

Inclusive Arts Vermont

TRANSCRIPT: Aurora Berger Interview

August 12, 2020

01:14 MILLER: Hi everybody and welcome! It's just barely 6:30. Thanks for joining us for our first artist talk for the exhibition *ANEW* which is currently sitting around me in our office, but it will be at its next stop at Dartmouth Hitchcock soon. We're going to give people just a moment to join in. So, hang tight and we will get started.

02:00 MILLER: Okay it looks like we've got a few more people. I'm going to give it just a few more seconds and get a drink here.

02:16 MILLER: Okay, so welcome to those that have joined us. If you have any questions for the artist, we're talking with tonight feel free to leave them in the comment section and we will come back to them later. You can also feel free to share this video out so that other people know it is happening. That would be really helpful for us.

We will start with introductions. My name is Katie Miller and I am the Executive Director of Inclusive Arts Vermont. We were founded in 1986 and our mission is to use the magic of the arts to engage the capabilities and enhance the confidence of children and adults with disabilities. And we do that through a variety of arts education, capacity building, training, and exhibition programs for people of all ages with and without disabilities. Tonight is really exciting. It is the very first, live even that we're doing to enhance our *ANEW* exhibition, which is the current traveling exhibition of work by Vermont artists with disabilities. We're chatting with Aurora Berger.

The reason we're doing these over Facebook, obviously, is because of the pandemic. One of the... silver linings, I would call it, of the pandemic, has been our opportunity to bring the exhibition to an even wider audience through the use of the internet.

While we are talking you can feel free to check out our website which inclusiveartsvermont.org and look at all of the work there, there are verbal descriptions of every piece.

So how tonight will work is that I'm going to introduce Aurora, and we'll be this sort-of interview style. I'm going to ask her questions we'll chat a little bit. Again, if you have questions feel free to leave them in the comment box and we'll get to them toward the end.

A recording of tonight's chat will be up on YouTube within the week and it will have a transcript, captions, and a verbal description along with it.

Okay, so without further a due I'm going to introduce our guest, Aurora. I will read Aurora's bio that was submitted with the exhibition. Aurora Berger uses her photography as a tool for navigating the frameworks of capacity and disability. As a physically and visually disabled artist, her work is a reflection of how she experiences the world. Photography is immersed in the visible, but as an invisibly disabled artist Berger is constantly searching for the edges of that vision. Using her camera as an intermediary, Berger creates self-portraits and visual environments. Her works are about inhabiting spaces, perceiving surroundings, and above all, the process of survival.

Aurora I'm really glad to have you here with us tonight. I'm wondering if you want to start off by sharing anything you want to share about yourself. And your piece in the show?

05:30 BERGER: Awesome. I am also very excited to be here tonight. Also, just for like a visual description of what I look like... I am a 20-something year-old blonde person. I am sitting in front of a bunch of windows. I love long blonde hair and a black tank top. I have blue headphones that are kind of visible.

05:50 MILLER: Thanks for reminding me to do my own. I said we were going to do it and I didn't. Here we go, we're learning as we go! So I am a 30-something white woman. I have shoulder-length auburn hair, big black glasses. I am wearing a black t-shirt and a black blazer. I am sitting in the corner of a beige wall.

06:14 BERGER: I also have glasses on. That's important, it'll come up.

06:15 MILLER: [[laughs]]

06:16 BERGER: So, about myself. I am originally from Vermont so I'm glad that I get to work with Inclusive Arts Vermont. I have not been living here for, uh, I've been back here for a year but I was living in the southwest for six years going to college and grad school. I have a BA

and BFA from Prescott College in Arizona and a MFA from Clairmont Graduate University in Los Angeles.

So I was living in the desert having a very cathartic desert experience for six years...

06:56 MILLER: I love the desert!

06:58 BERGER: Yeah, it's the desert. The humidity here is really getting to me.

07:04 MILLER: Yeah, especially today.

07:05 BERGER: Yeah, I have been sitting out here for like five hours at this point. But I have been back in Vermont for about a year because health insurance a thing. So, here I am. I currently work as a paraprofessional in an elementary school and I think that's in in terms of, like, background. Oh! I won an award from the Kennedy Center last year as an emerging artist with a disability. And so there's some work for the Kennedy Center that was touring the country before COVID and now it is in my room.

07:49 MILLER: Awesome. So can you tell me you piece in *ANEW*. How did it – first, what is its title and how did it get its title?

07:59 BERGER: Yes, so –

08:00 MILLER: And I'm going to pull up alongside us I'm going to pull up a picture of that.

08:04 BERGER: Perfect. So this piece is called "Knotted." It is part of a larger series that can all be found on my website if you're interested in it. This work was made as part of an exploration about being... in nature, actually. Which has been explored plenty of times by plenty of other artists but my interest in it was in bodies and disability and spaces where we find ourselves to be comfortable and uncomfortable and what those spaces mean. And so I was returning to Vermont for the summer between my first and second years of graduate school to have eye surgery and I was going to be home for like three months. So I printed out all of these photographs that I had taken on fabric and I brought them home with me in my suitcase. Which was a ridiculous plan. I hung them up in the woods all around my house in Vermont and I just left them there for three months.

So this photograph was taken the day I hung it up. It's in the stream that goes past my house. [The banner hanging] I took in my studio when I lived in Arizona, when my studio was just my bedroom. And there were lights in my bed. It was an adventure. There are other photographs of this piece hanging where it was on my website which were in the middle, of like, a storm and things like that. So the crisp, white edges definitely did not stay crisp and white.

The intention behind the name "Knotted" was that it goes with both like the knotted tree roots but also the knotted muscles in my back, because my muscles are angry all the time.

10:16 MILLER: Um, so I'm wondering if you can do just really brief for me, on the fly verbal description of your piece. Yeah, you know, just like a few sentences.

10:36 BERGER: I totally can. So this piece is a photograph of a piece of fabric hanging above a forest stream. So you can see it slightly reflected in the water below it. It's got an arc of tangled tree roots that it's hanging from. The photograph that is printed on the fabric is a black and white image of my back with no clothes on. And my hair is up in a bun. And the photograph sort of appears to be in black and white, except that the tree roots have some color to them.

11:01 MILLER: Nice, thank you. Can you – so when you went to pick up the fabric was it still there or had it fallen in the stream? What was its state?

11:12 BERGER: So...I still have it. I probably should have actually brought that piece with me today because I do have that in Vermont. I need to send someone to get a bunch of my work out of my storage unit when it was going to be in a show in North Carolina I had to like mail someone a key to LA. But the fabric is still around. It's pretty beat up. It's pretty cool actually. The white edges are pretty faded. That piece in particular is actually pretty intact surprisingly for having been in a stream. But I did have to go back like probably seven or eight times over the course of the summer to check on the pieces and rehang them if they had fallen down. Mostly just because I wanted to make sure I could retrieve all of them. I was worried if they fell and like got covered in mud I would never find them again. There were two or three pieces that I had like down in the stream weighted down with rocks. So I had to keep going back to check on those and make sure they hadn't floated away.

12:17 MILLER: Um, so I'm wondering – you did touch on this a little bit about your artistic process. Is photography your only medium or do you do more than that? I mean it sounds like it's installation and photography.

12:30 BERGER: It is installation and photography. I also – everything I do is based somehow in photography. I do quite a bit of cyanotype. Which is a photography process using the sun and I've done quite a bit of installation art. I did a lot of that while I was living in LA. But it was all about different ways you can interact with photographs rather than just being a piece of paper hung on the wall behind a frame. So either hanging them in the middle of space on plastic, overlapping them, fabric, what have you, projections through different materials.

I was just very interested in what we interpret photographs to be.

13:22 MILLER: Nice. Do you have a thing that you love the most about photography? Like what draws you to photography and why do you like it?

13:28 BERGER: Oh this is really cheesy.

13:33 MILLER: I'm a photographer too, actually. I have a BFA in photography and I, I love photography so it won't be too cheesy for me.

13:39 BERGER: Oh no, it's really cheesy. I told the WCAX reporter yesterday, and they went "Aw!" so...but then they did not put it in their piece so I don't know what to tell you. But I had really bad eyesight as a child. I've had four eye surgeries. And I still have really bad eyesight but like, yeah in a different way. Now my brain just doesn't understand what's going on with eyes that could theoretically work. So as a kid I was super nearsighted and held everything an inch or two from my face. One night we were watching fireworks at a fourth of July celebration. I had a disposable camera that I brought and I like zoomed it all the way in to see how much of a firework it could catch. And I realized I could see way better through a camera than I could in real life. And that was that.

((Miller's video freezes))

14:42 BERGER: I think you're frozen. If I'm still streaming, hi people. Maybe our whole feed is frozen. Hi people! Oh you're back!

15:11 MILLER: I was going to say did you freeze? I froze. That's trouble with technology and trying to do things virtually.

15:18 BERGER: Yes.

15:23 MILLER: Can you tell me a little about? I think we might be talking over each other. Can you still hear me?

15:55 BERGER: I can now.

15:56 MILLER: Okay great. This technology... it's like it's great when it works and when it doesn't it's really annoying. Thanks for bearing with me. We got there. I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about what inspires you to make art. It sounds like a lot of it is about your personal experience. But in general, what inspires you, what things in the world do you find inspiring...

16:22 BERGER: Yeah, absolutely. So I originally was a portrait photographer. I used to drag my friends around town and make them pose, like under bridges and things. There's one of them sitting across the table from me and she's laughing at me now. But, I stopped doing that because I eventually realized I hate people. I still like my friends, but I did not want to make a career out of having to awkwardly interact with strangers and try to fit their expectations of a what a photograph of them was going to look like. So I stopped taking portraits primarily of anyone who isn't me and the occasional other friend.

Now it's very much – my work in the last few years has very much become about my experiences in space and in like life in general. And so all the work that I've been doing has been related to my life in some way. Whether that is, I did a series on Vermont agriculture and the failing business that is Vermont agriculture and how, you know, we're just sort of living in this state of capitalist production that we still have this red barns for the photographers that come up from Massachusetts.

And so I have a series about rural life that's on my website. I am still working on a series called "Homestead." It's photographs of the house that I was born in with photographs of it as it currently is and then photographs from when I was a child. So the photos you're seeing right now are from "Rural Life." They're very postcard, picturesque photos of some various barns around the areas. There was a fair amount of trespassing in people's barns and hanging out with their cows. That was fun.

So, if you see your cow on my website, I've been in your barn! Hi!

18:51 MILLER: Did you have to do it at certain time of day to not get caught?

18:59 BERGER: No, I got caught a few times. I was like “oh, hi! I um was looking at your cows. Sorry!”

19:07 MILLER: I’m sure, I bet a people of people, farmers, are used to that.

19:09 BERGER: Yeah. I also tend to be like this, you know, blonde, 20-something with a really fancy camera. People are like “I don’t think they know how to use that camera.” They’re probably just like, a tourist, and they can’t be up to anything too malicious, so they tend to ignore me. It’s a cool trick. I’ve done a lot of trespassing in a lot of strange places. But, uhm... love cows! Who doesn’t want to hang out with cows?

19:39 MILLER: Right? They’re the best.

19:41 BERGER: Yes, they are. They’re awesome. So yeah, I’ve got that series (RURAL LIFE), I’ve got a series called “Homestead...” That’s photographs of my childhood in a house that has been largely abandoned since I was three and we were evicted from it. That is an ongoing series that I need to go back and take more photographs, but that’s the work that you’ll be viewing as soon as it loads. There it goes. So that is definitely a personal project.

The rest of my work is about disability. Pretty directly. So that’s my big inspiration for work, is exploring disability as a subject, an identity, a social construct, a capitalist one, and a health care construct, and what does it mean to be a disabled person in America in 2020. What does it mean to be myself as a disabled person? What are my feelings about it? How do I reckon with the medical system? How do I reckon with going to academia where people mistreated me? How do I reckon with being stuck in Vermont because I need Medicaid? How do I handle all of those different problems? Photography has really been a crucial tool for me in doing that and in understanding myself.

So there are three different series of self-portraits on my site, and they all go together. They all create this sort of, I call it a “really expansive self-portrait” where photographs of surroundings or spaces could also become portraits of me because they are part of me. There is definitely some NSFW (not safe for work) work on the site, you’ve been warned. As you can see... it is what it is.

22:08 MILLER: No, no that's fine. It's fine with me but we don't know who's watching.

22:14 BERGER: Yeah. So, there's that. If you want to see more you can go to my website for that. I think the work on the front page of my website is all PG-13. I promise that those bruises are from blood draws. Otherwise it's all PG-13.

But yeah, the work has been all about just understanding different constructs... social, medical, cultural, and understanding how other people understand disability and then how art history has reckoned with disability. Which... it has and it hasn't.

23:05 MILLER: I'm wondering for you, we, I talked with the WCAX reporter about this a little bit yesterday about how for some of the artists in the show, they identify as an artist with a disability and having a disability is a major part of their work and it informs their process, which it sounds like it does for you. And others, you know, identify as an artist who also just so happen to have a disability and it's not really part of their process at all. I'm wondering how you navigate that. I mean, we talked a little bit about how it informs your themes of your work, but I'm wondering, as an artist with a disability, how is it to navigate the art world and the gallery world?

23:58 BERGER: Yeah, absolutely. I have a lot to say about that. A couple of things; One is that when I was in graduate school I got a lot of criticism on my work for was that like... you don't look disabled. Why are you taking photographs of yourself, you don't look disabled, this isn't work about disability. You don't "see it" in the work. To which I would say, that would undermine all conceptual art. But that's not an argument that most art critics in LA liked. But I also think the fact that it's not visible doesn't undermine the work in any way because if you're saying that you can't see disability then it's not there, you're undermining every invisibly disabled person's experience. Especially the LA art world, I haven't been involved in too many other art worlds. Where I was in Arizona was pretty small. But the LA art world is pretty infamously inaccessible to disabled artists. I have had conversations with galleries, owners, curators... there's an artist called Jacqueline Romain if you don't know her work, look it up, it's called "Access Denied." It's her going to different art spaces in LA in her wheelchair and taking photographs in front of the steps to the galleries that she can't get into. She was making that work at the same time that I was living in LA so I was thinking about this and

completely, actually, lacking access myself being able to get to LA galleries without someone giving me a ride because I can't drive. And dealing with a lot of ableism from the people in my graduate classes, and dealing with a lot of health issues that were sort of showing up while I was living there. And walking everywhere in 100 degree heat and just... pretty much killing myself to try to have a career. Which is why I live here now, where I have Medicaid. It's amazing.

But, now I have no independence, so it wasn't a great deal.

So the other thing about that I think, for people with disabilities, something that I've been talking to several from my cohort from the Kennedy Center about, is that for artists with disabilities it can be really hard to access traditional programming that is offered to sort of the art world. And I think that the art world has a huge problem when it comes to racism, and classism, and it's beginning to reckon with that, to a degree. There are you know Instagram accounts for museum workers who are POC (people of color) or there are, you know, people talking about the problems of race in the art world in a major way. I think people have pretty universally recognized or maybe they haven't that classism is a think in the arts.

I mean obviously Lena Dunham picks up a paintbrush and is immediately a famous artist, right? George W. Bush picks up a paintbrush and has a show at the Kennedy Center. Those are clearly class issues. Those aren't because they're the most talented or the people who work the hardest. It's just the fact that they have money and they have fame.

But, I don't think that the art world is ready to reckon with ableism and I really think that's unfortunate. I spoke to a lot of artists who would say things like "would you really deny, do you really not want to be in a gallery show if that gallery isn't accessible? Come on, you would still do that, right?" And I was like "no! I really wouldn't. I'm sorry like my morals are more important to me than like, having a career that isn't what I want it to be." And I don't think my art belongs in those galleries either, to be honest. I don't think a curator is going to be me in those shows because if your gallery being accessible isn't important I don't think you're going to be putting my work in your shows. There's also just the issue of, like when the Kennedy Center show was canceled for COVID we, a couple of us reached out and said you know we had contracts for a touring show around the country and artist talks and are we still going to have

those contracts honored? And the response was pretty lukewarm. And I got really disappointed messages from people who were in that group being like this was my big break. And I was so excited about having this opportunity to show my work with other disabled people to have disabled art recognized as being valid as being work to something in galleries museums and having receptions and artist talks and programming surrounding them and to have it canceled obviously we all understood why. The question was about, you know, why was it canceled instead of postponed instead of rescheduled instead of here is our promise to you and we will make good on this contract. It just sort of felt like, you know, if you're going to ditch a group of artists and not following through on a contract, yeah it's really easy to do with some 18-26 year-olds with disabilities. It's really easy. And as someone who's pretty outspoken you know I definitely took it on myself to voice how unfortunate that was for us and I mean probably just making enemies everywhere at this point but it's fine.

I think, you know, being – being an artist is about talking about what you believe in. And for some people they aren't interested in identifying with disability and I think that's partly because we have this cultural idea that disability is negative. And I can understand why. I mean, I completely understand that and, for people who are physically disabled the social model of disability really does ring true in a lot of ways where we're talking about being disabled as society not being accessible and therefore we're disabled. But I also think that there are people with chronic illnesses people with chronic pain, people with autism, who do experience, like, internal disability and that isn't going to be solved by putting a ramp on a building. Or by making everything accessible. I am still going to be in pain even if you know the whole world is accessible. It's not going to solve that problem. So I think that a lot of times some of the disability activism stuff gets really tied up in the social model and excludes a lot of people with chronic illnesses. It excludes a lot of people who do identify as having a disability being a part of them and they're not ready to just say you know the world could fix things and I'd be normal.

31:42 MILLER: Yeah, we, it just reminds me of something we run into a lot at Inclusive Arts Vermont when we go to partner with an organization and we have pretty, uh, exact criteria for accessibility means and I think people are often surprised to see that it's more than a ramp. Entry into the building is important but I think, you know, it goes so much deeper than that. And making sure that all people feel welcome in the space and

can participate to the extent that they want often is, is more than just he physical access. Recognizing you know, like you were saying, that even once you're inside the space metaphorically speaking, you know, that pain, your disability, it doesn't go away just because you're there. And sometimes it can change the experience.

32:45 BERGER: Absolutely. And I think that's something that's really difficult especially for people with invisible disabilities to handle when people are talking about disability in that way. When people are completely collapsing disability identity and all of disability theory, really, into the social model because it just doesn't apply to all situations. It can be really alienating to have people say if the world was accessible disability wouldn't exist anymore. And it's also very, I think invalidating for a lot of people who have finally found disability as a way to reckon with their own body. Then to have people say "yeah, but we could fix that." It would just erase a large part of a lot of our identities. I also think with invade disability people don't think it's real a lot of the time. I mean, invisible disability is a massive portion of the disability world. I am thinking of, I was at a conference in Chicago with a friend of mine who is in a wheelchair. I had just given a talk on Diane Arbus and disability photography. This guy came up to us while were sitting there drinking our coffee and pretty clearly because my friend was in a wheelchair was like "oh were you guys at the disability panel?" And he looked at my friend Michelle and was like "oh I was going to get coffee with them." I'm really sorry that I don't look disabled enough that I should have been talking. But I did write that paper and then deliver it and defend questions about it. I'm sorry I'm not fitting your criteria of what a disabled academic should look like. And it was just a very funny moment for both of us because Michelle had just gotten stuck in a lift for 20 minutes because the lift at the Hilton Chicago wasn't working right. And we were like... how is this conference of academics just so unaware of what's going on around them? It was very strange.

35:07 MILLER: I was just talking with a colleague today about how embedded ableism really is at like, a subconscious level. And you know, I think it's something that similar anti-racism work, anti-ableism work is a lifelong thing. And it's like you have to constantly be aware of it and checking it. Not you, you, but the proverbial you. Yeah.

So I'd love to talk a little bit about your creative process and your work. What's something that you feel proud of?

35:51 BERGER: Oof. Something I am very bad at answering. So, creative process actually is sort of twofold. I am a photographer but I'm also a writer. I consider myself an academic despite not being in academia anymore. I'm actually working on a book. It is an academic book but it's an academic book with some memoir components to it about disability and art and contemporary art in particular being a focus there because the only books that exist about ten dot be historical. So my book doesn't really go back much further than the 40s and that's only one chapter. So what I've been really interested in is the ways that disability and art intersect that's definitely informed mt own work but also informed my research. And a lot of times I'll find stuff in my research that informs my work. So a lot of my work is inspired by artists who have come before me, clearly. I am pretty inspired by the works of people like Ann Brigman, Sally Mann, Francesca Woodman, Robert Mapplethorpe. If you know who any of those artists are, if you look them up and you see my website, you'll see the similarities. They're pretty, pretty obvious. And something that happened when I got to grad school I realized that I knew more about what I was talking about than my professors did. And it was a really jarring experience because I went to undergrad at a school that had an art department temporarily when I got there and it didn't have an art department by the time I graduated. They fired all the faculty. They hired me run their art department as a student, which is incredibly bad practice. Don't do that.

At that point I was pretty much teaching myself everything I knew about art. I was reading books and listening to audiobooks and doing as much research online as I could. I had this feeling that was going to grad school and I didn't know any art history. I had took one semester art history class and read a few books about photography and then I got to grad school and realized that actually none of my professors had even thought about disability and art. And I was really surprised because I sort of had this feeling like oh I'm just not in an art program right now. People are talking about this outside of being your own art program, one person thing. And it turned out that nobody was and I was really surprised, especially going to school in LA where you would think people would be pretty progressive and contemporary. But it turns out those shows weren't happening. And I had to pretty much teach myself but also my professors what I was talking about. So my, you know, my 3-5 page artist statement was 7 pages long and my meetings with my professors tended to be like, me explaining integral pieces of disability theory and

why my work made sense if you knew that theory. And then people would say what about people that don't know this theory. And I was like it all makes sense to those who do.

The fact that you know you as a white middle upper class man in LA don't find that to be integral theory to know doesn't mean that isn't integral theory for me and the people that my work might speak to. And so I think something that I am really proud of is bringing that to the forefront for at least two years that I was in grad school.

And also for the work that I was able to do with, while I was at the Kennedy Center, doing a residency. We had a three-day professional workshop, which was a great experience because I got to meet the other artists in the show. But we also actually sort of bonded together on our feelings that there was a lot more that could have been done with that PD workshopping for disabled people. And I actually made some great connections through that. We've been able to talk about you know ways that programming can be better and providing programming for disability can be better. AN di think that's probably the most valuable part of that show especially since the rest of our show got canceled.

40:59 MILLER: Yeah.. COVID pandemic it really messed with a lot of things. Which why I should just make a plug really quick. So you're in the Dartmouth area... the show currently in its physical form is in boxes and brown paper and bubbled wrap around me. I'm looking at it right now filling up our office around me. However, because Dartmouth is a non-traditional art venue, which we did on purpose, we wanted to mix some tradition and nontraditional art venues so that a lot of people would be exposed to the show. Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center will have it, and it will open the first week in October and run through the end of the year. So if you're down at Dartmouth getting some sort of procedure done, or visiting someone, or hanging out at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center people can check it out.

41:47 BERGER: Spice up your doctor's appointment! Look at some art!

41:51 MILLER: Go check out some art!

41:53 BERGER: I am a frequent visitor of Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. Come by, maybe I'll be there!

42:03 MILLER: Maybe you can get socially distanced coffee with Aurora.

42:04 BERGER: Exactly.

42:05 MILLER: So I'd love to hear, and while you talk about this I'm going to turn the lights back on because they turned off. But I'd love to hear about something you laugh about or any oops moments, happy accidents, things like that in your art marking.

42:45 BERGER: Yeah, absolutely. Actually the majority of the work I've been making is accidental. I've been working with a process called cyanotype. If you don't know what cyanotyping is, it's a form of exposing photographs that uses sunlight. And in order to do that you have contact print your photographs. Essentially what you would be doing, if I were to use this iPad as an example, is that you have a negative and you put it on top of the paper and you expose it in the sun. And so I've been making cyanotypes for years now and while I was in grad school I made some really large-scale ones which was cool because I've never had the space to do that before. But when I moved back to Vermont I left all of my stuff in LA because I was broke so it's all in a storage unit in LA still. And I brought back basically one giant mailing tube full of old plastic negatives that I had printed out. Some of them are like 30"x40" some of them are tiny and because I'm a digital photographer I make all my negatives in photoshop and I print them out. So a lot of my work has just been experimentation lately. It's just pretty much been take two negatives, put them on a piece of paper and see what comes out. And I've been doing a lot of it with my medical records and taking either images like charts and echocardiograms and things like that and printing those out on plastic or taking a photograph of me and taking the text from my medical records and sandwiching them together and seeing what they do. And I'm really fascinated by medical records specifically. I have boxes of them that are mine. And I really look forward to being in my like 60s with a whole room of medical records. I always joke that if I get tagged in a selfie thing on Instagram it's just going to be a pile of medical records. And the reason that I'm so fascinated by them is because medical records are a portrait of me as a person or of you as a person and they're this bizarre coded portrait that doctors can look at understand a person can look at let's say a lung, like, lung capacity test in numbers and understand what my lungs look like from a series of numbers in a graph. And that fascinates me. Just that the body can be reduced to numbers and coded and then understood by people still. So I'm really fascinated by that, that a giant pile of medical records is actually a portrait of me as a human that I can't understand a word of.

46:00 MILLER: That's really interesting. And like depending on the person your portrait is thicker or thinner, and of course now everything's all digital.

46:10 BERGER: It's super interesting to me. And one of my big things with that was heartbeats. And so the one that you're looking at now has an image from one of my echocardiograms. Because I get those yearly I have roughly 15 years' worth of them to look back through and pull from. I do not remember what year that one's from. If you go to my exhibitions on my website there should be a photograph of my MFA research show. And for my thesis show I made the decision – that top photo on the left – those two photographs are of my MFA thesis show and what I decided to do was take a line was essentially my heartbeat when I was nine years-old and paint it around the perimeter of the gallery. It's actually four times there. It took about three days with three different people helping me. It took me another two days to get it off the wall. But, worth it! IT was essentially my echocardiogram from the first time that I had one. It was an ECG from the first time that I had an EKG done which was at like 1:42 AM in the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center emergency room when I was nine years old.

47:55 MILLER: Dartmouth is getting a lot of plugs in this.

47:56 BERGER: Dartmouth is getting a lot of plugs. Dartmouth, I'm here. The ANEW Exhibition brought to by DHMC. Become a sponsor, I can wear a shirt that has your logo on it.

Most of my records have Dartmouth's logo on them. And that image says it on it. Because I put the text from the top of my EKG on one of the walls. So it might actually say Dartmouth somewhere on my exhibitions page.

Yeah. That's sort of my thing with accidents. I guess that's what we were talking about. So the cyanotypes definitely have accidents. All of my installation work was happy accidents. I go in with a vague idea of what I wanted it to look like and then it would be absolutely backwards by the time I left. So every single one of those that I liked well enough to put on my website was definitely an accident.

49:15 MILLER: I love happy accidents and when that happens. It's sort of, I think personally at least an artist that's when I feel the most creative. So I will note that we have about 10 minutes left until we've been at this an hour. If people have questions please leave them in the chat box and

we'll get to those. In the meantime, I wanted to ask you about what is it like being an artist during these times? Amidst a global pandemic, a racial justice movement and crisis, a major election.. what is it like being an artist right now and has all of that impacted your creativity at all?

49:58 BERGER: It has I have not made art creatively in months. I've been doing a lot of writing which has been good but I have not made anything in a long time.

50:12: MILLER: I think that writing is art!

50:13 BERGER: Yeah, I mean it is. It's a different thing. Especially when it's research writing. I mean, I think that writing is definitely part of my practice but I haven't made any art in a while. And I definitely don't make as much art when I'm depressed. I have a lot harder time being creative. I have a lot harder time focusing and I also, I mean being chronically ill, being in a pandemic is terrifying. Especially when the people around you, are you know, gaslighting disabled people and saying that if people have to die for the cost of the economy so be it. And being a disabled person and also an elementary school employee that's really pretty scary.

I'm going back to work in like, two weeks, in a school and we're going to be there five days a week and you know... like I think people have really decided that some lives are not worth as much as other people's lives. And that can be really difficult. I also think the election has some pretty big concerns for me, health insurance is a big concern for me. I'm from Vermont.. Medicare for all, Bernie! Shout out to Bernie Sanders for publishing this on his page! Thanks Bernie!

51:41 MILLER: Right?! Thanks Bernie!

51:47 BERGER: He also sent me a letter when I was in the Kennedy Center show. So, Bernie, thank you!

51:51 MILLER: That was very sweet!

51:52 BERGER: It was! It was really nice.

51:56 MILLER: I'm wondering if you also can tell me a little bit about where people can see more your art if they want to check out. You've shared your website, but where can people find out more about you and your art?

52:13 BERGER: Yeah, absolutely! I do have a website it auroraberger.com, it's pretty easy. I also have an Instagram, which is [@auroraberger](https://www.instagram.com/auroraberger), and Twitter, which is [@auroraberger](https://twitter.com/auroraberger). The twitter is mostly ranting about politics so you probably don't want to follow me there unless you're into that. But the Instagram is all art and pictures of my cats sometimes, so I mean if you're into cats and arts and disability, come hang out.

52:39 MILLER: I mean, what more is there to be into in this world? Okay I have a question for you, and this one is, it's not a serious question. This is a personal question from me. So I like to say that my love language is pie. I come from a pie baking family. WE only have one family heirloom and it's a rolling pin. Well that's the big one. And when people are sad in my life I make them pie, when they get married I make them pie. I mean, I make pie. It's what I do. So I want to know what your favorite kind of pie is. And if you're not a pie person I won't be crushed.

53:25 BERGER: I am a pie person. And I did think about when I saw it on your list. My favorite pie is lemon merengue pie.

53:36 MILLER: Yum, good choice. I love lemon merengue pie. There's not very many pies I wouldn't eat though. Okay. One more question and then I think I don't see any in the chat box so I think after this we might wrap up.

Where od you see your creative process going in the future as much as you can predict that?

53:58 BERGER: It's very unpredictable. All my plans are out the window. I'm hoping to continue working within disability art. Not hoping, will be working withing disability art. Claiming that. I'm hoping to, you know, get my work to a larger audience. I don't know if that will be through me putting together shows with other disabled shows or hopefully getting juried into some stuff. I was in a really fantastic group show in North Caroline this spring which got shut down only like a week early. Though is till haven't gotten my art back and it's now July... August. It's August.

54:49 MILLER: Send Aurora her work!

54:51 BERGER: Yeah, would like my art back please. I got to meet some really fantastic disabled artists though that so I'm looking forward to collaborating with them in the future. I think that as disabled artists it really comes down to support. And I think that was one of the reasons

the KC show getting cut short for a lot of us that support can be really difficult when you are disabled and you have limited resources and you're being kept in really specific boxes especially politically like Medicaid income caps, that's why I live with my parents.... Things like public transportation, which is why I live with my parents. And I'm 26 and lived by myself for six years and would love to go back to living by myself with my cat. But I'm stuck. I literally cannot make enough money to pay rent and have Medicaid. It's just not possible. There's not public transit so in order to live somewhere with public transit near me I would have to pay about \$2,000 per month for a one-bedroom apartment and that is literally more than I'm allowed to make to stay on Medicaid. I also can't work 40 hours a week right now because of my health. I think for disabled artists for all of things outside of our careers that are matters of life and death and it's really important to support disabled art whenever you see it, wherever you see it, buy art from disabled artists. There are so many of us. I'm not saying buy art from me, buy art from other disabled artists. There are so, so many disabled artists making incredible work about disability, about race, about classism, so many. And the fact that we are only pretty much only curated into shows about being disabled is ridiculous. I mean, I was appreciated being curated into this show (ANEW) but I shouldn't have only three shows on my resume for 2020 and all three of them being disabled art shows. That's ridiculous.

57:15 MILLER: I couldn't agree with you more. Yup.

57:16 BERGER: Absurd. So right, curate disabled artists, buy disabled artists, support disabled artists, read disabled artists. Read my book when I eventually get it published.

57:30 MILLER: Yeah. All of that. Yes. I mean like, I need like a thumbs up sticker for that. If people are interested in supporting disabled artists by purchasing their work head to our website. There's a list of 29 of them on there. You can check it out.

57:40 BERGER: I will throw names at you!

57:45 MILLER: All of the work in the show is for sale except a few. We don't take a commission, some of the host sites might, but Inclusive Arts Vermont doesn't take a commission from it. If you purchase through us the artist gets 100%

Well cool! Thanks for chatting with me tonight! And yeah, if people want to learn more about aurora you can check out her website, it's auroraberger.com. If you want to learn more about the show ANEW, which is going to be renewing its tour in October check out our website which is inclusiveartsvermont.org. And a fully accessible of this video will be uploaded to our YouTube channel next week. It'll have transcript, verbal descriptions, captions, all of that stuff.

If you have any questions about the show or anything feel free to find us online. That's it. Thanks so much Aurora, have a great night!

59:04 BERGER: You too!