

00:00:08

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev: Hello, Mike.

00:00:14

Mike Winkelmann: We made it happen!

00:00:18

C.C.B.: We did...If I told you – but I won't – everything that's going on right now, it would explain why I've not been a very good follower of everything that you've been doing.

00:00:34

M.W.: What have you been doing?

00:00:38

C.C.B.: What's going on is a lot of ... trouble for the future. I think it has to do with geopolitics, to be totally honest. It has to do with shifting geopolitics, which are reflected in different and shifting power structures from the perspective of public policy. You know, DOCUMENTA started after World War II to prove that the West was free while the East was not. And so that had to do with public policy. Because aside from private policy in art, there's public policy, and that's the so-called soft power. So, there are things that are changing and different pressures, basically, between wanting to return to a kind of conservative idea of the Western avant-garde and research, which on the one hand gives stability and is very Eurocentric, and on the other hand, there's the pressures of certain sides and aspects of the global South that are in antagonism with other aspects and sides of the global South.

00:02:17

M.W.: What parts of the global South? You're saying certain parts of the global South are in conflict with other parts of the global South?

00:02:24

C.C.B.: Yes. I think there's a very big division. You know, like, for example, Abu Dhabi and other places are in the process of making peace ...

00:02:36

M.W.: Wait, would you consider Abu Dhabi in the global South or the global North?

00:02:41

C.C.B.: Well, that's the point. You've hit the nail on the head. Let's say aspects

of a certain world order and other powers or struggles of the global South that were somehow represented in the last Documenta are ... well, there's an attempt to remove them. But all this is my fantasy, you know, like when you ask me, "What does that painting mean?" And I tell you this whole thing, and then you say, "I think you're inventing that. Carolyn."

00:03:22

M.W.: No, I understand what you're saying. You're basically saying there's a mix of agendas. There are the very poor people in the global South who have a certain agenda and certain thing they want to say. Then there's also this whole religious never-ending war that people are fighting over. It kind of convolutes that sort of message getting through. Is that what you're saying?

00:03:44

C.C.B.: Maybe. I don't know. Anyway, that's one reason. The other reason is that we're opening a show on March 14th, which is why I'm coming to visit you. I'm so excited. I'm so grateful to be able to come.

00:04:04

M.W.: We're very grateful to have you.

00:04:08

C.C.B.: Well, it's interesting for me, coming from the so-called traditional art world. I've been learning so much, and yet I feel like I know nothing. But I have this sense that you're more in the future than the people I usually encounter. So I feel that if I can understand it, I can connect it with the past and maybe figure out where we're going.

00:04:46

M.W.: What's the theme of the show on March 14th?

C.C.B.: It's the saddest show I've ever done in my life. It's called "Artists at a Time of War."

00:04:57

M.W.: Wait, how far in advance did you decide this?

00:05:00

C.C.B.: Well, it's a variation on Espressioni, a big show that was supposed to happen in early 2020 before COVID. It was planned in 2019. It was a big show about expression in different moments of history in relation to technological advancements. But with COVID and everything, we lost a lot of money,

audience, and tickets. It was a mess. So I split it up into many fragments. You were in one of those fractions.

00:05:39

M.W.: So you divided it into smaller sub-themes instead of doing one big show?

00:05:50

C.C.B.: Yes, it was supposed to be three times the size, but now we're doing the last chapter. I just got rid of the word "expression" because I'm sick of it. It's now called "Artists at a Time of War," which is the saddest show I've ever done. It includes works by artists who have experienced wars. It starts with Goya and *The Disasters of War*, and it ends with two new artworks by an Afghan artist whom I got out of Kabul thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Army. He spent a year in Europe and is now teaching in Frankfurt. He's completely unknown in the Western art world. [He made an extraordinary piece](#), a film made in the bomb shelters of Turin, which I'd never seen before.

00:07:12

M.W.: The bomb shelters of your city, Turin?

00:07:14

C.C.B.: Yes, of Turin. But nobody has seen them since World War II. So all of a sudden, there's this film done in these bomb shelters that could be anywhere. They could be in Kiev, they could be in New York, they could be anywhere, since bomb shelters are needed in many places. The second piece he made required collaboration with the Army again. They were the sponsors of the show, the Italian Army, because he wanted to explode a painting. So we made six big paintings, each about four meters by four meters. We went to an army testing ground where they test bombs and stuff. We wrapped the paintings in a house-like structure, and he blew them up. The paint was mixed with TNT, so they ended up looking like wild Jackson Pollocks.

00:08:20

M.W.: How big was the explosion?

00:08:25

C.C.B.: The explosion was contained. When they test bombs, they surround them with sandbags on all sides.

00:08:33

M.W.: So it just blew out the middle of the paintings?

00:08:37

C.C.B.: Yes, but there are no tears. There were a few tears, but we got rid of those parts. We only kept the parts without tears.

00:08:50

M.W.: Can you show me a picture of it? I want to see what it looks like. That sounds very cool. It's such an interesting idea. I'm sure it's really beautiful. There are six of them?

00:09:11

C.C.B.: Well, he did two tests, so there are six from top to bottom and four on the sides. But he did it twice, so there are 12 canvas sheets. But you know, there's a history of explosions and fire in art. For example, Yves Klein...

00:09:30

M.W.: Oh, wait, he made a box and then it exploded inside the box. And all the box had was frames of canvas.

00:09:38

C.C.B.: Yes, but they weren't connected, and it wasn't a real box. But there's a history of fire and explosions in art. It's not the first time. There's a British artist called Cornelia Parker who blew up a tool shed, and she created a decorative installation with all the pieces in space. It's a good artwork, but I don't think it's the same. It's kind of conceptual. And earlier in the mid-20th century, Alberto Burri used fire to burn plastic when it was first invented. He placed plastic on canvas and then burned it. I'll send you pictures. But the thing is, they'd just invented plastic. You know how in *The Graduate* a character says, "The future is plastics"? Basically, Burri was showing that plastic is nothing but oil because when you burn it, it turns black. So it's a post-World War II work. He's in the show, by the way, because he was a prisoner of war. He was Italian, and although he was considered a fascist because he was Italian, he wasn't really a fascist.

00:11:15

M.W.: I think I've seen this guy's stuff before.

00:11:18

C.C.B.: Well, anyway, he was taken prisoner as a doctor. And when he was in a P.O.W. camp in Texas, he started painting to pass the time. So he wasn't

going to become an artist. But then after the war, he never went back to being a doctor. I think he couldn't deal with the bodies. So he just became an abstract artist who made really beautiful things. I wrote a book about him in 1996, I think. But anyway, the point is that his first painting was really hard to find. His first painting that he ever made in his life was in the P.O.W. camp in Texas. It's called Texas, 1945. And I found it and I'm showing it.

00:12:08 M.W.: Is it this painting that's like...

00:12:12

C.C.B.: An oil field? You know, it's very red.

00:12:24

M.W.: Okay. I see it. But it's like with a windmill.

00:12:30

C.C.B.: Well, anyway, it's not a great painting. It's expressionistic.

00:12:33

M.W.: But what year was this?

00:12:35

C.C.B.: 1945. He did it in the spring of '45, when he was still in Texas in this camp near a place called Hereford.

00:12:46

M.W.: When did he do all this more textural stuff? Is it like '60?

00:12:50

C.C.B.: No, no. He started in 1949. His first burlap sacks are 1950.

00:13:02

M.W.: Some of these are fucking sweet as shit!

00:13:04

C.C.B.: Yes, they're fantastic. He's really great.

00:13:13

M.W.: Okay. Can I ask a question? What does your archive consist of?

00:13:17

C.C.B.: Oh, it's fantastic. You know, it's 30, 40 years of everything.

00:13:21

M.W.: I have no idea what you mean when you say "archive." I don't even know what you're talking about. What is it?

00:13:31

C.C.B.: Well, okay, but then can I ask you a question after this one?

M.W.: Sure.

C.C.B.: Well, it's everything from sketches on a napkin by an artist who's really famous today. He was trying to explain something to me. I've kept everything: letters before there were emails, from fantastic artists. I have recordings, hundreds and hundreds. Although Hans Ulrich Obrist is very well-known for doing interviews, I've conducted interviews that I've never published or done anything with. But I have thousands of hours done over the last 30 years with tons of artists that have never been transcribed or published. So there's a lot of that. Then there are plans for exhibitions, sketches. Lawrence Weiner's drawings for something that we were going to do. Then there are all the drafts of my essays, all the versions of my texts. I have all my floppy disks from when the first computers were available. I have everything. I never threw anything out.

00:14:45

M.W.: Is it organized in some way, or is it something you still need to organize?

00:14:53

C.C.B.: I have to organize it. But I've also had a huge library of books since my childhood. They're underlined and have comments that I handwrite on my books. So that's really important. You know, Harald Szeemann, my predecessor – he's dead now; he's been dead for years – but he did Documenta in 1972. The Getty acquired his archive for \$7 million.

00:15:24

M.W.: And he was a curator like you. Oh my God. Crazy! So you could sell this to them for a fucking shitload of money if you organize it.

00:15:38

C.C.B.: Yes, but I'm not interested in that so much. Otherwise, I'd be running an art fair. I'm not even good at it, money, I'm not good at it, but I'm not that interested either. So it's not so much about that as it is that the material has been saved for the future. Because then people can go and study it and read it.

00:16:04

M.W.: How many other curators have done this?

00:16:08

C.C.B.: Well, maybe I'm the second.

00:16:11

M.W.: Oh, not that many curators?

00:16:13

C.C.B.: No, usually you see them at auction when they're dead, like the papers of Clement Greenberg or something.

Tell me about your your text-to-image AI work.

M.W.: Can I share my screen? Yes. What do you want to see? So what's cool about this is – you see my screen here? Yes. What's cool is that you can feed it a text. You can just feed it something very simple, like "Made out of yarn," and it takes that and makes a picture, And you can use this bar, and the lower you put it, the less it blurs the image. So now you can see it's much closer. But if you take it up, watch what it does. Now it's using its imagination more and interpreting the picture less. Meaning that you can add text images that you've made with other programs. Here, it becomes even more abstract,

because I let it go even further. I said, "You don't have to follow the picture as much." So here's kind of in between, where it uses a picture ...

00:19:18

C.C.B.: But that picture, for example, you made it with Cinema 4D and your tools that you normally use?

00:19:26

M.W: Yes.

C.C.B.: So it's all made by you?

00:19:29

M.W.: Yes.

00:19:29

M.W.: So this one, I don't have all the layers, but you can kind of see how I erased parts of it. So there are two layers. When I turn this on and off, it's showing you what it looks like with the Stable Diffusion layer. This is what it looks like with stable diffusion. This is just the raw render. So I just kind of added a little bit of detail like that.

00:20:15

C.C.B.: But what did you tell Stable Diffusion?

00:20:18

M.W: I probably said, "Rembrandt" or something like that. Something very simple. I didn't describe the picture at all. I just said, "In the style of an Old Master painting." Something like that. But again, very subtle.

00:20:40

C.C.B.: But what did it change it to?

00:20:43

M.W.: It just changed it a little bit. Like if I take this picture and I say, "Van Gogh," then it will just take this and do it. Here, let me turn this down a little bit. See how it does it? It pretty much just takes it and makes it in the style of Van Gogh.

00:21:10

C.C.B.: So it's about a pictorial style.



00:21:15

M.W.: Yes, it's not, literally Van Gogh. It's just kind of inspired by Van Gogh. I don't know how it knows what Van Gogh means.

00:21:10

C.C.B.: So it's about the style?

00:21:14

M.W.: That's just one way. I tried a million different things on it. It's just like taking it and sort of adding something very painterly.

00:21:25

C.C.B.: Can I ask a question? Why did you stop exploring Dali and go to this Stable Diffusion? What's the difference between them?

00:21:34

M.W.: They're almost entirely the same. But this one I can run on my computer. This is my video card, crunching the numbers, completely locally, so I can put anything in here. I'm not restricted. On those other ones, you can't do anything.

00:21:53

C.C.B.: You mean to say that Stable Diffusion is a software you can put on your computer?

00:21:58

M.W.: Stable diffusion is open-source, completely free software. You can just download it from this worldwide repository, and everybody's adding shit to it. Everybody's just like, "Oh, here, I made this. It works with this thing here." So there are all these extensions. These are all the different extensions that you can add to it: "This crops this ... This works for lower RAM GPUs ..."

C.C.B.: But I don't see pictures.

00:22:42

M.W.: I'm showing you all the different pieces of software people made to add different capabilities to it.

00:22:53

C.C.B.: That's fantastic.

00:22:55

M.W.: So this is how this software is progressing – very fast.

00:22:59

B.C.B: So Dali is a website where you have to put something in and then it puts it ...

00:23:06

M.W.: It's a completely closed box. You submit a request to them through their gate. And if you don't say what they like, like if you put, "I want to see a picture of Mark Zuckerberg sucking whatever", it's immediately just gonna be like, "No, can't do that." Versus I can put anything in here. The other thing that's very nice with this is all the outputs that I'm doing just go directly to my computer. So I don't have to download anything. It's just like immediately, you can see it. Boom! Right here on my computer. No waiting.

00:23:54

C.C.B: So basically, if I were to analyze what the artist is doing — let's say you — I'd have to analyze the process of the instructions and the transformations, not really the end image.

00:24:08

M.W.: It is kind of the end image, because there are lots of different ways to make shitty things. Like this stuff isn't very good. It isn't very interesting. There are shitty things you can get from it. So I think it's about getting it to do exactly what you want. And it needs to be interesting. I think what you're asking about is the main artwork, which is figuring out all of these things. So this is what the program looks like right now. Again, it's going to get easier. You have to type in all these things. So I have different lists of prompts that we've also run through other chat GPT, AI programs to make them better. We basically put in a rough thing and then fed it into this and said, "Take this, but make it a better description." And then I made an even better description from that.

00:25:16

C.C.B.: You made a better text.

00:25:20

M.W.: Yes. I used AI to make a better text and then I took that AI and fed it into this other AI. And so you basically say, "Okay, at frame zero, I want you to do this, and at frame one, do this," and then it can interpolate between those different things and generate video too. A big part of what I'm doing is generating video, not just stills. The stills I'm using for the Everyday's now are just to add in little details here and there, but the video is actually much more interesting.

00:26:01

C.C.B: Can I see?

00:26:02

M.W.: It's generating video right now. I'll show you a couple of seconds.

00:26:19

C.C.B: Does it make you sad to not have fun making all these images by yourself, and to be giving instructions instead?

00:26:28

M.W.: No, because it's super exciting. I have a very specific idea in my head. And so it's not just like, "Oh, whatever it made, this is cool." Most of the things that I look at, it's like, "No, that's not what I want." You really have to keep massaging it and there's a million settings here, where it's like, "Okay, this can feed into a fucking video and this will change the colour of it." That alone makes a massive difference to the look of it. And trying to understand how this thing thinks is actually fucking insane. And plus it just knows every reference, like, any weird obscure thing. You're like, "Oh, make it like this," and it knows it.

00:27:23

C.C.B.: Can you add the prompt "Make it like Alberto Burri"?

00:27:28

M.W.: Yes, we could do something like that. Here's the video. It did three seconds of video.

00:28:03

C.C.B.: But it doesn't look like Alberto Burri.

00:28:06

M.W: No, this is not the Alberto Burri! We'll see what it does.

00:28:15

C.C.B.: That's what it did? No, it's just blurry now.

00:28:19

M.W.: Actually, this is probably what it did: an Alberto Burri painting.

00:28:23

C.C.B.: Well, it looks awful, Mike!

00:28:26

C.C.B.: Okay.

00:28:29

C.C.B.: It looks like an Ad Reinhardt, sort of. It doesn't look like Burri. It looks like a piece of earth.

00:28:39

M.W.: Now it's doing a bunch of them. It's got the red.

00:28:47

C.C.B.: But it doesn't have the burlap sack.

00:28:51

M.W.: That's not terrible. So here's a bunch of them that it did.

00:28:55

C.C.B.: Well, they don't really look like Alberto Burri except for the red. But what it hasn't picked up on is the burlap sack. It's interesting. It's just like vague abstract expressionism.

You know, I wrote "Mike Winkelmann" into the program yesterday. I sent you what came out.

00:29:21

M.W.: What is it?

00:29:23

C.C.B.: You know the WhatsApp I sent you? I'd typed in "Mike Winkelmann."

00:29:29

M.W.: Into what?

00:29:30

M.W.: Into, what did you call it? Stable Diffusion. As a test, and that's what came out.

00:29:39

M.W.: All these artists are like, "It knows me, it's copying me now!" It doesn't know you! Shut the fuck up. So here, this is Alberto Burri.

00:29:50

C.C.B.: It's getting better. It's using the reference to wood, but it's very, very different from Alberto Burri. The most important thing was sewing the burlap. So I think it has to do with the quality of the images.

00:30:09

M.W.: No, it has to do with the quality of what you're telling it to do. That's the thing. It's not a fucking mind reader. If you say "Alberto Burri," that

could mean what? Do you want a picture of the person? Do you want a painting of what he looks like? Do you want some of his paintings? And then he's got all different works. Again, the more specifically you tell it, the more it will get it. If you could keep dialing this in and say, "I want blah blah blah," you could definitely make it much closer to what they're like.

00:30:41

C.C.B.: So if I hadn't written "Mike Winkelmann," and I'd written "Everyday, Mike Winkelmann," it would have come out better?

00:30:49

W.M.: No, because there are a lot of different things that could mean, and again, you need to be much more descriptive. Like when you say that, I don't even know what you mean. I could think of a million things that you're thinking when you say "Mike Winkelmann."

C.C.B: Well, why don't we write, "Make an Everyday by Mike Winkelmann"?

00:31:19

M.W.: If you just put "Beeple," it definitely knows that a lot more, but it just does all this purple shit. I've looked at what it's trained on of my images and it's not that many, it's just a few images.

00:31:34

C.C.B.: What it's trained on? How do you know that?

00:31:36

M.W.: Because I've looked up the data set. You can search the data set.

00:31:40

C.C.B: And on what basis does it make its data set? How does it make it?

00:31:45

M.W.: Well! And therein lies the multi-million dollar question. So they scraped the internet. They just went ahead and doop doop – they scraped everything. And so that's why Getty is suing them, because Getty is like, "Wait a second, did you scrape our stuff?," which they definitely did, because a lot of times when you make videos, Getty watermarks will get generated.

00:32:15

C.C.B: Yes, I saw that.

But it's interesting because what I noticed in your Everyday, since you've been doing this – I mean, I only looked at two or three – is that it seems pacified. I don't know how to explain it, but it's as if the image is pacified. It

doesn't have the same sort of angst. It's simpler and smoother and more stable.

00:33:04

M.W.: Yes. Well, it's just the aesthetics. It's not saying anything. It's not like, "Oh, wow, that picture says something." And that's the thing that people say: "This is an aesthetics machine. It's not an art machine. The art is the thing. What are you saying? If you're not saying anything, then you're just making aesthetics." And so it's like, yeah, this is just all aesthetics. And I think it's very interesting, but again, it's what are you doing with it? What are the words you're typing into it? That's the art of it. And can you get it to say something and not just be blah pictures of whatever?

00:33:46

CCB: I understand it's about instructions, the precision of the instruction. It's interesting because it's a little bit the reversal of traditional Conceptual art, which was using text as an image. I remember Lawrence Weiner told me, when I asked him, "Why do you use the word "wood" like "Wood in a balance over water"? Why do you not paint the picture? He was one of the founders in the 1960s of Conceptual art. He said, "Because it's not democratic." He said "Everybody has a different experience of wood and a memory of wood, and water. So if I write it, everybody can make their own image in their brains." And he said that he wanted to make a visual artwork. He said, "I'm not a poet. I'm not a writer. I make visual art. But I want everybody to make their own image in their brains. So I gave them the instruction. But it's very abstract."

00:35:05

M.W: That what year did he do that?

00:35:14

C.C.B.: 1966. He died last year. I'm so sad. Anyway, he was old.

M.W: What's his name?

00:35:19

C.C.B.: Lawrence Weiner. He's one of the foremost Conceptual artists, who revolutionised visual art by using words as images or as instructions. The other leading Conceptualists were Joseph Kosuth and Robert Barry. And then there were a few more, like Douglas Huebler. Weiner was a materialist. He said he really loved materials, but that if he gave the instruction, the text, people could make the image in their brains and it would be really beautiful and always different. So that's why he did it. But in a way, it's the opposite of what this thing is doing. What you're saying is the opposite. It's like using the

text not to make an open, imprecise, and uncertain image that's different for everybody, but to find a kind of correlation that's extremely precise between the text and the image. Right?

00:36:35

M.W.: Well, that's just one way. That's the way I've approached it so far in the very limited time that I've used it. But you could also make something where you just let it do what it's going to do. You don't have to be like, "Okay, I'm going to try and shape this and keep putting in prompts and try and direct it to become what's in my head." I can think of ways to use it in a more experimental way, where part of the artwork is seeing what it makes from this very random machine – this snapshot of our best image-generation software right now with X, Y, Z inputs – where you say: "Whatever it does, I'm going to take that. That's the artwork." So there's a bunch of different ways you can use it that are interesting. Like, insanely just as we're sitting here, I generated all these Carolyns.

00:37:50

C.C.B.: They don't look like me at all.

00:37:52

M.W.: I know, but it's just fascinating that these people, you look at them and you have an immediate emotional response. These people do not exist. These are literally just fucking made-up images.

00:38:10

C.C.B.: But they all look similar, so I have a feeling that the text to image didn't put together the first name and the last name. So it's a lot of Carolyns.

M.W.: That's the thing. So, again, if you searched yourself in the database, maybe there will be five billion images, but maybe only one or two images of you. So that's not really enough for it to know what you look like.

00:38:38

CCB: Let's see what happens if you just leave Christov-Bakargiev. That will reduce it.

00:38:46

M.W.: See, now it's just like ... That's like a certain style of name.

00:38:58

M.W.: Yes, it looks Russian.

00:38:59

C.C.B.: From that like region.

00:39:02

C.C.B.: It looks like Bulgaria. You know, my grandfather ...? I see what it did. Anyway, this is really interesting. So you think that this is a watershed moment in a way, where you suddenly discover this new software and it changes the way you're working?

00:39:25

M.W.: It's going to change the way everybody's working. Eventually it will change the way we think of media in general. There will be a lot more stuff in the future where it's not so much like, "I'm watching things the creators made." It's more like you sit down on the couch at night and say, "I want a romantic comedy with Adam Sandler and Beyonce, and I want it to be, like 45 minutes long and kind of scary, but kind of funny." And then it's like the fucking movie starts and it's a thing made exactly for you. Or it's like, "I want to play a video game that's not that hard, but it's kind of like Mario, but it's also a little bit like Zelda. It's got a bunch of mushrooms in it and it's got robots and you can fly rockets and outer space is in it too." And then it just makes a fucking game that it generated right then. And you can save the game or you can just generate a fucking other game.

00:40:52

C.C.B.: And so what will the artists do?

00:40:55

M.W.: The artists will still make stuff and they'll use these tools to make things that are interesting, where people will say, "Oh, that's the game you made with these tools. That's a sweet game." Just like now, they'll make things that are more interesting than what the average person can make with these tools. The average person will be able to make something that they like, but nobody else likes. The artist will make something that everybody likes. That's what the artists will do. They'll use these same tools, but to make things that appeal to a bunch of people, versus your Beyonce, Adam Sandler, 45-minute rom com with scary elements that nobody else will like.

00:41:38

C.C.B.: Yes, but art is different from popular culture. You can make something that a lot of people like and it's very crappy.

00:41:49

M.W.: Sure.

00:41:51

C.C.B.: So that's not the only criterion.



00:41:54

M.W.: But if you make something and nobody gives a fuck about it—and you can certainly do that—it's not what an artist sets out to do. Somebody has to give a fuck about it.

00:42:05

C.C.B.: Of course, but, here we go to the beginning of the conversation. I mean, the question is whether it still makes sense to have this field that we call art. The prehistoric humans didn't call it art and it didn't have the same function in society and it didn't have this role of somehow representing the problems or the reality or a deeper understanding of the world that you're living in. You know, that's kind of what artists do.

00:42:40

M.W.: But I think they'll still just use these tools to do that.

00:42:45

C.C.B.: Anyway, I'm glad you met Jeffrey Deitch.

00:42:50

M.W.: He was very excited. He was definitely super, super pumped. I think we're going to do a show or something.

00:42:58

C.C.B.: Fantastic.

00:42:59

M.W.: Yeah. I think he's doing a 30th anniversary of that "Post-human" thing. And so we wanted to do something with that.

00:43:18

C.C.B.: I like him a lot.

00:43:21

M.W.: Yeah. He's definitely very nice and it's always great hearing from somebody who has more perspective, but is also interested in new things. He's not just stuck in a certain era of when he came up.

00:43:45

CCB.: No, I agree. He's similar to me to some extent. I mean, I have a few people that I see more often of his generation and one of them is Achille Bonito Oliva, the Italian art critic who was the same sort of generation. And I remember having a conversation with him, not with Jeffrey Deitch, about you. But what I share with Achille and what I share with Jeffrey is what you call the "gatekeeper". In other words, we share one thing, which is that there's

occasionally a moment where somebody who does something that's not considered art or, you know, that's not art, you have to make an act. I remember asking Achille, I was explaining this NFT business and the sale and he didn't know anything about it and I said, "Well, what do we do, Achille? Do we let him in?" I used "we" you know, "Do we let him in? I mean, it's like opening a watershed, you know, a huge universe." And he said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Let him in! Let him in!" So Jeffrey is like that. Jeffrey did that—you know, he let people in.

00:45:08

M.W.: What did he do in the 80s? I don't know that much about him. Did he do shows and stuff?

00:45:15

C.C.B.: He was a curator at the beginning. He didn't have a gallery and he wasn't involved in the market, but he understood "Simulation" art. We used to call it "postmodernist," but he didn't use the word "post-modernist." He used the word "Simulation" art. And there was a moment in the early 80s when he brought together a series of shows, including "Post-human," where the theory is that suddenly things didn't really exist, but there had been an inversion between things and their symbolic representation, which is different from Pop art, but it's a development of that kind of thinking. Baudrillard had written these texts about the fact that we lived in a society of simulation, which would mean that goods didn't really exist, but they were substituted by these simulacra of goods. It had more to do, actually, with objects of consumption. Because America is a consumer society mainly. So you have Andy Warhol and Campbell's Soup, and then in the Simulation art period, in the early 80s, you have people like Ashley Bickerton and Haim Steinbach and Jeff Koons in America. There was a show called "Damaged Goods," but I don't think he curated it. I think it was Dan Cameron. But it's that the actual object doesn't exist, but exists as the symbol of the object. So in a way it's like early, pre-metaverse thinking.

And in Europe, it wasn't so much about the consumer object but it was about the places and the things that we use as furniture or design or architecture. So it was like the human had disappeared. And all that was left were these references to places where humans had been formerly. So you have a whole generation of architectural sculptors like Thomas Shütter and Hubert Kiecol and Reinhard Mucha, and they're making abstract sculptures of a place where a person could have maybe wanted to lean on or something, but there's no person. So it's evoking the absence in a way, of the human. That's what post-human meant. He didn't mean "post-human," as in today. When people say "post-human" today, they really mean multispecies co-evolution.

They mean “not only human” or “more than human.” So humans and insects and plants and so on. But at the time, post-human was a world where humans as individual singularities didn’t really exist, but only the things and the signs and the symbols of them were left. Does that make sense?

M.W.: It’s not like “post-human” now, like mixing biology and technology. It’s like humans have died out; they’re gone.

C.C.B.: Yes. And only their avatars exist, or the spaces where they once were exist. Jeffrey did shows with a collector in Greece called Dakis Joannou at a foundation called Deste Foundation. And I remember going to those shows and I learned a lot from all those artists. I mean, we’re friends Jeff Koons and I, but not really. I run into him and we say hi, but I never really got that close to him after he did the Vacuum Cleaner pieces. I wrote about those.

00:49:52

C.C.B.: In the early 80s?

00:49:54

M.W.: Yes. And then he did the Aqualung pieces that were fantastic, in bronze.

00:50:01

M.W.: I think he’s pretty good!

00:50:05

C.C.B.: Anyway, I can’t wait to come and see your thing. You must be busy, no?

00:50:12

M.W.: Yeah. We’re a little busy, because we’ve never had an event here, so it’s figuring out how to invite people, how to get people here and trying to decide what to show. Getting all the artists’ submissions and shit. Yes, there’s, there’s quite a lot. And then I’m going to the Philippines in seven days and then I’m going to LA after that and then fucking right after, we’re going to Basel and Hong Kong. So there’s a lot of shit going on. But it’s definitely all good. I think it’ll be exciting. I’m excited to finally show people the space, because we’ve been purposely not showing anybody the experiential space for quite a long time. So it’ll be nice to be able to have people in the building and not be like, ‘Nobody can take pictures of anything.’”

00:51:35

C.C.B.: Well, I’m very curious. Do you have a PR person, or company?

00:51:42

M.W.: Not really.

00:51:46

C.C.B: You are the person?

M.W.: Pretty much. But we've got contacts in many places and we've got a bunch of people shooting footage that night, and covering it and stuff. But it's very tough because it's our studio. And at first we went back and forth a lot about what to call this space. We were going to call it The Space, because that's what we usually call it. But then it was sort of like, "Well, this is really just our studio. It's an experimental place where we're like, who the fuck knows what's going on?" So then we're like, "Let's just call it The Studio." But then it's like, well, it's a studio opening – that's not like a thing. It's like a gallery and this other experiential space, and actually nobody will see the studio because that part of it's not open to the public. So, I don't know, it's very weird.

00:53:04

M.W.: So it became Beeple Studios, in the plural?

00:53:07

M.W.: Beeple Studios. Yes.

00:53:15

C.C.B.: But you have it in the plural, "Studios," like a cinema studio. It sounds like the movie world – you know, like Paramount Studios.

00:53:30

M.W.: Yes, I feel like it is like that because there's a bunch of different zones.

00:53:45

C.C.B.: I think it's really good idea because it keeps the idea of the artist as independent, not as a subordinate part of this system. You know, William Kentridge in South Africa, he opened a studio to the public some years ago. It's a kind of workshop space where they produce performances and things, and it's called it The Centre for the Less Good Idea.

He did that video in front of the Richard Long mud circle on the wall. It was like a kind of charcoal drawing animation, where the walls are falling. And there was this ... maybe you missed it. You didn't even see the show.

00:54:34

M.W.: I think I saw that.

00:54:36

C.C.B.: I think you missed it. You would remember. People remember William. It's a very distinct style.

Well, I didn't really understand much about this revolution with the text image, but we've started the discussion.

I think the next thing is I come to Charleston. It's unbelievable. How the hell did I end up in Charleston? I mean, it's more plausible that I'm going to Dhaka in Bangladesh tomorrow than to go to Charleston, in my experience.

M.W.: Are you going to Bangladesh tomorrow?

C.C.B.: Yes. But that's normal. I always go to the Dhaka Art Summit. I love it when they do that. I learn so much. But Charleston is off my map. So it's interesting, actually. My first trip to Charleston!