Heidi: Welcome and hello. My name is Heidi Swevens. I am here with artist Paul Betz for the next installment of the MASKED artist talks. I am so excited to be here with Paul, we had a talk last time. I’m going to do a brief introduction before we get into the conversation. So as I said my name is Heidi Swevens. I use she/they pronouns. I’m the Director of Community Partnerships with Inclusive Arts Vermont and so one of the things I get to do is work with artists on the exhibitions. I’m really grateful for that. For access purposes I’ll do a visual description of myself and surroundings. I have blue eyes and pale skin with short brown hair. And today I’m wearing an autumn colored flannel, button down flannel. Behind me is blank walls and shadows and various lights. And the MASKED exhibition just as a sort of reminder if you’re new or just listening for the first time, the MASKED exhibition is a collection of art from 22 Vermont artists with disabilities. It’s traveling the state through April of 2023. It opened in January of this year and will travel as I said through April of 2023 and the State House is where it will end up. And it’s currently at Main Street Arts in Saxtons River, Vermont. And Paul’s photograph Mossy Crevice is one of the pieces in that exhibition. So Paul Im going to invite you to introduce yourself. Im so glad to have you with us today.

Paul: Thank you. Hello. My name’s Paul Betz. I’m a photographer. I take photo’s of everything*.* That’s pretty much it for my introduction because I want to leave time to [get to] the rest of my work. So, without further adieu, this is some of my photos from a trip to Boston that I am going to be presenting for my artist talk.

Heidi: Great, so without further adieu, the photographs, right? (Laughter)

Paul: Yeah.

Heidi: Is it okay if we start with Mossy Crevice which is the one that’s in the MASKED exhibition?

Paul: Yeah

Heidi: Okay. And Megan who is behind the scenes with us is going to do a verbal description of this. And then Paul we’ll ask you to share more.

Megan: On the screen we have a color photograph of a rock, a large rock covered in moss. Bright green vibrant moss. It takes up about three quarters of the image and then coming out of the top of the rock is a wooded hillside with some trees. You can see the very bottoms of the tree trunks going upwards and nice leafy green vibrant foliage among the trees.

Heidi: Thank you, Megan. And Paul tell us a little bit more about this photograph if you’d like

Paul: Well, [even though it wasn’t, it wasn’t taken] by my, by my new camera I didn't have , it was taken with my cell phone.

Heidi: Ahh, so you have a new camera which we’ll want to hear more about. But this particular photo was taken with your cellphone. Did I get that?

Paul: It was but, but you can’t tell the difference.

Heidi: (laughs) Yeah cellphone cameras are pretty amazing these days.

Paul: I can’t, I can’t tell the difference between my cellphone or my “camera” camera.

Heidi: Yeah, so, I’m, I’m curious I mean I’ve heard this story before but I, I think the audience might be curious, where is that photo taken? Because if you use your cellphone seems like maybe it was a spontaneous photo adventure (Laughter) rather than one of the ones where you brought your camera with you. So tell us a bit more about that, that.

Paul: Well it was a spontaneous adventure. There wasn’t, there wasn’t, there was not enough room for me to get safely on the path to, to take a nice photo with my camera so we, we improvised.

Heidi: Im a fan of improvising

Paul: [Yeah. Me too], like okay. That, that, that was taken in Ethan Allen Park.

Heidi: Ethan Allen Park in Burlington?

Paul: Yep. By the, by the, by the tower.

Heidi: Hmmm. I’m not familiar with Ethan Allen Park, so there’s a tower there, it sounds like?

Paul: There’s a really old [decrepit] tower and we were gonna go all the way up to the tower but, but [ the road was too rough for us to get up there was a bear in the path and the tower] and we couldn’t get up there. We had to turn around and go back down. (Laughter). That wasn’t so good.

Heidi: So I’m curious, what made you stop to take this photograph? You know you’re heading towards the tower, did the mossy crevice, did something catch your eye? Or what made you be spontaneous and improvise there?

Paul: Me and Dan, we both thought it was a good photo so we just, we just took it.

Heidi: Yeah. I don’t know I mean I’m sometimes and if this isn’t what you were saying Paul correct me. But you were just passing and you were like “Wow, that would make a great picture.” Let’s just stop and see what we can do. Yeah.

Paul: Yeah

Heidi: I know we have more photos, new photos to share and you also have a video that you - talk about where the video’s from.

Paul: Um, okay. My, my, my people, my people suggest, my people suggested the video if I could pull it up and they would get a, they would get a better understanding of how, of how I physically, how I take my pictures. All the people I, All the people I meet, unless you’ve been with me when I’m taking a photo. No one really gets it unless they’ve. But this video I thought would help explain more than just me, more than just me telling

Heidi: Yeah. I was really excited - We were talking at the beginning of the year about your artist talk and at that time you were saying that you had made a video or your were making a video about how you do it. About your process. And so…

Paul: Do you remember my, do you remember my friend Finn?

Heidi: Mmm Hmm.

Paul: He’s, he’s the one that actually, he’s the one that actually helped me make, helped me make the video. When it was all done I help me explain to other people that I, because nobody, because nobody gets it unless you actually have been with me [on a photoshoot]

Heidi: Yeah, so Finn helped with the video.

Paul: Yeah Finn made it with a lot of help. With the help of a lot of people.

Heidi: Yeah it sounds like a collaborative effort. I’m remembering in our first artist talk we did for ANEW, we - and this is my recollection so it may not be all that relevant. You can tell me to just get on with the video but, you mentioned there was other people that helped out. Kind of the way parts of photography that you do for yourself and its your vision if you will and then there’s logistics of support to make it happen so, umm, without further adieu, can we shift to the video?

Paul: Sure

Heidi: Okay (laughter) And I love that instead of you answering all the time you made a video to explain something so the people will have a better understanding. So here we go.

Megan: This is Megan speaking. We are gonna share a video by Paul Betz about his photographic process. I’m gonna do a very short verbal description of the video. There’s an audio of a banjo strumming in the background. It’s a slideshow of images. Some images show Paul taking photographs with his camera set up that is attached to his wheelchair. And other images are photographs he has taken of the the Vermont rural landscape. Some of the featured photos show a barn, an evening landscape of a lake, a red apple on top of a rusted car, and a geometric staircase. There’s also text that is embedded into the video and I will read it aloud as the video plays.

(Banjo music plays in the background of Paul’s video)

“My Story: Capturing Simple Beauty

Meet Paul Betz. A local Vermont Artist

Paul love to capture Vermont’s natural Beauty

Rusted Barn, photo by Paul Betz

In spite of his challenges Paul creates art his way

Paul’s experience and perspective help him to develop his own distinctive method and style

His unique view of the world shines through his work

Apple Orchard, photo by Paul Betz

Geometric Treehouse, photo by Paul Betz

Well folks, that’s a wrap!

Check out Paul’s work: [bestbetzphotography.com](http://bestbetzphotography.com)

Instagram and Facebook too!

Heidi: Great, well thank you. So Paul what do you have to add? Anything you want to add to that or more you want to say about the video? I mean it’s clear there may not be more but I just want to invite your perspective.

Paul: I will say, to me to [find, to find the video] and when I saw it all put together When I saw it, [he didn’t tell me he was doing it he just did] and when it, when it was done I just thought it was amazing.

Heidi: Yeah.

Paul: So then I helped them finish it and that can be a way to explain to people how I can make photos. And I made it for [showed it to Global Campuses]

Heidi: Yeah. I, I was curious what your reaction was when you first saw it and what I’m hearing you say now was “It was amazing!” So -

Paul: I was just like [glad he did it on his computer] . I know a lot of leg work that went in with him taking photos take a couple of photos of me taking photos and put them all together and I was like :Okay, Wow!”

Heidi: So what I’m hearing you say is that you do photography, you do them one at a time and this one had them all together and sort of that sense of -

Paul: Well then he took a couple, a couple of shots and then he put the couple in. I saw those photographs together and put them in there.

Heidi: Yeah, of I’m so glad. And then I’m curious because I noticed the music, so how did you come up with the song to play in the background?

Paul: Well because he got it on his computer and we were both trying for sort of a Vermont, sort of a Vermont theme to go with the photos. And that’s the only song that, that sounded like enough of a Vermont theme.

Heidi: yeah

Paul: to go with the video. I wanted that one.

Heidi: Yeah, matching the theme, with the Vermont rural landscape, yeah. You know many artists are inspired - So you’re a photographer and in the artist networking and other places artists have talked, and this may not be true for you, sometimes you know music puts somebody in a creative mood or there’s connections between different disciplines and different genres so it sounds like you are very intentional about the music that you picked to go with the photography.

Paul: Yeah.

Heidi: Can I ask another question about one of the specific images? The apples on an old car?

Paul: Yeah, I - that was an apple on - That was an apple on an old tractor. Because why, why, why that is there is I went , I went to [an orchard] every year but we didn’t go, we dropped the ball this year, but last year when I taking outdoor photography there was a, there was a, there was a contest on Instagram where if you enter some sort of contest thing you got some big prize and any way you have to have an instagram account, that was my entry for that contest but I didn’t win. Because when I entered it the Instagram thing there was over 200 or 400 entries. They were from, they were from all over the world so I’m not surprised I didn’t win. But I don’t even know who won. So it was like “oh my god!”

Heidi: (Laughter) So the apple photograph was for Instagram, an Instagram contest that had 400 entries?

Paul: Or more.

Heidi: Or more. Yeah, Instagram - I'm not on Instagram, well I'm not using Instagram but it seems like a popular thing. So Im curious Paul, was there a theme of apple photos for that contest? Or

Paul: Uh Yeah what we had to do, what we had to, what we had to do for that contest is first we had to go take, we had to go take, is we had to go take about a dozen or so photos of the apple tree, apples anywhere. And then we had to pick, we had to pick the best, I think I twas like two or three to send into them. But you also had to create an account at the same time*.* So we were saying an Instagram account and all this stuff [and then because I already had the set I kept going I didn’t win the contest and what we ended up doing is the photos that were in there put them on my Facebook and put them on my website and people can look. I’ve got to do photography spontaneously. And you will see a in the next couple of photos.

Heidi: What a beautiful segue Paul. From Instagram contests and spontaneity to some more images from another adventure. I so appreciate the diverse kinds of photography you do and also the places that you take your camera and your cellphone. So with that are we ready for - do you want to do any kind of introduction on the photographs Paul?

Paul: I was going too. These photographs that are coming up now [ versus my other the video that you saw] these photographs have to do with a, a concert in Boston, a concert in Boston that had Motely Crue, Def Leppard and Joan Jett playing all at once.

Heidi: So Motley Crue, Def Leppard and what’s the last,

Paul: And Joan Jett.

Heidi: Joan Jett, all at the same concert?

Paul: Yep

Heidi: Okay Wow! And this was in Boston so you were

Paul: There’s, there’s, there’s - I bring one or two of the concert and then there is one or two of the Boston Aquarium

Heidi: Ahh the aquarium. So what if we switch to the photographs now and you can share more about them after. Does that work for you Paul?

Paul: Yeah that works

Heidi: And why don’t we got one at a time, that way - so Megan can describe it and you can add in more of the story if you’d like. Is that okay

Paul: yeah

Megan: We’ll be sharing 3 photographs by Paul. The first photograph is on the screen. It shows moon jelly fish inside a tank. They are floating throughout the whole image. And they are lit by a blacklight so all the jellyfish are kind of glowing in the water.

Heidi: So Paul, tell us more about that image and what speaks to you. What do you like about it?

Paul: Well what I wanted to point out is that is nobody, nobody was there, nobody was - The day we went the aquarium before we went to the concert and the Boston aquarium itself that particular day was, was over two hundred people.

Heidi: Wow

Paul: there was a lot of people and because of, and because of, and because of other circumstances which I will not get into we were forced to use other transportation. So what you will, so what you will see in the aquarium photos - is you will not see my camera set-up because what had happened, what had happened is Finn, Finnley’s, Finnley is holding my camera and Im holding the shutter release

and Im the one pushing the camera and on that day, on that day I took over 200 photos myself. Which nobody knows because it was hard, it was hard to see because its so dark. But I would be like right up to the glass so I could take, so I could take the photo. You’ll see in those how dark it is. I thought they might want to know that because they ask how the heck do you take all those photos without hands - without holding - so we had to improvise.

Heidi: Yeah. Thank you for that background. Im just gonna highlight a couple of the things that I heard. That the aquarium was before your concert. And there was about 200 people in the whole aquarium.

Paul; Yep before, before the, before the concert.

Heidi: Before the concert, yeah. And then you’re commenting on how dark the photos are and how you were improvising with holding the camera and being in the dark. Did I get that?

Paul: Yeah

Heidi: Okay because the description of the moon jellyfish being lit up against the dark background, it seems like the dark really stood out for you Paul as you’re taking the photographs. That that was part of the experience for you.

Paul: Yeah because I only, I only thought in the tank was dark - it was dark in the whole building. I was like “oohhhhh”

Heidi: (laughter) - and did you use any flashes if it’s dark? Im just thinking its not just - its almost Halloween so like the spooky dark. The camera without a flash it must’ve

Paul: Not too many flashes but one or two.

Heidi: Gotcha okay. Well thank you for that additional information on the story. Does that photograph have a name yet?

Paul: I would say dark, I would say *Dark Underlit Jellyfish* cause its so dark in the whole building. It’s like “wow”.

Heidi: Yeah, its almost like the jellyfish are the lights.

Paul: Yeah that’s what it reminds me of cause its so dark.

Heidi: Well, thank you. Is it okay to go onto the next photographs? We’ve talked about the concert a little bit but I don’t know if there’s more of the aquarium. So ill be interested in finding out.

So we’ll do the second photo now of the aquarium and low and behold turns out the three photos well share today are of the aquarium but in my low vision blurred way of seeing the world I saw lights and dark background and I thought it was a musician on stage because I knew Paul had gone to a concert (chuckles) so we’ll get back to the aquarium photos now. And Megan thanks so much.

Megan: The second aquarium photo is up on the screen. It shows a large aquarium tank from the top. Its like a circular tank and inside of the tank is lots of different brightly colored coral in the water. And in the bottom left corner there is a diver in a wetsuit with a tank on their back. Around the tank is kind of like a platform where people at the aquarium can view down into the tank and there are people lined up around that rim of the tank on the platform looking down into the coral and the diver.

Heidi: Thank you and anything to share about this one Paul?

Paul: Yeah. What this photo is is every day at the Boston Aquarium they have several animal shows and what were, what we’re, what we’re looking at now what were watching is we’re looking at one of the, one of the shows going on and people are looking at the tank. That’s what we’re looking at right now.

Heidi: Great one of those shows. Its not a concert but it is show, yeah. It must have been amazing for you to experience and witness all of that Paul. Had you been to the aquarium or a place like that before?

Paul: Not in several years.

Heidi: Yeah, not in several years. Great are you ready for the third photo now?

Paul: yeah.

Megan: The third photo is up on the screen. In the… most of the image is black but in the very middle is a window looking inside an aquarium tank. Swimming by the window is a sea turtle. And the turtle is mid fin-flip and the turtle is looking right at the camera as well as it swims by. And behind the turtle is different pieces of brightly colored coral.

Heidi: Thank you. So Paul, what do you want to add with this particular photograph?

Paul: That is, that is, that is an amazing photo. What, what people, what people, what people, what people get from seeing this photo is, is that, is that the, is that the turtle itself would pose. Because not only was I taking pictures of the turtle but everybody was taking pictures of the turtle. If your, if your a person that takes pictures with your cell phone camera or something

Heidi: Yeah. And it sounds like from the description that the turtles looking at the camera. So maybe you’re with the paparazzi.

Paul: What made me decide is regardless of who is shooting the work *-* In the end, in the end, [the turtle would look at whoever was taking a picture]the turtle was here under the water looking right at the camera so

Heidi: Yeah seems like a perfectly timed image. Yeah. Am I remembering correctly and I know everyone has different memories but I seem to remember that you went to a bird place in Vermont and you had a photograph that you shared at your last talk of the bird, maybe an owl looking right at the camera. Is that -

Paul: Oh yeah that was in October. the owl photo, and the eagle was another one because I went to the natural history museum down in Queche, VT and that where I got those photos from.

Heidi: Yeah

Paul So

Heidi: The natural world in, yeah. Yeah. So thank you for sharing those additional photos, Paul. And you know I think with your video and some of the conversation we have a sense of how you take your photographs and some of the supports. We’re winding down our time for this portion of the interview. We’ll go live at a later time. But I’m curious what does photography mean to you? And you know I you want to just share as an artist as a photographer. How do you find value and meaning in the photography you do?

Paul: Well I enjoy it a lot. And I have a have a unique perspective being in a chair. And um, —- I get all kinds of comments Questions about “Where did this one come from? “Where did that one come from? Anyway I tell people with the help with a little help from with who is with me that day I can actually take the photo myself. And that’s the enjoyment that I get out of it

Heidi: The enjoyment comes from the framing and the parts that you see that are yours. Yeah. Well Paul I am so grateful to have had this conversation with you and the stories that accompany the photographs - maybe that’s just how I see and experience the world. I am a storyteller and I love the stories and the laughing at some of the misunderstandings - but so grateful for your time. Is there anything else you want to add? I know when we go live we will be sure to post your website and instagram and Facebook and I think they were in the video. But anything you want to share with the audience before we say bye for now?

Paul: Paul: Um I’m, I'm, I'm still looking for, I’m still looking for places to, to, to, to to frame my photos put them up and try and sell them. So we’ll see. Right now I don’t have a car so

Heidi: Yeah without car some of this logistics have to be done differently but not as fast, yeah.

Paul: And I, I will send you two or three photos from the concert. You can pick which one you like

Heidi: Great, thank you for keeping me accurate even after that fact. And you're sharing that you’re working on the framing and this, I think many artists - humans - artists and photographer in particular there’s always more projects, you know? So sometimes its nice to you know pause and just like after the video “ Oh its amazing!” And then there’s more to do. So yeah. Well thank you again for your time Paul - we will pause for now and we will reconvene when we go live. And thank you again for all your time and creativity.

Its been a pleasure

Paul: Alright.