



OUT OF SIGHT: A CONVERSATION ON VISUAL ARTS PODCASTING - Notes

Friday, April 26 | 12–1:30pm

Friends Center, Room 136

Session Type: Panel

Organized by Dana Bassett, Bad at Sports

Selected via Open Call

Presenters: Dana Bassett, Tyler Green, Gonzalo Reyes Rodriguez, Agustina Woodgate

Panel organized by Dana Bassett with presentations by Dana Bassett, Tyler Green, Gonzalo Reyes Rodriguez, and Agustina Woodgate.

This panel brings together a diverse group of art podcasters and radio hosts to discuss radio and podcasting in the realm of contemporary art. Conversation topics range from podcasting as practice, the journalistic or archival approach, interview and narrative format, and technical concerns related to producing your own audio project.

NOTES:

**Notes are often paraphrased*

Dana Bassett: Hi welcome, I'm so glad to see you all here. I was worried not that many people would be interested in a non-visual panel at this conference. But here you all are here. Let's get started with Tyler.

Tyler Green: Thanks everyone for coming. I do a couple of things. I produce the podcast "The Modern Art Notes Podcast." I'm a writer and historian and my publisher would want me to tell you that my book ["Carleton Watkins: Making the West American."](#) is forthcoming on UC Press. I've been producing and hosting "The Modern Art Notes Podcast" for eight years. We feature artists, historians, and curators. The people we bring on the show are about 2/3 artist and 1/3 other. Find us on spotify pandora, etc. But no longer on facebook because they partner with white supremacists to approve content and we don't approve of that. I'm going to play a couple of clips in a minute. But, the foundational premise of the show was that I wanted to create a place virtually that reflects the world and the art world in which I wanted to create and participate. When I started the show, criticism was changing and ending as journalism

collapsed. Criticism became primarily an academic medium and non academic criticism became commercial. Criticism became less a way of sharing ideas and more about promotion. The so-called critics I found were often beating-the-drum on topics they thought would make them popular. It became a popularity contest. A very famous New York critic made a fuss about how there wasn't any women artists being featured but ignored relevant exhibits.

DB: Can I name him? Jerry Saltz. Give the people what they want. They want names.

Audience Laughter

TG: So, the lack of representation of women and people of color was well understood but little addressed by trade books, magazines, etc. When you have the art market creating its own media adjuncts then what happens is they prop up white male artists etc. And I wanted to create a space I wanted to be in, which wasn't that. I wanted to create a substantive documentation of real engagement with real topics. Not flimsy and edited into PR nothingness. But to give artists and curators and historians a space where the subtleties of inflection and humor and the way your voice changes when speaking with urgency can be experienced. The podcast is meant to be useful in an immediate way but also as an archive. An archive of our time. These are things that will be meaningful someday.

So I brought a couple audio clips:

[Robert Adams on Crucifix Tree Photograph](#)

TG: Turning back trees and clear cuts nihilism of clearcutting.

Mammoth tree stump in Oregon. When I see this picture I immediately think of crucifixion did you think of that?

RA: Can't remember. Says a lot about Oregon. What you are looking at is the top of another tree that started from the stump. Roots of the second growth tree you are looking at. The thing that struck us is how much it seemed to be man connected to wires. Certainly that picture too echoes the origins you are thinking of.

TG: One thing I like to do is bring people on the show whose work gets at socioeconomic issues and politics and contexts. We have a great example just two blocks away at the Fabric Workshop Museum (FWM) exhibit of Sonya Clark's [Monumental Cloth, The Flag We Should Know](#). It is a four minute walk from here. Clark has been on our show twice. She has several pieces up at FWM that jump off from what appears to be a white dishcloth she came across at the Smithsonian Museum of National History. A literal dishcloth that was used to surrender at Appomattox. The exhibition asked the question, in many ways, what if the document that got distributed was one of defeat? The truce flag rather than Confederate flag of battle?

Clip 2: [Sonya Clark Interview](#)

Raising the white flag. Do you think there is a cultural moment that historians

and artists are picking up on?... America has a lot of work to do.

DB: Thank you, Tyler. I now will be talking a little about my baby, [Bad At Sports](#). Founded by Duncan MacKenzie, Amanda Browder, and Richard Holland. Four years ago, Duncan started on this very beautiful path called tenure and is now the art department chair at Columbia College in Chicago. But I am kind of the newish face and voice of the podcast. I asked Duncan about the origins and he told he found writing to be boring and isolating. And he and the other co-founders all wanted to create substantial content about artists and art works around Chicago. But they wanted to be together and drink beer. They also loved talk radio which I think is a special kind of person. And of course podcasting in '04 and '05 was kind of new. So, it was a divine spark of inspiration. We are the longest running arts interview podcast in the country. I started with BAS in the blog part of it. We do articles. We do weekend [Top V](#). In 2012, I started a gossip column and then I somehow moved on to the podcast. Ever since I came into this well fleshed out mission and platform, my personal mission has been to work with artists who were not originally part of the podcasts. Which tended to be mid or late career male painter. So I mix things up not only in terms of race and gender but also I like to be interdisciplinary. For example, I like bringing poets on the show who Duncan still doesn't believe are artists. About two years ago we collaborated with [Lumpen Radio](#). And basically, since we are really good at making radio they asked us to do a live show. The show took to the airwaves in 2017 as Bad at Sportscenter on WLPN 105.5FM with hosts Dana Bassett, Ryan Peter Miller, and Brian Andrews. The podcast is irreverent and colorful in terms of language so doing the actual airwaves broadcasting live once a week to roughly 400,000 listeners each show is a bit different. Our top episode download podcast is around 5,000 listeners, to compare the two. We try to translate live radio back into the podcast. The live show every week adds spontaneity. Wednesday 11 am CST 105.5 FM Lumpen Radio. Something Duncan and I share is we love being with people. So we never do phone interviews. All interviews have to be in person. We travel a lot to talk with people. To conferences and fairs, like this one. Now, I'm gonna leave you guys with an intro to our next speaker. Google [episode 651](#) of our podcast and you can listen to Gonzalo about his art practice.

Gonzalo R. Rodriguez: I am the former co-host and now just producer of [Archives + Futures](#), a podcast for future generations. The podcast came out of this exhibition that I and [Ivan LOZANO](#) participated in called "Monarchs" at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts: [Monarchs: Brown and Native Contemporary Artists in the Path of the Butterfly](#). The idea behind which was a survey of Brown artists across the Midwest. Everything culminated at the U.S./ Mexico border and Standing Rock. And how were artists there addressing these ideas and issues. There were over 40 artists involved. There was [this review](#) out at Hyperallergic, that had a surface level engagement. The review was a lot and nothing at once. And that was frustrating. You know when artists of color are finally given national platforms and larger scale of recognition with each other and then there is a lack of critical response to anything. This podcast came out of that lack of critical reception. We hoped it would serve as a way for artists to talk to artists. What are we doing and why. And setting it down for other artists to engage with in the future.

We started last summer at the [Comfort Station Logan Square](#) (the POWER project) in Chicago. The first recording was a live event featuring Marcela E Torres and Oscar Chávez called: Archives + Futures: Queer. It was actually a really good convo, they didn't know each other. But ended up taking it to another place and then they started asking each other questions. And that's happened again where the guests kind of take over. And when you are totally doing something DIY some things don't work out and we lost the audio. So, we are gonna recreate that show this summer. Not exactly the same but hopefully the magic will return. Our themes are broad. Currently, we are trying to expand outside of Chicago and the Midwest.

Our second show was themed around materials. Archives + Futures: Materials. We interviewed Victoria Martinez and Melissa Leandro, who are both abstract and material heavy but have very different backgrounds. How did they get into these similar mediums? Which I was not into only because I'm totally a Marxist-structuralist-thinker-worker. For me, as one of the producers, it is really important that we hold each other critically accountable to what we are doing. The spaces really are for each other. And then if there is a white male painter audience then fine. But that is not the point.

DB: How will people find the podcast?

GR: Facebook, [Instagram](#), if you google us, we have a website. We are really good about the Instagram.

DB: Cool. Well now, but never least... Next we will hear about [radioee.net](#). Who are you?

Audio clip plays: engine sounds and music. Voice in clips says "streaming live from the Defunct Giant motors auto paint and body shop warehouse in Miami beach, Florida..."

Agustina Woodgate: Okay so I had planned for you a performative intro but perhaps it's not going to work. (Some technical difficulties pairing audio and visuals.)

AW: I am part of radioee.net. An extended, online, nomadic, multilingual radio station. We host 24 hr marathon podcasts. Sometimes broken into several days but always 24 hours. We have a specific topic an editorial cut if you will and these thematic topics range from immigration, public transportation, and climate transformation. Transmitting local voices, music and sound to create an audio portrait of a place in time. We only focus on sound artists. Mostly, we put people on the microphone who don't have public voice. I guess we are the artists making radio. We started 10 years ago and we didn't know how to plug in microphone. The most challenging part is that we are typically on the move. We install in different vehicles. We have to install our own hotspot. We have 5-7,000 listeners every time we broadcast and we partner with local or pirate radios to broadcast on airwaves. We really focus on online. We occupy other online radio stations across the world. And they rebroadcast our stream.

A note on the notes : Each Slide introduces a different episode/event in a different location with

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distinct thematic concerns from radioee.net. All of which can be found on their website :
<https://radioee.net/>

Coordinates and contingencies
Chanela and composition
Ciclo
Exploring all things architecture
Bicycle operated radio station, roving
Traveling the future path of the underline

*I am going to start pedaling.
Go with the flow. You will feel it.
Tell us about Miami and its bike history.*

AGUAS ALTAS
A rising tide lifts all boats
April 2017
Coral Gables
Making radio on a boat
12 -8 pm
Navigating Miami's waterways

Sea level rise has arrived to Miami. How will ecological, economic, and infrastructural systems fare as climate effects sink in? What are the destinies of cities and species as the seas overtake the shores?

Internet grid radio web
Hotspot.
Strong signals weak signals
Information transportation
Oceanlines satellites

TRANSMISSAO FORDLANDIA
Fordlandia, Brazil
September 16 + 17 2017
10am to 10pm -3GMT
Jungle agricultures from the former Ford Factory
In Portuguese + Spanish + English.
Co-broadcast with 97.5FM Fordlandia,
a station co-founded by Radioee and the Fordlandia school.

AW: Fordlandia was the most difficult one. It was the most different for us, because we were in the Amazon and bringing connectivity to this community. The plantation city of Fordlandia was founded in 1927 by Henry Ford to develop a steady rubber harvest for his motorcar empire. By 1946, it was declared an industrial production failure. How do rivers, roads, and rubber shape Fordlandia today? How do forces of production and migration organize its economies, ecosystems, and agricultures? We did a seven week workshop, 50 people showed up and every day we taught them. We did 36 hours of uninterrupted broadcast. They took over the radio. You can see the students (refers to slide). We explore multilinguality. We broadcast in the languages present in the location. For example, the auto piloted (<https://radioee.net/event/auto-piloto/>) show in the Bay Area in November 2018 was in Spanish and Vietnamese. The last one in Istanbul required a lot of local collaboration. They are the ones who crafted the route. We had a sketch but they directed us and acted as hosts. Here in this picture, you see the police. In Istanbul we got stopped 8 times in two days. So yeah.

DB: We only have thirty minutes left. Let's do questions and pass that mic around.

AM= Audience Member

AM 1: I'm curious to hear your thoughts about building a safe space online for conversation and discussion. For a lot of reasons, I feel like that's not possible. But I also feel like there are ways we can think about it that make it more possible and how we can think about that?

DB: So building a safe space?

AW: Safety starts with no video. So we have a strict no video policy. It works because people are more concerned with what they say and less focused on how they look. And that is what we want.

DB: At BAS (Bad At Sports) we have ground rules. We tell people perfunctory stuff like how to talk in a mic but also we tell them about the editing process. Basically, we don't want anyone to feel like they have said something that makes them look bad. So we will edit it to their specifications. We aren't trying to make anyone look bad. We want to have substantive conversations. For example, recently we interviewed Howardena Pindell and she got back to me with some edits. So, we will edit it before it goes live.

TG: Yeah we are edited too, but we don't give the guests an opportunity to edit. If they have notes we will take them. If artists say something afterwards that they want put in we will do that. My editor is so good I can't hear it when they put it in.

AW: We don't edit at all. All live. It is more like an event. You jump in and listen.

AM2: In regards to radioee, I'm really fascinated. You started off saying no one is located in the

same city. As I am understanding, it is you go to a location then you assemble as a team? So interrogation of place seems like the focus. Can you say more more about this?

AW: Thanks for asking. Our core team of four all live in different cities. When we are in production, we meet online. Typically we travel to the location, unless it is really difficult (like the Amazon). If it is more regional, we will travel to the place 3-4 times: meeting people, prepping, building connections. It develops very organically. None of us are radio experts. That demystifies the making. And because we are moving there are 1,000 mistakes but we don't call them mistakes. Just unexpected occurrences folded into the broadcast. So yeah, a portrait of a place in time. The context comes into the sound of piece. We are half experimental journalism and half soundscape. You saw on the bike we thought we could make the turn but got trapped in the cage. So there was three educators on a bike vehicle stuck in a cage talking about education. Then we begin to talk about where we are and what is happening. We talk about the cage. So easy to transition between schools and cages. In this way, the place and the topics begin to meld.

AM3 : When creating a podcast how do you mediate between audience familiarity and experience and your own personal ambitions for content, space, etc?

DB: Gonz?

GR: We think about that a lot. The first one was live and we had a lot of people show up excited but then the second one, no one showed up. I'm more interested in the conversation than I am in even archiving it. The expectations of what happens when it goes out there. It is meant to be distributed and we want it to reach people but that is more of a long time thing. Like we almost want you to stumble upon it and it will help you that way as opposed to a regular scheduled time. It is immediately for Ivan and I and the artists we are in conversation with rather than an audience. And every episode is different so it just depends.

DB: We find at BAS that people are finding us by specific artist that they are interested in. Then we have another audience who are very familiar with the art world in general and follows for that reason. For me, I was a listener of BAS before I heard myself on the radio. When I moved to Chicago, BAS was an introductory tool. So, I am my own audience. Like someone looking to get acquainted with the arts scene in Chicago through listening into these conversations. If I'm interviewing someone who needs no intro like Alex Katz. Who needs no context. But if we talk about younger lesser-known artists, we do work to set up contexts. And also because we are all working artists, we are interested in the nitty-gritty, talking about practice and production. For example, questions like "How do you get a studio?" "Why did you hate grad school?" etc.

TG: You know podcasts have become a big business. They have done studies on what works in terms of building your audience and really the only thing that works is word of mouth. It is crucial and wonderfully small "r" republican. In terms of connecting the visual to audio content, on our webpage we run images of any artwork we can that gets referenced. Most of what we cover is

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in response to the nonprofit world, museums, universities, etc. who are usually pretty eager to promote our show. It is rare in today's media for an artist to talk in-depth for 45 minutes.

AW: For us, audience building is incredibly experiential. We are never in the same place so audience is always different. We do have a set of followers. We broadcast 3-4 times a year at most. But our guests bring audiences with them, in that specific location. So our audience is both hyper local and global. We do use whatsapp broadcast, which for us, is incredible. We are live and we are live now. For us it's more about getting together online to listen to something online. But it is all word of mouth though.

TG: Yeah it's everything. That and the 5 stars on iTunes.

DB: I like that the algorithm itself is word of mouth. I just wanted to add that as listener of radioee because it's bilingual I seek it out as a tool for learning. Talking before, we discussed the international scope. I, of course, make radio but I also listen. I learn a lot of different things maybe beyond what it is trying to teach you. Audience comes for one thing but finds another entirely.

AW: It is also an exercise in letting go. They (the people we bring on the show) took over your mic, your station, and that's ok. You don't have to understand. [Speaks in Spanish] It's ok. And then there are so many coincidences between all the languages. And that can be a way out of a topic that can get too dark and heavy. Language is a flow.

AM4: Can you all speak to how you go about getting grant funding for your projects?

GR: This is something that is a pain about when it comes to my own work but in Chicago there are a lot of grants and funding for group things. There is almost no support for individual artists but there is a lot of support for things that are social. Right away we got a [Propeller](#) grant. But before that we were borrowing things from universities.

AM4: But when you fundraise, what is your period of time, application, etc?

GR: Yeah like right now we only have funding for the rest of the year and then we have to find funding after that. We applied for a grant that would let us go to Los Angeles to talk to artists there. I'd really like to do that.

DB: Briefly and quickly, I would like to add a thank you to the Columbia Art department for borrowing equipment. I was only recently able to purchase 2 audio recorders of our own. Most of the revenue we make from the project comes from ad sales. Something that I find to be cool and liberating is you can sell funds. Which can be an advantage. So if there is something you want to advertise... I love recording advertisements and we are very affordable.

TG: It costs \$11,000 to buy one ad spot on *This American Life*.

DB: You can buy me for \$11,000.

Laughter.

TG: This raises the public radio thing, which drives me crazy. NPR has so many ads. We are for-profit but we only have 3-4 ads a show. The Mellon Foundation wanted to advertise on our show but discovered we weren't an NPR station. And then they backed out because we weren't a nonprofit. We are free. Anyone can download the show. But there are a lot of places that won't advertise with us. Advertisements are how I make a living.

AW: Absolutely no ads. We have to fundraise everytime we broadcast. A lot of the time the funding comes from the local place we are visiting. A lot of the last shows we have done have been commissions. Because of the scenario cities are interested. For example, the roving bicycle one was funded by Miami's Department of Public Transportation and partially meant to highlight the underline they are developing. So, each show has a completely different budget depending on how we are doing it. A self-driving car versus a hand-pulled cart.

AM5: I'm curious specifically about criticism of mostly visual work in an audio format, how much do you have to decide to describe? How much context to bring in? How much to describe the actual artwork?

TG: That's a good question. On our show, most of the artists are pretty well known. We usually refer people to the website. Which gets high traffic. If it's a work people don't know, then maybe a three sentence description. But we are very rarely discussing the composition of a specific art object. Rather, we are discussing the ecosystem around an object. For example, the show with Sonya Clark about her FWM show, we are talking about issues around textile production and its relation to white supremacy in 19th century and labor relations in the 20th century rather than the specific pieces on the show. Our show tends to discuss topics more broadly. Or like recently, we had a show on late Monet, who among us can't conjure a water lily?

DB: For us, it is pretty similar. It is also why I love bringing on literary artists to the show. Poems can be read aloud, which feels intrinsic to the medium of radio. It's funny when the person is more famous we tend to do more ekphrasis. Recently, we visited a studio and spent a lot of time describing. When we are in space it is easier to give that description, as opposed to being in the station's studio and not around the work. It isn't a strong part of the interview. It becomes more about process.

TG: I think what we are saying in a different ways is: respect the intelligence of your audience. Trust that people can get there and that if people do get lost, be sure to provide a way for them to get there.

DB: So, lots of links.

TG: People use what you give them.

AW: We don't talk about art at all. We don't bring on artists. The only artists we bring are musicians. And it is very experimental for them as well because we put them positions they've never played before. They often bring all their equipment which can be difficult because of our experimental conditions. Bringing a full drum kit on a boat is not practical. For us, the visual is the landscape. Which is always a topic of conversation for us. How do we bring the landscape to the audience? We are in traffic or stuck in a cage and it is bonkers but the audience can't necessarily tell. We learned being quiet was the best way to bring the landscape forward. We used to play music during problems but then we realized we should close down the mics and allow the landscape to come in. You think you have to fill in the space but the space is right there.

DB: I want to add that I love to make up stuff on air. The invisibility of it is another aspect you can manipulate. On that note, we at the end of the time. Thanks to all of you for coming. If you have other questions or want to talk more later, we are here in the flesh. Any closing gratitudes?

TG: Thanks for coming.

DB: Thanks for coming, enjoy the rest of the conference.