where somebody lets their guard down. We say to new artists who come in, this is your space, you can do whatever you want to do. I've talked about Ronald Griggs. When he came in he was doing fairly conservative portraits. And one day he did a figure that was a human animal combination. And we said, wow that's great, you should do more of that. And it kept getting more and more wild. A lot more graphic and some are actually very sexually explicit, yet amazing, super beautiful. Every time we'd see him we'd say wow, that's great, keep going, keep going. And that's really the same with everyone. We are cheerleaders in a way.

Our staff are practicing artists, which we call art advisors. They at times act as artists assistants, and at times advisors on what kind of materials people might want to try out. But most of the time they are confidence building. Cheering behind them, saying 'that's amazing', 'how about a bigger sheet', 'smaller sheet!' With some artists it takes them maybe a year before they'll try something new. One week, how would you like to try watercolor? No! A month later, would you like to try watercolor? No! Six months later, how about now? Umm, I'll think about it. And then finally they start something new and something really amazing happens.

PW: Something else we do – I was going to ask you if you guys do this – we have online shows. So that's another way we bring in people that aren't quite ready for a solo show. We let artists create online shows. We have guest curators do online shows. And we are constantly looking for places to show the artwork. We'll do coffee shops, we'll do ice cream stores, we'll do restaurants, we'll do other galleries. We love being in other galleries. Do you guys do online shows as well?

AM: Well, all of our shows in our galleries are also online, everything is posted online to allow people to buy if they're not local. But we don't do separate online shows. Honestly, we just don't have the staffing to do that yet. We're a small program in terms of staffing. It could be something we do down the line as artist-curated or something. Many programs have outside curators that will curate their online shows, as a way to broaden

the audience. It's a great strategy and I'd love to do it, we just don't have the capability. We're doing a lot with 190 artists. We have 11 staff, three studios, and two galleries.

AK: How does that compare to you, staff wise?

PW: We have a lot more staff, but we've been around a lot longer. And we have a separate gallery. I have two full time people that help me at the gallery and then sometimes we need even more help, switching shows or if we're getting ready to go to a fair. Then I can call the studio and get more help. I don't know exactly how many people work in our arts program. I guess 30, maybe 40 people, something like that.

AK: Do you think that geography, [where you're located], impacts the work you're doing, or doesn't it? Is it a different program here in Detroit than in LA, and how is it received? Is it difficult to pull this off? Is the system set up to help you make these things happen – for artists to be able to create work and benefit from making and selling their artwork? Does that vary from state to state, and how many of you are there? Are there a dozen studios or...all those questions in one.

AM: Well on a financial level, you know, these programs, both Tierra del Sol and PASC, a lot of their funding comes from Medicaid dollars. There's of course grant funding, foundation funding, individual donations and things like that too. But most programs have started out with being supported by Medicaid dollars, which tends to be, a third, a half, or even way more such as in our case. But the amount of funding Medicaid provides, is dictated by the state. And it's very different in California than it is in Michigan. The rates are quite a bit higher in California, the amount of income coming to programs is higher in California than it is in Michigan. So that definitely changes things. And there's also different rules on things like how many staff to artists there needs to be, in different states, right? But honestly, I went to school for art, not for social work. So on that level, it is totally different in each state.

But I'm kind of curious, Paige, aesthetically, if you see differences between our programs. I mean there's certainly parallel ways of working. I see similarities.

PW: Well, you know, it's like any artist that's working in California, people move there to work with light, right. Aesthetically, I don't think there's anything really glaringly different. I mean, because my program's been around longer, we have ceramics, we're doing a little bit more digital work, we're starting to get into more performance [and video] stuff.

Also the prices of our art are higher because it's California and West Hollywood. So that brings in more money. Tierra del Sol was founded in the early 70s and many of its staff [started at this time].

AM: Well, PASC only started four years ago in Detroit, whereas in LA, Tierra started in what, '89 or something? And I think our program only starting recently has a lot to do with the history of Detroit and the disinvestment that has happened over years and years. In the last couple of years there's been a lot more attention on Detroit, and a lot more investment in it. But the fact there has been a lack of creative programming for the disabled population in Detroit, does have to do with its history and its rustbelt geography.

PW: Well, Creative Growth (f. 1974) is a studio Arts Program [for disabled artists]. It was the first in Oakland and California to have a gallery dedicated to artists with developmental disabilities. They were the first to start applying to art fairs. [Initially], even the Outsider Art Fair would not let them in. So they did a lot of knocking down walls for us. They were the first ones to start raising the prices and start treating their artists like any [other] contemporary artist. And people that come into my space in Los Angeles say, oh, it's like Creative Growth or oh, it's like Creativity Explored (another progressive studio in CA f. 1983). So there is a history in California, which probably makes quite a bit of a difference.

AM: Yeah, absolutely. And I don't know for a fact, but I think California has more studios than any other state? I'm 99% sure that that's true. They have been leading the direction of progressive disability programs in many ways. And a lot of other programs would look to you for direction or inspiration. Page and I talked a lot before I started PASC. I also reached out to Creative Growth to get some direction on how our program could and should be run.

I think a lot of studios throughout the 70s and 80s were looking to Creative Growth or reaching out to them to get direction. Creative Growth had two founders, Florence Luden Katz and Elias Katz. Florence was an art teacher and Elias was a psychiatrist, both worked in the Sonoma State psychiatric Institution in California. When it closed down they founded and launched Creative Growth.

PW: They started Creative Growth in their garage.

AM: Yes, totally, and then after they established it they started growing Creative Growth and expanding it and started other studios like Creativity Explored. One of the studios spaces they started is called NIAD, it used to be known as the National Institute for Art and Disabilities, and they were initially using it as a research institution, as a place to talk about this world, what we now kind of call progressive art studios or supported art studios. And they used NIAD as a platform for conferences and reaching out to other programs. And they also created a handbook in the 90s that a lot of new programs starting up then, in the mid to late 90s and early 2000s, used to help guide how to do this thing.

AK: Do you have a sense of how many organizations there are that have a kind of a connection to the kind of work you're doing?

PW: It's worldwide.

AM: We say 60 plus, but I think it's way more than that.

PW: Yeah, I think it's way more than that. I'm curating a show with the LA Downtown Library and I'm going to have a map made and I'm going to pin every single studio across the country on the map. And I'll have people contact me and gather a bunch of data and spread the word. We don't have a ton of data about the programs that we run and how many [there are]. You're saying California has the most and I don't even know that. I thought New York might have more than us, but it might be California.

AM: Creative Growth launched a conference a couple of years ago and started bringing a bunch of studios together. And every year it's gotten bigger and bigger. And the last year an alliance is now kind of forming that's going to be a national Progressive Art Studios Alliance or PASA, connecting all of these studios together to help them with things like advocacy, research, education, all of these sort of areas. So I think things are starting to get a bit more, you know, supportive. The studios used to kind of fight against each other, before my time, that's the lore that we hear. I think because there is so little funding and so little attention on this work? But that's definitely changed.

AK: Well I think there's another shift now as museums start to collect this artwork. There were over 100 pieces, right, that were collected by SFMoMA from Creative Growth, NIAD and Creativity Explored. And seeing museums' commitment over time to including those works not in a separate exhibition of its own, but integrating them into exhibitions moving forward. I think that shows a real swing of that pendulum.

PW: Yes, there's a huge swing happening. If a museum is doing a large group show, it is on them to reach out beyond the MFA programming they typically reach out to. It's starting to happen to our program. It will start to happen to yours. And the more art fairs we do, the more art fairs allow us to be part of their program. We used to only be able to do the Outsider Art Fair, which is ridiculous. Now that we're participating in contemporary art fairs, people are saying, "ohh, I didn't even know about you, this is amazing". We've been here for a long time, but we're finally breaking down those walls. It's amazing the attention we're starting to get, it's long overdue.

AK: That's great.

AM: Yeah, absolutely. Some of our artists are actually now in the collection of the Cranbrook Art Museum. So there's some real interest there. I mean, it's been kind of an amazing year. One of the artists from NIAD, which is a studio in Richmond, CA, in the same area where Creative Growth is, an artist named Marlon Mullen, just had his first solo show at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. And that's really incredible. It's not the first solo show by an artist with disabilities. Judith Scott had a solo show at the Brooklyn Art Museum. And I'm sure there's been others that I just don't know about.

PW: And we have two artists that just had a show in New York, they were part of group shows that were in museums. One of them got collected by the museum. So, there's a lot of growth happening, it's super exciting. Also, as the gallery director, I like to point out it's a great starting point for collecting art. I'm in a very fancy neighborhood in West Hollywood. The working class people that live around this gallery cannot afford to buy art at the galleries across the street. But they come over to our space and they're starting to collect art. So it's a fun place to go for beginning collectors.

AK: Let's take questions – open it up.

Audience Question: How do you find the artists, or do they find you?

PW: So in California, when somebody with a disability graduates from high school, they go to the regional center, which is in their neighborhood. And the regional center interviews them and asks them what they are interested in? What would they like to do? And how do they want to be part of the community? If they are interested in arts and they live close enough to one of our studios, which is not always super close – we've got people taking a bus in from an hour away – but if you are within that range, then they will recommend us. That's one way. The other way is if an artist lives with their

parents, we have parents come in and ask if their adult child can join, so those are our two ways.

AM: So they come directly to you in that instance, right?

PW: Some of them do, yes, but most of them come through the regional center.

AM: That's more or less the same for us. Sometimes people will just contact us directly and because our programs are mainly Medicaid supported, we prefer people to use Medicaid because then there are no out of pocket costs for them, and then they would come to us through STEP, referred by our equivalent of a region center DWIHN. But if they're not on Medicaid, and Medicaid has a lot of pluses but some difficulties, it's hard to manage for some of our folks, then they can come to us through private pay as well.

One thing that's really important that STEP does for us is offer transportation. If people are on Medicaid, STEP will pick them up and take them to the studio, which is really important. Transportation, as I think we all know, is a major issue in our area.

AK: Do artists come twice a week or does it vary? Three days a week? Everyday?

PW: It varies at Tierra. We just opened up on Saturdays. So we're Monday through Saturday, and artists are allowed to come when they want. Most of our artists come five days a week, but we have some people that have other jobs and they come in one or two days a week, it's up to them.

AM: Same thing with us, it's really up to [the artists] how often they want to come. We are Monday through Friday at the moment. We're looking into opening on Saturdays.

Audience Question (from Jason Young, Director of the University of Michigan Institute for the Humanities): I just wanted to thank you for all the work you're doing. The artwork on these walls is absolutely fantastic. It's been really transforming our space, and our

interactions in the space. I was wondering if either of you have a wish list – this is the thing that I wish we could do next. What would it be?

PW: That's a great question.

AM: I don't know if this is going to answer your question. Well, it really has little to do with me that the artwork is so amazing in there. It's really the incredible talent here that we work with. Some of our artists are, well there is no other way of saying it, at or below the poverty line. They would not have access to an art studio and would not have access to our materials. They would not have access to our staff, that is there to suggest references, if they want them, or provide them research information and things like that. They would not have access to any of this at all, none of them would be coming here. So you have that (poverty) as well as disabilities. So a wish list would be for them to have access to and a way to engage in the arts without so many barriers – economic, geographical, discrimination. And that's across the board.

PW: As our artists make more money, there are limitations [to how much money you can earn] when you're on disability and you're getting state funding. So I wish those limitations would go way up. We have a lot of trouble when an artist really starts kicking it out of the ballpark, when we are taking people to the Armory and they're selling out the booth. We have to figure out how to make sure they're safe with their state disability checks. So the dream is that [to raise the cap on income for people getting disability] and start an alliance. That's one of the fights [PASA] is going to take on, you know, if we join it. That would be my biggest wish. That is the biggest thing that stresses me out. What's the point of a sale if it's going to affect an artist negatively? So I just hope those laws change and people start realizing that [being an artist] is a job. For some people, this is their voice, literally their voice. The government needs to start recognizing art as a legitimate job. Artists should be allowed to make money, and still receive their insurance.

AM: One other thing related to this, I do have more things to add to my wish list. This is an arts program, right? But there's a lot of other areas and programs for the disabled population that could be run like progressive programs similar to us. What we do is we develop independence, confidence, and comfort. And we see tremendous growth and transformation in our artists. When they come in, sometimes as little as a month later, sometimes 3-4 years, they become way more independent because we put them in control. We have artists that don't talk that much. We have artists who we have been told are nonverbal, who eventually start talking. It is because they are making artwork, contributing to the world, and they feel intensely proud about what they're doing. To create something (artwork) and present it to the public (in an exhibition) is really important.

I think this model could extend to so many other areas. I mean you could be running job programs that are based on this model, rather than one in which you are telling people no, don't do that, don't do this, don't do that. STEP has a culinary arts program that provides similar independence, and it's certainly doing great things for our members. But I think you could build a progressive structure into so many other areas to support independence and self-actualization.

And honestly, beyond disabilities, education for all could be taught totally differently. As somebody who grew up not really learning the 'normal' way of learning for the majority of other students, I hated school. Education programs that are student-led, based on letting the student figure it out, and fail, and celebrating that failure as a part of learning, rather than criticizing it. I think education tends to be run from a perspective of what's best for the university or the teachers or the administrators, rather than the students. When students feel they are running their education, this is their choice, they become proud to be in their classes, learning new things.

Audience Question: Are there digital fabrication tools in the spaces that you run?

PW: Well we do digital art and that's fairly new for us. We use our phones now to make art too, like taking videos and things like that. We don't have a 3D printer – is that what you mean?

Audience Question: Yes, 3D printing.

PW: Actually, we don't have that. I know there are some programs in Los Angeles where they're building [tools] to help participants make art. But that's not creative sculpture. I actually don't know of any studios that have that, but that's pretty cool.

AM: We are starting to do collaborations with different organizations. It's not digital fabrication by any means, but we did a great print collaboration with our neighbors Signal-Return who run a printmaking studio. And I believe the more things we do where we work with a say a digital fabrication studio and there's a partnership that develops where our artists learn about that equipment, those tools, those materials, or what's possible to make incredible art. But it would be really hard for us to bring one of those facilities into our studio, and maybe unnecessary. I've always thought the more we get out into the world and engage with other people, professionals doing incredible things and work together, the better it will be for everybody.

AK: Anyone else?

Audience Question: You like ah, you like you like a water paint, and color pencils. You like a marker? See you like ah color sticks. You say painting, water paint, or something.

AM: Do you mean at Paige's studio? Do they do that?

Audience Question: Yeah.

PW: We do all of those things that you just mentioned. And we also have a really strong ceramics program at our space. When an artist comes to us and they've got a dream

and they want to try something new, even if we don't have it, we try and make that happen too. So we do use all those things, sometimes all in one piece. As you could probably see back there, right?

AK: Thank you so much, please look at the work in the common room. It's all for sale and the show will be up until February 28th.

PW: We both want to thank Amanda who has brought us into this amazing University space. It's super rare and really important for us to come in and be able to talk and be able to show the work that's coming out of our studios. It's important for our artists. It's important for our programs overall. Thank you guys all so much for being here.

The transcript for this conversation, which was originally recorded as part of the opening reception of *On The World With The World*, a group exhibition of 40 artworks by over 24 artists from Progressive Art Studio Collective (PASC) at the University of Michigan Institute for the Humanities, has been abridged for the sake of clarity.