

Visual Arts Market Access: Panel Discussion with NYC Gallerists

6- 10pm, Wednesday, April 13, 2016

Phi Centre (407 Rue Saint Pierre (Montreal), Space D, 4th floor

Photos by Julia Stringhetta

Summary:

On April 13th 2016, ELAN held a public panel discussion with visiting gallerists from New York City as part of the Visual Arts Market Access Project, made possible with funding from the *Canada Council for the Arts*. Moderated by Hope Peterson, the panel brought gallerists and artists Lital Dotan, Eyal Perry, Matthew Schum, and Amanda Hunt into conversation. Drawing on the varied professional experiences of the gallerists, the discussion covered topics such as exhibitions, residencies, artistic and academic institutions, and addressed the question of how artists can best navigate the art world and market. A reception followed the panel and Q+A, where the panelists and audience continued the discussion.

Panel:

• **Lital Dotan and Eyal Perry**

- Lital and Eyal run [Glasshouse Art/Life/Lab](#), a performance incubator and residency program in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. They are performance artists, curators, and program managers. Glasshouse is dedicated to hosting artistic practices that are based on performance, participation, and time-based art in the domestic sphere, working under the motto “Art Should Be Experienced at a Place that Allows Staying”.

• **Matthew Schum**

- Matthew is a writer and curator working between New York and Los Angeles. He previously worked as a curator and publications editor for [LAXART](#), Flash Art International, and has been widely published in periodicals such as *Art Forum*. He has worked at the Walker Art Center and Museum of Modern Art, and has curated shows in Turkey, Minneapolis, Vancouver, and Berlin. Schum recently completed his PhD in Art History from the University of California San Diego.

• **Amanda Hunt**

- Amanda Hunt is Assistant Curator at [The Studio Museum](#) in Harlem and has previously curated major biennials, solo-exhibitions, and public art projects at the Contemporary Art Center in Portland and at LAXART in Los Angeles. She has worked at various galleries and institutions including Whitechapel Gallery, London; Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York; the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She holds her MA in Curatorial Practice from California College of the Arts in San Francisco.

Moderator:

- Hope Peterson: Visual Arts Coordinator, ELAN Market Access Studio Tour Project.

Introductory Remarks

(Edited and Condensed)

Lital Dotan & Eyal Perry

- Glasshouse was started in 2007 as an initiative to deepen the conversation about performance art. As artists, Dotan and Perry found the practice and discourse surrounding performance art was limited. Their programming includes performances, residencies, and round table discussions aimed towards creating a language around practice.
- The first phase of Glasshouse began with a series of weekly performances done in their apartment in Tel Aviv. Over time, it became a physical space in Williamsburg and their agenda broadened.
- The defining feature of Glasshouse is that Lital and Eyal live at the space. Their residency program creates a discourse that is rare, as conversations don't happen at a studio. Instead, they happen over breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
- Their mantra "*have some soup*" illustrates their desire to create a discourse around the basic notions of living.
- Challenging the traditional notions of performance is a core aspect of their practice. They are interested in creating opportunities for audiences to occur rather than show up to an announced event.



Takeaways:

- **Build community**
 - “There is a big difference between opening yourself to others and taking an active part in something bigger than who you are. When you develop a communal, open structure to whatever you do, you can do so much more. Sometimes it’s about collaborating with other local artists to increase the potential of getting involved with something outside of where you are.”
- **Propose collaboration.**
 - “When applying for a residency, there is a difference between seeking a platform for your work and offering a collaboration. By thinking of your residency as collaborative, you have a chance to show what your value is to the person you want to be hosted by.”
- **Tailor your applications for project funding and residencies to the specifics of the organization that you are in communication with.**
 - “When we receive proposals, one thing that is very integral to what we do is that we want the artist to address the relationship to the fact that it is a home. We do have a more sterile gallery space, but we are looking for works that are relating to the fact that it is also a living environment.”
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Matthew Schum

- Matthew was born into a working class family in Minneapolis. He became interested in art when he moved to Vancouver to study at Simon Fraser University. Discovering art history was formative in that it helped him relate objects to the French theory that had been forced on him in college. Suddenly, there was an artwork to look at when it came to the history of Europe or North America.
- He was in Vancouver at the height of the Bush administration. Schum found a way to understand where he was from without resorting to “something as simple as patriotism”.
- After a brief stint in New York City, Schum went to graduate school where he studied the Istanbul Biennial as the subject of his dissertation. He was specifically interested in how temporary communities were created around the Biennial.
- Schum’s career illustrates the expanded role of the role of the curator in the art world. For his work with artist David Hartt, curating was much more than selecting paintings to go on a wall. The process involved applying for grants, logistical tasks related to the presentation of the work, and writing an essay about the artworks.



Takeaways:

- **Travel**
 - “To be involved with contemporary art, you have to be going to exhibitions and making friends here and there. I also realized that there is a benefit to shuttling between the periphery and the center through my studies related to the Istanbul Biennial...Leaving your comfort zone and finding a way to think critically about your home from outside is really important.”
- **Know your History**
 - “A lot of times I’ll go to a studio visit and it’s really hard for me to have a conversation with someone who doesn’t have a sense of where their work fits within the history of their medium. You have to appreciate that. Beyond where you come from, what your parents did with their life, what shaped you as a person, there’s a history and an unconscious to the medium. You have to be in dialogue with that.”
- **Whether you are an artist or a curator, you should be a writer**
 - “The best artists are able to present their work. Being able to write protects you from simply being at the whim of the critic.”

Amanda Hunt

- Hunt is originally from Philadelphia. Despite having never been to the Pacific Northwest, she curated a Biennial in Portland, Oregon in 2014. As part of her process, she reviewed 300 applications and attended over 65 studio visits across Oregon to map the geography, culture, and artistic communities of the state. Eventually, Hunt ended up with 15 artists, many of them collaborative partner-ships.
- Weekly conversations with the artists were built into programming for the exhibition. This was a way of “bringing outside in,” as Hunt was someone coming from a different state, and to “bring inside out” by creating exchanges between regions.
- Amanda now has spent 2 years at the Studio Museum in Harlem as Assistant Curator. The exhibition space and collecting museum was founded by artists in 1968 as a way to support the work of black artists. The mission has since expanded to include artists working in the African diaspora and those who are inspired by black culture.
- Each year, the Studio Museum hosts a studio residency program. This involves inviting 3 artists to the museum.



Takeaways:

- **Do your research**
 - “Whether you are a curator visiting studios, or you are an artist thinking about spaces, places, and people that you want to have exchanges with, you need to do research. Do not send out a portfolio or show up at a gallery without any knowledge of the work that they support. Understand their ideology and politics. These are things that you need to know as practitioners moving through the world.”
- **Branch out**
 - “Look to see what residency programs are available elsewhere. See how far you can go and how far you can push yourself and where you can take [that opportunity]. You’ll meet communities wherever you go and that helps you grow the language around your work. It also allows one to be aware of histories and be self-critical as well. Whether or not you can afford it financially doesn’t have to be limiting. There are grants and stipends.”

Q&A

Audience question: In terms of accessibility, I know a lot of [the art world] is very competitive and that you have to be both a good artist and a good academic. I get a lot of emails from vanity galleries (galleries that charge you for exhibiting your work) and I'm wondering if I should pursue opportunities like this when I have so few chances to show my work?

- **EP:** I think you made two assumptions, one being that [the art world] is a battlefield, and that there are very limited possibilities. The possibilities are endless. I don't think opportunities are just handed out for anyone to pick. If you see the experience of applying for galleries and residencies as a means to develop yourself, your social and technical skills, and your market value, that's when you enhance your potential accessibility. You become more than your art. It's not about feeling miserable that there is so little out there—the world is out there! It's about developing the right attitude and enjoying the trip.
- **LD:** Research who is showing work and who creates the kind of work that you also make. Go there. Learn them. Know the people behind this work. Create a conversation not about promoting yourself, but about the practice.
- **AH:** Never pay a gallery to show your work. You are being taken advantage of if this happens. Be more open in your thinking about how to function in the art world. Maybe it's a group exhibition that you have initiated with friends or another gallerist who you know who is working outside of the commercial sector who can help you get to that next point. There are always different ways of making a living.

Audience question: Firstly, how much time and energy do you put into researching new artists? Are you open to collaborating with arts organizations to learn about new artists to show and discover?

- **EP:** We don't find artists, they find us. As an artist, I wouldn't wait to be found. I would build up a strategy on how to access whatever you see as your goal. It's really not about waiting passively to be discovered. The chances are slim to none. I also want to talk about taking risks and getting out of your comfort zone. At one point in our career, Lital and myself were represented by a commercial gallery in Tel Aviv. When a collector was about to invest in 7 or 8 pieces of ours, we fired our gallery and decided we wanted to be independent artists. From moving countries to expanding Glasshouse during the recession, every time we have taken a risk it has resulted in something positive.
- **LD:** I can add on and say that our path has never been easy. It's a constant struggle. Nothing around us is cushioned in any way. As an artist, you should just keep doing what you're doing and be very focused on what you find interesting and what compromises you will make to maintain your agenda.



Audience question: I paint music synesthesia and make mobile sculptures. I also work with time-lapse video integrated with music. I'm retired and self-taught and I have a hard time finding artists who make similar work. I'm trying to form some small painting groups, take my work on tour, and I've just learnt how to write grants. I'm wondering if there is anyone on the panel or in this room that would be interested in collaborating.

- **AH:** I think the idea of galvanizing and creating a community around something that you feel passionate about sounds amazing. That's a wonderful place to start. Also consider that you can bring art anywhere. That's the beauty of it. You can host a show in your apartment.
- **EP:** You gave a list of things you don't possess, however a crucial thing that you do have is passion. It is so important. Passion will drive you. On a practical note, Glasshouse is open to all forms of creation so we encourage you to approach us. And approach us face-to-face. Creating a career by email is hard!



Audience question: How have you gone about developing your audiences, especially for spaces like Glasshouse when you had to settle into a new location?

- **LD:** I wouldn't worry about the size of your audience. Our audiences range from 2 to 200 people, so it is always in a state of flux. It really depends on what we're showing, how many people are engaged in a specific performance, and how relevant it is. Obviously, when we started out the audience was small. Now it is growing more and more and we need to make less effort to spread the word [about events]. That takes time. In the past, the fear of nobody showing up caused a lot of anxiety. We did have performances where the audience was very small and they became a performance of themselves. Ultimately, the performance happened, and that's what's important. Audiences happen once things are happening.
- **EP:** Keep in mind that audience development is not necessarily about counting heads. You can develop your audience by understanding the potential of the experience that they're going through and trusting them to come back and bring others with them next time. Instead of counting heads, I find it's about how you take the opportunity of each arrival to make them want to come back. It says something about you and your operation if you can get people to return more than if you're wise about PRing every event from scratch. Protect your audience base.
- **AH:** Use your network and community. Social media is a very effective tool to connect with others.
- **MS:** It's always a battle. One place you really want to be is when you've finished a show, you're really excited, you have taken that risk of putting a show up, and you don't know how many people are going to come. I think you also have to be really careful about connecting value to "likes" and social media. At the Getty in Los Angeles, they count on 40% of their RSVPs to show up. However, when a curator does a show with an artist and they know it's really good, it doesn't matter if 500 people show up or 1000. You just know that you made a good project and there's always posterity, so you want to make sure you document it well.
- **EP:** One of our platforms is Lital's 24 hour performances. Once we had a 24-hour performance and a huge storm hit New York. Not only was it impossible to go out but the subway system was shut down so no one could move. Consequently, only 2 people attended the entire performance. After 12 hours, I suggested we stop because it was

ridiculous weather. Lital said “No. I’m here for 24 hours. It is my piece” and finished the work. For me, it was a lesson that the value one gives art as the artist can have nothing to do with the number of people attending. If you remember that, then you’re in a good place.

Audience question: When you search for artists in a region that you are not familiar with, where do you start looking?

- **AH:** I know myself and what kind of work I’m looking for. Very generally, I’m looking for intelligent work. This answer goes back to research, which could mean anything from a simple google search to a more extended exchange with the people who are on the ground there. I wouldn’t know half of the artists in the exhibitions that I have curated if I hadn’t gone to organizations in Portland, met with directors and asked questions to artists who I was already in the studio with. I’m a very social person, so asking questions face-to-face and dialoguing with colleagues is a very natural way for me to research.
- **MS:** When I’m looking for a partnership, interests are intersecting. Never see a failed application as strictly rejection. It’s not about whether your work is good or bad, it’s about whether we have shared interest. It’s kind of about serendipity half the time as much as what’s good or bad.

Audience question: Where do you look for funding? How do you find money?

- **LD:** For us, it has been difficult because we came from Tel Aviv where there were no grants. Consequently, we needed to find innovative ways to support our practice. Currently, Glasshouse sustains itself from shared economy platforms like Airbnb. On our Airbnb, it makes it clear that if you come to our house, you are part of an installation. We have to invent ways of survival because the type of work we do is immaterial, so there is no commodity. You have to create the commodity out of nothing.
- **MS:** Like in Canada, the United States has arts funding bodies that you go to for money. In the case of the David Hartt project, I applied for a grant through LAXART and part of the funding went towards the exhibition. I encourage you to consider bringing grants that you receive in Canada to other places with less robust funding structures. You can also make additions of your work so it can be sold.
- **AH:** There are also small granting pools. I’m currently developing a public art project in New York and I am amazed at how many small organizations give modest grants.
- **EP:** I want to caution you when looking for funds. I’m not saying that it’s not great to find funding, however, I taught photography for 20 years and I’ve been fortunate to take part in the development of many young people, and there’s one thing that I have seen consistently- looking for funds can really create passiveness. Countless people I have met have told me “If I get the money, I will do this”, but they never think about what will happen if they don’t. So I’m not saying that looking for money is a bad idea, but never let your art be dependent on funds.



Audience question: For Lital and Eyal, I was wondering if you met because of your artwork and would love if you could give me thoughts on your inspiration for moving to New York and your experience being a couple.

- **LD:** We started as collaborators. It took us years to build a friendship and an intimate relationship. In terms of immigrating, it was a necessity. I felt I couldn't survive where I was. The choice to leave somewhere is very personal. We refer to ourselves as cultural refugees, but everyone has their own reasons for leaving their home. Our home wasn't comfortable.
- **EP:** Like we said before, take risks, just trust the path, and let good things happen to you. For a while, we worked primarily in Europe. We had galleries representing us, shows and life was good. Thanks to the residency that we held, we were visited by Marina Abramović and she invited us to a 3-month residency in San Francisco at her institute. Eventually, that led to another opportunity and shifted our attention to American culture and the possibilities of the United States. All these opportunities happened to us not because we were hunting but because we were just doing what we did.



Audience question: This is more a comment, but I have managed to live from my art. Many years ago, after being unsuccessful in my grant applications, I realized that my practice was so important to me that I had to find other methods of making money so I could continue in the arts. Living as an artist has meant learning how to market myself and communicate my work. This is something that I don't think art schools teach.

- **EP:** I disagree with your perspective on art schools. I think it's just the opposite. When I graduated from my MFA in NYC, I was told by my professors that if I was still in the arts 8 years after I graduated, I was an artist. Only then could I start seeking a career. Today, art schools have become business schools where you are taught how to play the market. The problem I have with this is that students end up looking for galleries and shows before they have any significant art. It is largely due to the fact that the art market is looking for new stars and have much less respect for people who devote their entire life to make art.
- **MS:** I would agree. There is also a lot of energy put into decrying academics. I've actually been through it and I know how awful aspects of academia are and until you've done that you shouldn't really talk about it. You should really stick to what you know and get rid of these superficial divisions. The harm that academics do each year to artists is very insignificant in fact and the art world is not nearly as academic as people say it is. It's probably not nearly as capitalized as we say it is either. I see all sorts of tribalism inside of the art world that are a total waste of time.

Audience question: What does Art mean now? I feel that it is a big competition and that it feels like a prison. What is art's place in our daily lives?

- **MS:** I think you need to go to college and get critical thinking skills. I have a lot of students that don't seem to focus on that. You need to read things that are difficult to understand

and you need to have a historical perspective or else your art is often not meaningful. Even worse, you don't what is good.

- **I have my Master's degree in art and I focus on it all day, 7 days a week, but I can't really find the meaning in it anymore. If I'm not even getting impressed by art. So I'm confused...**
- **MS:** I want to clarify that I wasn't saying "go to art school", because I don't know your background. What I was saying was that I think it's important to cycle through ideas, try them on, and decide what language you can use to share with people.
- **EP:** I think you are floating a lot of issues here. Firstly, I would say that I am troubled by your conception of art being a prison and it being constraining, however I would like to remind you that your mind creates certain pictures that you can change. You don't have to feel that way. The other issue that you brought up is the challenge of explaining your art to people who may not get it. We share the same feeling. There aren't very many people out there that we can intellectually have a dialogue with. There may be lots of people in this room who you can connect with, but once we all leave, it's a needle in a haystack. That's why I think it's so important to build a community of people that you can talk to. If there is something that me and my partner search, it is not the meaning of art. The meaning of art is something to create, not to find. Instead, we search for people to talk to, to listen to, to invest ourselves in and have them invest themselves in us.