



ART UNBOUND EPISODE 30 TRANSCRIPT

JULIA DOLAN

You're listening to Art Unbound, the official podcast for the Portland Art Museum and Northwest Film Center. My name is Julia Dolan, and I'm the Minor White Curator of Photography. We are recording this on January 14, 2021, just a week before installing the exhibition Ansel Adams: In Our Time, which comes to us from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Although we won't be able to open the doors to the exhibition until later this winter or in early springtime, due to the statewide COVID-19 restrictions, we are working hard to release online experiences for our audience, such as this podcast. Today I'm speaking with Karen Haas, Lane Senior Curator of Photographs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, about the exhibition, the Museum's exceptional photography collection, Ansel Adams' impact on contemporary photography, and a behind the scenes look at a traveling exhibition's life during the time of a global health crisis. On that note, I want to be sure to mention that we are recording this podcast episode remotely, and we are grateful for the staff of MFA Boston for their hard work in helping make this come together. As this is an audio podcast about a visual medium, we will provide relevant links in this episode's description, as well as at portlandartmuseum.org/podcast, where you can also find a full episode transcript. Karen, thank you so much for joining us today. I'm here in Portland, and you are with us but all the way in Boston.

KAREN HAAS

It's lovely to be here today. I'm really looking forward to our conversation. Thank you so much.

JULIA DOLAN

Karen, let's step back in time to the early 2000s. When you and I first met, I was a graduate student in art history at Boston University. And you were already working as a Curator of Photographs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. During one of my classes, we visited the MFA's print study room, which is a wonderful place for students and scholars to study artwork, at least when we're not in a pandemic period. I can still see aspects of that visit in my mind's eye, it was that special. Although with time, of course, those memories get a bit blurrier. Could you talk a bit about your own training in art history as well as your work at the MFA?

Unknown Speaker

I'd be happy to. I am happy to say that you and I both went to Boston University. And that is really where I fell in love with the history of photography, as I know you did, too. And it's a real point of pride that I work at the MFA where the study room is such an active place for students and scholars and visits of all kind. And in fact, part of the reason I think the Lane Collection is housed at the Museum and part of the Museum today is that we were able to show just what an active and exciting place it was to view photographs and that it keeps our collections very much alive for our visitors and scholars coming to see the work there. So yes, I began my career first at Boston University. But I worked at a number of museums before I came to the Museum of Fine Arts in 2001 full time. I worked at the Gardner Museum, I worked at the Addison Gallery of American Art, another place I know we share and both love north of Boston, and have worked full time at the MFA and on the Lane Collection, as I said, since 2001.

JULIA DOLAN

We're going to talk a little bit, or a lot more, about the Lane Collection in just a few minutes, because that's so important to the work that you do- a specific collection. But your point about keeping collections alive I think is really important through individual visits and classroom visits. Because photographs can't be on the walls all the time, because of light restrictions. They are what we often call fugitive. Light can destroy photographs over time. So we have to keep them in our vaults, for the most part. So it's always really special when we do have a chance to do a photography exhibition, or bring out photographs that haven't been exhibited for years and years for students or scholars to have some one-on-one time with those objects. So print rooms are very important to the work that we do.

KAREN HAAS

Yeah, I agree. I think that it really is one of the most exciting parts of what we do. I mean, we think of ourselves as curators of exhibitions. But most of us spend a lot more time, I think, sharing our collections in these spaces- in these less public spaces, maybe, and it's really- we feel very lucky to have that activity and to teach.

JULIA DOLAN

Let's talk a little more about photography collections at MFA Boston before we talk specifically about the Lane Collection. So, in Portland, I am the sole curator of photography although my curatorial colleagues regularly use photography in their own exhibitions that might not be fully photographic. MFA Boston is a little bit different in that you have more than one curator of photography at the institution. Can you talk about the size of the collections and the number of curators you have?

KAREN HAAS

We are lucky enough to have three curators, each of us with a very different specialty and particular interest. One person who centers most of their time on the 19th century material, one who is particularly knowledgeable about photojournalism, and particularly Latin American photography, and Middle Eastern photography, and then my specialty, which is American modernism, which is where, of course, Ansel Adams comes in to this story, but we think of our Museum's photography holdings, which is about 15,000 prints, which isn't really a huge number for a museum of our size, an encyclopedic museum of our size. But we are a collection of very interesting collections. So we have the collection, the Museum's own collection, which was founded with a group of Alfred Stieglitz photographs that were given in 1924. So making us one of the very first museums in the country to collect photography as fine art, which is a real, again, another point of pride. And-

JULIA DOLAN

That is so early.

KAREN HAAS

It really, really is. But then the Lane Collection, which is the American Modernist material, which we'll talk about in a minute. But we recently acquired the Howard Greenberg collection, which is a collection of very New York centered photo journalist, heavy collection. So really another piece in the puzzle, we collect everything from snapshots to- we have a wonderful deep holdings of the work of Josef Sudak, we have Yousuf Karsh's collection of portraits. We really have an exciting mix of material, but lucky enough to have great depth in a number of different areas. And each of us kind of working on those parts as individuals, which is exciting.

JULIA DOLAN

It's really important, too - photography, even though it hasn't been officially around for 200 years, yet, it goes in so many different directions. And so specialists, even within this brief history of this technology, and thought, and concept is so critically important. And I think it's a reminder that even though it's a short-ish history, there are billions upon billions of photographs being created even now. So it is important for people to specialize and do deep dives on particular aspects of its history and its continuing production. And it must be wonderful to have scholars working with you, right alongside you, when you have questions and thoughts and ideas.

KAREN HAAS

And I know that you and I share this sense too, that there's almost no other medium that feels really so topical and timely as photography right at the moment. All the things that we're going through, and how much of those really stressful, terrible times that we're living in, how much of that is being documented in the material, in the technology and the medium that is, is what we work with. And that feels very exciting. And that's one of the things that's exciting I think about the Ansel Adams project, is that topical, contemporary voice.

JULIA DOLAN

Agreed. That's one of the main facets that attracted me to this exhibition that you curated. And to your point, what I love about being a photography curator is that we can present a medium that most folks are familiar with and may participate in actively day-to-day on their iPhones or Androids. So there's already this skill set, if you will, or understanding of some of the language of photography that we can share and then go deeper with within the spaces of the Museum. So that leads us to the Lane Collection, where most of the Ansel Adams photographs in the exhibition, Ansel Adams: In Our Time are coming from. So can we first talk about the Lanes? Can you tell us about William and Sandra?

KAREN HAAS

I would be thrilled to talk about William and Sandra Lane because they really are the center of my universe and a really fascinating couple, I would say. They met, it's wonderful because I always say, you know, I get to talk about my collection starting with a love story. They met on the steps of the Metropolitan Theater in Boston in 1961. They were waiting to go into a concert, an Opera. Bill Lane had an extra ticket and Sandra Lane, who was a recently minted Simmons College student graduate, you know, so right out of college, met this much older man who had a ticket, they sat together. And of course, the best part about it is the title of the opera that day was La Forza del Destino - the Force of Destiny.

JULIA DOLAN

Oh my gosh!

KAREN HAAS

We still have the ticket. We still have the ticket in the, in our archives, from that very first day. And little did they know, of course, at that moment that they would go on to create this- what really is arguably one of the great collections of American Modernist photography together. Bill Lane was already a collector- self taught, completely self taught collector of American Modernist paintings. So people like Stuart Davis, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe. These were all artists he was collecting already for himself. But when his good friend Charles Sheeler died in 1965, Sheeler approached the Lanes who were by then married and great friends of Charles Sheeler, the artist, his widow approached him about acquiring all of the photographs that were left in his studio. So one day, they were collectors of paintings and works on paper by these artists. And then literally overnight, they became the owners of over 2,000 photographs by a single artist. So we have the photographic archive of this artist and that really, you know, just the floodgates opened at that point. And they began to very seriously collect the friends and, you know, contemporaries of Charles Sheeler. People like Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, a very California centered collection otherwise. And part of the intro to Ansel Adams came through the fact that Bill Lane and Charles Sheeler went to California in the 50s. So before Sandra was on the scene at all. And through Sheeler, he was introduced to Ansel Adams and spent time with him. So revived that friendship when the two of them became interested in photography, seriously interested in collecting photography. And they went on to acquire more than 450 works by Ansel Adams. So I was in the process of cataloging all this material that was coming into the collection, which has since been made a promised gift and since been given to the Museum, and cataloging that in light of this moment we're in and really seeing the collection in an entirely new way. Looking at it in this new light and seeing it in the context of sort of the world today, the environmental situation we're in and really seeing Ansel Adams as a new- through a new lens, as a result.

JULIA DOLAN

I think that is a point that connects me back to an exhibition, a much smaller exhibition that I did at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which is where I worked as a photography curatorial fellow before coming to the Portland Art Museum in 2010. And I was assigned and Ansel Adams exhibition.

KAREN HAAS

Oh my goodness.

JULIA DOLAN

I remember- and I will admit to being a bit of a snobby art historian and saying, but everybody knows Ansel Adams, why do I have to do an Ansel Adams exhibition? And I am so glad that that was my mandate, because it made me relook at his work, not just as a kind of presumptuous newly minted curator. But as someone who needed to do the work and do a deep dive on someone that I think we can easily brush over or take for granted because there are so many photographers in the world to introduce to audiences. And that was a really wonderful experience. And it sounds to me and from what I know about the Lane Collections, Adams' photographs, they have so many things in that collection. They do have beautiful, amazing, iconic works, that many people know but they've also gone into the nooks and crannies of Ansel's career and oeuvre...

KAREN HAAS

Right

JULIA DOLAN

...and brought in things that meant something to them that then offer us as audiences a more nuanced understanding of Ansel Adams' career.

KAREN HAAS

You know, I had the same response to the first time being asked to do an Ansel Adams show. I absolutely said there is nothing I can possibly say that is new about this artist, I had the same feeling. But you're right, the Lane Collection is such a rare thing. They collected very few different artists but in very, very great depth. And having that luxury, and this is something that I think people who don't work in museums don't necessarily consider, but this idea that when we pull together an exhibition of this scale, we normally would go to lots of museums to borrow the best Ansel Adamses is from all over, all over the country, again, pre-COVID. But we have the luxury of having all of these things in our building. And I have the luxury as a curator of looking at these pictures really any time I want, and to compare them and one of the things about the Lanes having started as collectors of works on paper and understanding things like print connoisseurship, etc, they were interested in things like variant views, they would buy two or three prints of the same image. Most people would not have any, you know, see any reason to do that. But of course, it's incredibly exciting curatorially to show them in the exhibition and in the study room, etc. Sandra, having trained as a school teacher was always very interested in the idea of educating the public and because the couple didn't have children of their own, and because these pictures, these objects really became like family members, and you don't collect thousands of photographs to hang them on your wall, these were always very much acquired in order to be given to a museum. And we are lucky enough to be the Museum that was- where they were donated, which was thrilling. But they were always committed to that sort of public sharing with the public in a way that I think many collectors don't start collecting that way, necessarily. But that depth of the collection really allows for us to, you know, show work- Ansel Adams is a perfect example of an artist who always thought that his most recent print was the absolute best he could do. He was very impatient with the idea that they wanted to acquire works made in early in his career, but how exciting to have a collection that features these very early pictorial sort of soft focus printed on, you know, paper as though they're like fine prints or drawings even. And then the great, you know, as you say, iconic, later prints that are much more what people expect. So that's one of the things I feel very excited about. You're gonna be able to show your public that range of his career, when I think most of us just really, what it boils down to is we know the work through the posters, or the calendars, or the books, but very few of us really have a sense of the range of the prints.

JULIA DOLAN

Yeah, and I am super excited. In all of the Ansel Adamses, as I've seen, I'm thinking about in the exhibition, we start with his work at what about 1927 with the Parmelian Prints of the High Sierras portfolio. I've seen one or two of those prints here and there, but I've never seen the entire portfolio. And I imagine for most of our visitors, that is the case. So this will be brand new in person, and will extend our understanding of Ansel Adams. And it's super important, you know, to think about the fact that you know, he wasn't born whole. He didn't just up here as a photographer doing these images that we know from the 40s and 50s and 60s. There was a learning curve there and there was a figuring out who he wanted to be and what folks wanted to see in photography of the American West and the landscape.

KAREN HAAS

And even someone who was really, I've been told by the period, the Lanes were collecting this work, which would have been in the 1960s, right around 1967, to about 1973. He was a huge- his work was a huge percentage of the overall market for photography. It's hard to put our heads back into that period. But he was so hugely successful and so important to that moment. But even with all that, it would have been highly unusual for a, you know, a Boston businessman to call up an artist in California and basically say I want to buy hundreds of works by you. This would have been unheard of at the time. And he was very, you know, that was a very unusual thing to suggest. And we were lucky because for one thing, there was the early friendship, the introduction through Sheeler in 1954. But then because Bill was a pilot, the Lanes would often fly out to California and visit- stay in Carmel with the Adamses, look at prints together, stay as houseguests at their home. I mean, it was a really warm and lovely friendship that developed over time and and they became the kind of the glue that brought in all the other California artists and the family members that they eventually acquired work from. So that was a really important experience for them. But it was a highly unusual style of collecting, as you can imagine. The other thing was that Ansel Adams was coming very regularly to Cambridge, Massachusetts to work with Polaroid. And so there was an opportunity to see him on the East Coast as well.

JULIA DOLAN

That's right. And I believe one of my students at Boston University when I was teaching basic history of photography told me that she lived in Arlington in Minor White's former home, which A- had a dark room in it, and the guest room was always Ansel Adams' room because he would come so frequently. So they have these amazing connections to Boston. What an incredible gift to the Museum, to the city, and to all of us, you know, even here in Portland and on the west coast, because now we get to share in this incredible collection. I'm so excited. Before we talk a little bit about Ansel Adams: In Our Time, would you tell us a bit about the 2005 exhibition that you did of Ansel Adams, which I was still living in Boston at the time, so I'm so excited that I was able to witness that in person and enjoy it in person.

KAREN HAAS

Yes, that 2005 exhibition was a really daunting project, but made somewhat easier by another friend that we share. My research assistant at the time, Rebecca Senf, who's gone on to write a terrific book on the research that she began at that time on Ansel Adams and now is the curator, Chief Curator at the Center for Creative Photography, where his collections are and his archives and his negatives. So that was thrilling on many fronts, and I certainly could not have done it without her, and the catalog without her. But that exhibition in 2005, was a much more classic, it was organized chronologically, it covered Ansel's entire career. It was a highlights exhibition, meant to show off really the range of the work. One of the things that I learned in the course of researching the collection was that it was an exhibition called The Eloquent Light that was organized by Nancy Newhall, and came to Boston in 1967 that the Lanes saw at the Museum of Fine Arts. And we have letters between Bill Lane and Ansel, where Bill describes multiple visits to the exhibition in Boston and how much that had influenced his thinking about approaching Adams to acquire large numbers of his work. So that was thrilling to realize that it was a previous Ansel Adams exhibition, a much larger even Ansel Adams exhibition that then had inspired the acquisition that then led to this 2005 show. So it was very much meant to represent his entire career. And I really felt it was important to do, we then went on to- it traveled all around the world, we took it to Japan, even it, it was a really exciting project. But I knew when we thought about Ansel Adams today that we really needed to do something very different.

JULIA DOLAN

And fast forward to what 2017 or 2018. Unlike the 2005 exhibition where there was a lot of research time and run up time and incredible amount of effort, but also more time to produce a catalog. It's my understanding, you didn't have a whole lot of run up time to put this exhibition together.

KAREN HAAS

Yes, it was a really, really short timeline, done very quickly with very little support. In terms of staff or and no, obviously no, no new publication potential because it was such a quick project. But I really felt very strongly and I told my the leadership of my museum that I really did not want to- I did not feel that this was the time to do another retrospective of Ansel Adams' entire career. I really felt as though this was an artist, for better or for worse, who is almost always treated as a sort of standalone figure- that he somehow didn't- It wasn't influenced by anyone else. There wasn't any ongoing influence. The things that you and I felt in graduate school as these snobby graduate students, you know, coming out and thinking, you know, I'm not going to work on Ansel Adams, there's nothing new to say. I really wanted to sort of change that conversation- bring that conversation forward in time, and as I said, in cataloguing the gift, which was promised in 2012, and came through, right in 2017. In cataloguing the collection, I suddenly was seeing it in a really different light, I was beginning to see all the ways that he was not only a really fascinating artist, but he was also an incredible activist, and so concerned with environmental issues that, sadly, are still very powerfully in our minds today, and need to be. I wanted to make sure that in this moment, where we're sort of, it felt like really undoing so many of the protections to our land, to our landscape that Adams was so actively working to protect, that we're sort of unraveling a lot of that work right now. And we really needed to stop that process. And, you know, maybe it feels a little naive to say, or I hope not, but I began to think that maybe it is going to be people like contemporary artists who may really help to remind us of really how critically important so many of these issues continue to be, and really how urgent the, you know, little did I know, though, of course, as I, you know, said during my tours, because that was even a while ago now but in and closer in time, but you know, that paradise literally was going to be burning as I was going to be giving tours in galleries with burning, you know, with burned out forests- images of burned out forests and and that we would have people literally moved to tears in front of some of the images in the exhibition for this reason. So that- I knew I wanted to bring the conversation into this moment, I wanted to keep some of the good work that I saw he had done and recognized in his career, I wanted to keep that story going. And I wanted to show just how really much more interesting he seems to me as an artist if he is thought of in a trajectory, you know, in a continuous- sort of lineage of photographers rather than as the standalone figure.

JULIA DOLAN

Absolutely. And I think about how a show like this may not have been possible if you had not been working with his material for so long, and having already shown it before, and then coming to new realizations and new understandings. And that is one of the gifts of working with a collection over time, working with an artist over time, but then also keeping part of ourselves within the contemporary world as well. And thinking, Well, you know, what does come next? And how does someone like this and his work that was made in the 20th century exist and become meaningful in the 21st century? Which does get me to the point that I, for the most part learned about your exhibition, because of Instagram. And I'm sure I had seen a press release or things like that. But the reality is that you and I follow one another on Instagram, and you were posting photographs from the show, and this was in late 2018, early 2019. And our Director had mandated the curators to pay closer attention to what was going on around us and make suggestions about exhibitions that might be really wonderful for our communities here in Portland and along the west coast. And I was noticing the response that you were getting to the exhibition. So number one, I was attracted to the fact that you included contemporary artists in the exhibition. I, like you, am particularly trained in American Modernism, and more specifically, American photography between World War I and World War II. But it's really important that I of course, pay attention to what's going on here and now in photography. So it called to things that were very meaningful to me like placing a well known photographer in relationship to the contemporary world. And people were responding to it. You had hundreds of thousands of people come visit. And I had friends who are curators express to me how powerful of an exhibition it was. And so I reached out to you actually on Instagram, even though we have each other's each emails and so on, you can still see the comment that I made back in early 2019, saying "Hi, are you traveling this

exhibition?”

KAREN HAAS

And I was, I was thrilled to hear from you, of course, yes, going back to Sandra Lane for a second. So after Bill Lane died in 1995, she continued to collect with me more closely, you know, involved with me and the Museum that by that time with knowing that the collection would come to the MFA, and she used to talk about the fact that for Bill, really, American Modernism was everything that was really all he was interested in, he was very close, you know, very loyal to the photographers he collected, and not so much anything else. And Sandra used to always say, you know, Bill is spinning in his grave as I'm buying this or that. And she used to talk about buying, as she said, fore and aft, she liked to think about the people who lead up to the work that he was, you know, the two of them collected together. And then the people who responded to that are influenced by that. And that was very important to the thinking about the show. And so I really like to give her credit for this idea of not wanting to see someone like an Ansel Adams as coming out of you know, like a phoenix rising from the ashes or something, you know, that he didn't see, or or that, you know, we talk sometimes about Ansel having discovered the view or created these views or the fact that I always think that you know, for many people who never will go- never will see Yosemite, a person- in person. The images that many of us conjure up when we think of those places, literally are those black and white photographs by Ansel Adams, and that he created something so powerful, so iconic, but also he was such an incredible marketer, as our friend, Becky can attest, you know, he was just a savvy marketer, he planted all of these images in our heads in such creative ways that it's fascinating to think that, you know, we give him, Ansel Adams, all the credit for this. But we forget, there were all these expedition and survey photographers in the 19th century, he was very clearly inspired by he was very much looking at the same places. And that's another thing that I'm excited that you'll be showing in, in Portland. The other thing I just want to say is how thrilled I am that you as a curator have taken the additional step to add a few artists to the exhibition that we did not include in Boston, and that I think will really make the show particularly meaningful for your audience, for your community. And I'm quite envious of a couple of things that you're going to be able to show in Portland that I didn't get to- we didn't get to see in Boston. So that's just thrilling to me, again, bringing the conversation forward, but also maybe tailoring it to some extent to your audience as well.

JULIA DOLAN

Well, we are incredibly grateful to you because that is not always the way a loan exhibition works. We often contractually are required to display only what was curated by the curator at another institution. And we are not permitted to add additional objects or a concept here and there. So the freedom that you offered us to just make it a little bit different for the folks on the west coast. And in particular, folks who live in and around Portland, was so gratifying and incredibly generous. And it's also, before we move on, I just want to say it's great to have experiences with different types of exhibitions that you would never know if it took seven years to put together or if it took 10 months to put together. There's such an energy to an exhibition that is put together sometimes quickly from our timeline that you can feel in the exhibition. And I think it propels audiences forward. There's an excitement there that doesn't weigh down the exhibition. And that's what I'm really really looking forward to. I am so excited as I work more deeply with these objects and with the labels and the text and what is explained within the exhibition. We even have artists' voices on video within the exhibition to talk about how they see the landscape, how they see the national parks what Ansel Adams means to them, what the American West means to them. So there's a really new energy in this exhibition that I can't wait for people to see.

KAREN HAAS

I'm glad you mentioned the energy that comes across in the exhibition. And I would say I have to really credit the artists, the contemporary artists involved with it. For a lot of that, they really stepped up and in the same way that you and I had mixed feelings, maybe about tackling Ansel Adams as a topic, I really didn't know in advance how many of these artists would respond to me, inviting them to respond to Ansel Adams. And so it was very, very reassuring and very cheering to work with such an amazing group of artists and realize really how much- we kind of joke sometimes that he is, Adams is, you know, so connected with this subject of the Western landscape that it almost feels as though he's kind of the, you know, 800 pound gorilla in the room that you can't really tackle this topic without either following

in his footsteps very directly, or really consciously reacting against it. And of course, we have artists in the exhibition that do both. There's a real range of responses. It's not all just artists whose work looks like Ansel Adams, often it's a little bit of a stretch to see the connection initially. And once you do, I hope that people feel the same sort of frisson that I did when I sort of, because it was very important when we were thinking about- when I was thinking about who might make sense to include because it really could, you know, there was very little time we couldn't, I did not want to do a survey of Western landscape, I really wanted this to be artists' very directly responding to Adams and to the work he was making, either working in the same place or on a very similar theme or subject, so that the thread was very clear and didn't feel as though you know, the sky was the limit, because the sky was definitely not the limit. And so I was just thrilled that so many of the artists who wanted to take part that they were willing to make the videos, as you mentioned, that allowed for so many of their voices to be heard directly in the galleries, which I find really exciting and appealing. And it kind of continues the tradition. One of the things I love about the Lane Collection is that you really have a sense when you work with what I think of as historical figures, people like Charles Sheeler, and Ansel Adams, even Georgia O'Keeffe, these were all personal friends of the collectors, these are people they knew and loved. And that relationship was very much a part of why I think the collections have the depth in the field that they do, and to have brought that forward in time, too, to sort of honor that close relationship with the artists, to have gotten to know some of the artists that I didn't know personally before. And now to get to know some of the artists that you're introducing into your venue that I didn't know before, it's been really exciting. And kind of makes me feel as though we've come full circle in a nice way.

JULIA DOLAN

I love that aspect of it, too. There were a few artists in the exhibition I was not familiar with, or only a little bit familiar with, and I have now become much more familiar. And I'm looking forward to forming relationships with those artists as well. We are in a position of working on figuring out how we can bring their voices into the conversation in real time, which is the last thing I think we maybe can talk about, for a brief moment. What does it mean to host a traveling exhibition, a major exhibition, at a time when nothing works like it used to even 12 months ago, 11 months ago, we were not working in a pandemic mode. We weren't programming for folks who are sitting in front of screens in their own homes, we were programming for folks who were coming into our spaces. And so our timelines are so different and I'm learning to be less rigid about timelines and expectations. I'm also really enjoying knowing that the programming that we will do both before the exhibition opens here, because we're not exactly sure when it will open, when we'll be allowed to have people come back into our spaces. I love that when we do this work, it will be online and folks around the world can access it, whether it's live or in the recordings that we add to YouTube or our Podcasts. And I would love to just briefly talk about how we had to work so closely from 2,500 miles away to make this happen, and how a dozen people on my side of the country and a dozen or more people on your side of the country had to get together to figure this out.

KAREN HAAS

Absolutely. And we, we've been, I think, much more aware of things like, you know, what it means to be, I mean, we know what frontline workers are out there in the rest of the world, but we have a whole new appreciation, I think of what it means to be a frontline worker in a museum. And I don't know about you, Julia, but I am really feeling very, very grateful. I mean, I'm sure you do too, but also a little bit, maybe, happily, maybe taken down a peg as a curator who's not needed. Right? We are home.

JULIA DOLAN

Yes

KAREN HAAS

We are sitting at our desks working on these things, talking to each other, online. But very, very grateful for all the people literally on our front lines, the registrars, the preparers, the matters, the framers, the handlers, the truck drivers. We were just saying that today is the day that the shipment arrived at your Museum, it literally brought me to tears to think that it had arrived safely. I don't think I was this emotional ever, about moving works of art around the country.

But everything feels so fragile and so strange. And we're doing things so differently. The public probably doesn't realize what's involved in an installation or the installation of an exhibition, maybe how many days and people it involves, but also how strange as you can imagine, it becomes when we're doing this all on screens and from a distance and describing things in words that we're used to seeing in person, etc, etc, etc. So it's really been an incredible challenge, and one that I think will make us all- I don't, I think we're all just going to feel so much more grateful not only for our colleagues, but the ability to be together, to stand next to someone in an exhibition, and share the experience of looking at a work of art and be able to talk to each other about that experience. When the show, as you mentioned, was in Boston, we had lines, endless lines to get in mobbed, literally people were, you know, shoulder to shoulder to see the show for better for worse, it was incredibly popular. And we probably won't have a show like that again for a while, not just because it was this show, but just that people you know, it will take time, I think for all of us to, to feel that that's the way we want to be or can be together. And so it really is quite poignant, but also very exciting. I love Portland, I've only been once and I just fell in love with your Museum and can't wait to visualize, better imagine how this will look on the walls. And I know that that will be soon and just hoping really that we can, you know, we all can be open again, because we are closed as well, very soon.

JULIA DOLAN

Yes, Normally, you would be getting ready to hop on a plane along with one of your registrars, most likely, and one of your photography conservators to come out and help with the installation here. That's a pretty typical thing to do when you travel a major exhibition. And that's just not possible this time. So we're doing all of that video-wise and it is true, I am the least necessary person in this process now. Installing an exhibition is perhaps the most gratifying aspect of curatorial work for me, I love it, I typically make a point of pretty much camping out in the galleries when an exhibition is installed. The reality is I can't be there for most of it this time, because I am the least necessary person in that process. And that's okay, someday I'll be back to do it. But I need to stay out of everybody's way to keep folks safe and healthy. So yeah.

KAREN HAAS

The other thing I think is a real tribute to Portland as a place and your Museum in particular is how many of the artists I know are counting the days before they can come and see it because so many of the artists are on the West Coast or in the western half of the country. We got- huge numbers of them came to when the show was up in Boston but I think you will get a very large group coming your way and I look forward to you having the opportunity to show them maybe the galleries, you know, moving forward the spring, early summer.

JULIA DOLAN

Well, we're thrilled, and we absolutely cannot wait. Opening date to be determined. But we'll get there, we will absolutely get there. And if listeners are interested in hearing more about what it means to move artwork around the world, during a time of pandemic, and location closures, and health restrictions, we do have a podcast that was recorded pretty much at the outset of this pandemic, when we had to stop everything, and reschedule exhibition after exhibition after exhibition, it wasn't just one year, and I imagine at Boston, you were feeling this too, we have had to reschedule years worth of programming, and it is a very delicate and complicated dance.

KAREN HAAS

And we're all in it together. And we appreciate that we- our art museum is not the only one experiencing this, it is like a big, I don't know set of dominoes or something, you really do have this sense that we each need each other. And it's a good reminder. And the idea of a blockbuster exhibition, you know, maybe isn't going to be our future, this may be moving forward a very different way of thinking about exhibitions and curating. And we may be on the fringes a little more than we're used to. And that might be a very good thing. And it might be a very interesting thing, too. And it certainly has made all of us, really, I think, rethink the process of what it is to be a curator in these times. And it's good to be thoughtful about these things, I think, and we've all learned a lot. But this has been an amazing process. And it really does take a village, it's no exaggeration. And we are lucky to work with such great colleagues, because they're the ones who've helped make it all possible.

JULIA DOLAN

And Karen, I'm so grateful that we are working together on this exhibition for our institution because it brings me back to a lot of my good times and good memories in Boston. And I love being able to work with you in a way that we haven't worked before. And I feel like we have a closer relationship now that I'm so appreciative of, in some ways that is maybe richer because of the situation that we're in. We've had to learn together how to- how to work this through and that's really meaningful. Thank you so much for spending time with me today. I love hearing more about the Lanes and how this collection came together, how the exhibition came together. And I think it's a really great primer for folks who will see some of the information online on our website, and then hopefully in person within the spaces of the gallery. Many, many thanks. Sending big hugs from Portland in your direction.

KAREN HAAS

Well, thank you so much, Julia. This was a treat for me, and I'm really glad we were able to do it. Thank you.

JULIA DOLAN

Thank you for listening to Art Unbound. For more information about Ansel Adams: In Our Time, be sure to visit us online at portlandartmuseum.org. I would also suggest keeping an eye on our social media feeds, where we will post the latest exhibition materials and updates. This podcast is produced by Jon Richardson, Portland Art Museum's Media Producer. I'd like to thank Karen Haas for spending this time with us, Mark Orton for providing the podcast's music, and you the listener.