**Inclusive Arts Vermont**

**MASKED Closing Artist Panel**

**Transcript**

**Featuring: Heidi Swevens, Kat Redniss, David Roy, Kate Adams, Paul Betz, and Dominick Gabrielsen**

**Kat:** Hi, everyone and welcome. We are here for our *MASKED* Artist Panel. I'm Kat, and I'm here with my colleague, Heidi. And we are here with four of the Artists from the MASKED Exhibit. They are featuring their artwork in the exhibit, MASKED, which is traveling around the State. We won't get too into that, because we'll go live.

But Heidi, hello. How are you?

**Heidi:** Hello! I'm well. I'm really really grateful to be here with you and with the artist today. Yeah.

**Kat:** Excellent, I'm gonna do a really quick verbal description of myself. For this practice, it's an access practice we do in all of our digital spaces, and all of our spaces. I am Kat. I am a fat, femme, platinum blonde, woman. I have my hair pulled up with a scarf tied on my head that's like a peach, leopard print scarf. I have bangs, and I have rect… excuse me triangular metallic earrings, an oatmeal, sweater, a gray tank top. And I'm in my sunroom so there are windows letting kind of a gray sunshine in and there's some furniture behind me. I use she/her pronouns. And I'm so happy to be joined by my colleague Heidi. And we'll be facilitating the conversation today. Heidi, want to introduce yourself?

**Heidi:** Yes, So as Kat said. I'm Heidi Swevens.

I use she/they pronouns, and for access purposes, a visual description. I have blue eyes, and pale skin with short brown hair. And today wearing a teal sweater, with circle earrings, that have trees, on them, and behind me are angles, and shadows, and lights, I think there

might be a doorway visible. My iPad is angled, so the background shows that. I'm the Director of Community Partnerships at Inclusive Arts, Vermont and I get to work on our exhibitions throughout the state and with the artists and so really, really grateful to be here today.

And Kat, I think before we introduce the artists and the art, maybe just for the audience, we're going to show the works of art from MASKED. And then we're gonna start some questions with the artist and then see where it takes us. Because we have the questions, as starting places. But really part of our hope is that the artists will be able to interact with each other and have some of that synergy from just being in the shared space - digital today. So how's that sound?

**Kat:** Yeah, that's wonderful and we are also joined.

There are the four artists on screen. But we are also joined by our colleague, Megan, who's behind the scenes running tech so before we get into it with the artist let's start there. Megan, can you share the artist's artwork and I know some of our artists are going to do their own verbal description, and then we'll get into you all introducing yourselves. So we'll show the artwork, and then we'll get into your introductions and get into those questions.

So Megan, go for it.

**Kat:** And so this is Paul Betz's piece. It's a photograph, and it is a photograph of a forest scene. It is called Mossy Crevice and it is on kind of a slanted forest floor. There is a large rock face that is covered with multiple different kinds of moss. There are dark, dark green, hunter-green moss that are kind of almost furry and soft. And then there is this bright electric green growth coming out of that moss at the bottom left of the rock. There is an opening, a vertical opening, that leads to unknown, and it's a, it's a black space created by darkness and shadow. Above the rock, the, the forest floor goes up like it's, going up a hill and there are small trees and branches and growth all in a mixture of browns and greens on that. So that is Paul's piece. Paul, anything that I missed for that?

**Paul:** You did wonderful.

**Kat:** Awww, Thank you, friend, I appreciate you. Alright, let's see the next piece. Dominick, do you wanna describe it, or would you like me to?

**Dominick:** You could if you wanted to. And I could add if anything’s missing.

**Kat:** Perfect, perfect. Thanks, Dominick. So this is Dominick Love's piece. And this is it is a piece, it's a large piece on a square back black background, excuse me, that's painted black. There are dozens of masks painted all different shades and colors and textures. The masks are papier mache, and they have these open vacant eyes that show the black in the background. The masks go in a somewhat circular fashion, and there are two different sizes of masks. Kind of an adult face mask, and then a smaller child’s face mask. The masks are painted, the primary colors of them are a pale blue, a cobalt blue, grays, sage greens, light oranges, golds, and chromes. And so those are all different; several of the masks have an overall wash with some highlights of those colors. And then there are a few that have these kind of bolder strokes of cobalt blue. One covering about half the face, one bisecting the face and one with large brush strokes, across the face. Anything I missed for you Dominick?

**Dominick:** No I don’t think so.

**Kat:** Okay, great, thank you. Yeah, go ahead. David.

**David:** Okay. Yeah, I can do a verbal description. yeah, this is my piece, it's called *Wandering Eyes*.

It is all in black and white like an old film. In the middle bottom middle of it is three women in different dance-like positions dressed in very old fashioned like pilgrimage times. And then the background, is the forest in the background there’s like a passage going through with trees, on each side. And then around it's in a half arc, all these different faces in a way interacting with the dancers’ own emotions that they show. And that is *Wandering Eyes.*

**Kat:** Thanks, so much David. Great, and this is Kate's piece and Kate will you unmute yourself for me? Perfect, and Kate would you like me to describe this? Or would you like to describe this?

**Kate:** I think I'd like to try.

**Kat:** Great great go for it.

**Kate:** It's a little for those that can't see it visually.

Yeah It's a little bit complex, right. I hope my description will give you a sense of, that it’s, it's a photo, photographic collage and it's put together on a wooden photo frame. The outside is a circle. It's painted black and then within the circle, are 4 black lined frames for the photos. And starting up in the upper right, my right, right hand corner anyway, is it, it is a photo of a man named chief Don Stevens. He's a, the chief of the Mohegan tribe, and it's a little bit harder to see the details. I think it looks like a blue gray shirt. He has a traditional headpiece on with beading around his forehead, with red bristles sticking up from it. He’s wearing sunglasses, and yeah, some sort of a necklace but I can't see it well from here.

Right down below him, it's an outdoor picture of a farm pond with geese, not geese, I'm sorry, ducks on it, and a girl with long brown hair standing there, watching the geese. Then over to the left of her is a vertical image with a black horse and a teenager. The teenager is right up close to the horse with his right hand over the horse's neck. He’s wearing a black shirt and he's looking off over the back of the horse, and his left hand is holding the reins and a riding helmet. And then up above him it's a horizontal frame, it's a red background and on it is a black image. Well, which is actually a bear skin. And around the bear skin is an orange, which is an accumulation of, of ribbons put there, to honor the Native children, and in particular, who were lost during the times of when they were forced to go to boarding homes. And so this is intended to be a healing piece for them.

In the middle, it's a small, small, much smaller ring in the middle, which is actually made at the top of a canning jar rim and I painted it black so it fit the rest. And, and from this distance you won’t see the image. But I'll just describe to you, it's a woman wearing the type of outfit, the, a woman in the Abenaki nation in the 1830s probably would have wore, which is a, a cream colored full blouse with long sleeves, a wrap wool skirt and she's carrying a variety of baskets, because that would have been what she was doing as a craft, and as a way to bring in money for her family. Hanging down below it is a white leather strand and from it are hanging black hooves of a deer with beads above them. And I think that describes it pretty well.

**Kat:** Wonderful. Thank you so much, Kate, for doing that, and for getting us all those details. So as you just met we are here with four artists from MASKED, they all submitted pieces from MASKED, which you just experienced. So we are here with Paul Betz, with Dominick Gabrielsen Love, with Kate Adams, and with David Roy. And with me is Heidi. Heidi, any comments, before we get into our first question? Anything you'd like to start with?

**Heidi:** Just this sort of this is a reflective, you know, sort of a, where were you when things started with MASKED? Where are you now? And then, you know, what suggestions do you have for any other disabled artist or people in the community? So that's the flow of the conversation, and the artists will introduce themselves, a little more as they open with the questions and other than that yeah, that I think that's that's it. I'm really excited.

And who, who's gonna start?

**Kat:** Let’s go with the same order we just did. What we just did. Yeah. So, Paul, Paul, will you share with us the question? First of all, would you like me to just describe your setting? Or would you like to do a verbal description of yourself?

**Paul:** You can do it.

**Kat:** I can do it totally. So Paul Betz is sitting in a living room in his wheelchair, and there is a kind of contraption coming off the back of the wheelchair, near his mouth. Paul is wearing a gray green, looks like, long sleeve shirt glasses, Paul’s arms are at his sides. It's in the back. There's light coming in from the windows and gray curtains and a bookshelf over one of Paul's shoulders, and I know, if I know Paul often we're going to see a big great Paul smile. Because Paul is, Paul is somebody who we’ve worked with for many, many years now. Paul, thank you for being here with us. And the first question that we'd love for you to explore, we're gonna ask all our artists, to explore this, is what prompted you to submit your work, this piece to MASKED?

**Paul:** What prompted me to submit this time was that I got more photos that I didn’t have and with, umm with the encouragement of a friend of mine I submitted a photo.

**Heidi:** Hmm, nice. So Paul, as Kat was saying you've, we've worked with you before you had a piece in the *ANEW* exhibition which was the one before this and so when MASKED came around you had lots more photos that sounded like to, to sort of pick from for the theme, and this one.

**Paul:** Yeah.

**Heidi:** I, I'm remembering, you're talking about, it was when you were with a friend, but in your individual artist talk, the Mossy Crevice photograph was something that was just sort of, this thing that caught your attention.

And you're like, I need my camera, but you didn't have your camera. So it was the cell phone. Is that did I get that? I mean, I added a little bit.

**Paul:** Well we, we, we had, we had, we had brought the camera with us but there was nowhere to set the camera up. So that’s why I took it with my phone.

**Heidi:** Yeah. Improvisation. I think maybe the other artists can relate to improvisation. I know, I can, so yeah.

**Kat:** I bet. I bet. Thanks so much, Paul, and next we'll go to Dominick. Dominick, if you'll just introduce yourself with a brief verbal description, and then answer the question, what prompted you to submit to MASKED?

**Dominick:** Sure, I'm Dominic Gabrielsen, verbal description. I am dark blond dirty blond hair, blue eyes.

With a beard. I'm sitting on the couch. There's brown pillows behind me, and my windows are covered by kind of brown wooden shades.

What got me to… well the MASKED exhibition, which I may have said before, but was kind of an accident.

I had done a series of paintings, including boxes, and panels for my family, and several painted masks for them, and children. You know, my, many of my cousins, have one or two or three children. And because of Covid I was unable to deliver them. And this led to me having a sort of pile of painted masks around and kind of seem to fit with the theme of the, the exhibition. And I, I was, you know, then brought in touch with Heidi and I think at the time, who was helping you at the time, Heidi?

**Heidi:** There was a, a jury, there was a, a jury of people, and so Kat and Katie. There's a number of us behind the scenes, yeah.

**Dominick:** Okay, yup, and then you had a person that was always on with us as well.

**Kat:** Oh, An intern!

**Heidi:** Oh, I think, it was maybe, was it Alyssa

**Dominick:** Yeah, it was a, Alyssa. Yup and that's just that's what brought me to the, to the show. It was happenstance and circumstance.

**Kat:** So far, we've got improvisation, happenstance, and circumstance. I love it, alright David, David Roy, would you introduce yourself with a verbal description, and then tell us what brought you to MASKED? What prompted you to submit your work?

**David:** Of course, I'm David Roy, I have blond hair that's parted in the middle, blue eyes. I'm wearing a gray sort a white, blue, white, white, blue, and gray flannel. And my background is various. It's my own, my own artwork at various art pieces, that'll take a while to describe each one, but there's a lot of them. And then what prompted me to go into MASKED was actually, I did a collage class during Covid just on a whim, and I enjoyed it. And someone who I used to work with like shared the open call for artists, was, that you posted for MASKED. And I was just like oh, I have this call, I just made it the first collage I made after the class and I just submitted it and it happened to get in. And I was like, oh, I guess that happened. And now a year later all of this stuff have happened that we'll talk about.

**Kat:** Great thanks so much, David. And Kate Adams, if you would introduce yourself with a verbal description, and then tell us what prompted you to submit to MASKED?

**Kate:** Alright well, well, I'm an elder with moonlight hair, which is long and pulled back in the back. But I got a big footlong lock of it coming over my shoulder. So my skin is pretty much white. I'm wearing a burgundy blouse, and I'm sitting on a dark brown couch. Behind me is the wall, which is knotty pine boards of my cabin and you partly can see some of the red, yellow, black, white - whoops, that way - fringe of a prayer shawl that's hanging on the wall was given to being by a good friend, so oh, that's me.

And I, I was rather a last minute because I happen to see it in one of those flyers that comes at your mailbox I think.

And it said the MASKED exhibition, and before Covid I hadn't been very involved with Facebook or social media, but with Covid that was a way to kind of at least reach out in some way.

And there was so much negative images and words on a lot of Facebook and I wanted to be a part of trying to put positive images out. I love taking photos of nature and animals and creation and people in a natural realm, and I've shared those before and so I was making an effort to put them out on local Facebook sites, but I wanted to find more of a way to share my photography. And so when I saw that I thought “Oh, so check this out!” Well I didn't have a lot of time. I think it was like 2 weeks before the deadline and, but I pressed through there's some challenges with doing it especially with the piece, as you see that was a little bit more complicated than just posting one of my photographs. But it was, it’s been a, very much of a growing learning experience, which I'll get to share more of later in the conversation. So I'm very glad I saw that. Now I know that there is such a thing as Inclusive Arts Council. Alright.

**Kat:** Hmm! Wonderful! and I'm gonna pass it over to Heidi. But I just wanted to note. So Paul has been working with us for several exhibitions, but Dominick and David, and Kate are all brand new and this exhibition is what brought our relationship with them. So I have major gratitude for that, for reconnecting us with Paul, and for bringing these three phenomenal artists into our creative community. Heidi, do you want to go on and move on to the next prompt?

**Heidi:** Yeah, I will, and I, I just have a big smile on my face. So I'm really excited for what will unfold from improvisation and happenstance to why not submit this first piece I did, after a class, to maybe last minute, but I'll persevere kind of things.Yeah, really really grateful for all of that. So our next sort of open-ended question is, you know, when did the call to artists go out? I think that was, this is the behind the scenes to the question. But September of 2019? No 2020? 2021?

**Kat:** I think we first announced it in April, and then it officially went out August and September of 2021. I think yeah.

**Heidi:** Yeah, so thank you for that detail, cause that was a while ago. So our question now is what does MASKED air quotes “Masked” mean to you today and we have some sub sections of that if it's helpful, but why don't we start with a wide open, what does masked mean to you today? And we'll just invite the artist to respond kind of as you feel moved. Hmm.

**David:** Yeah, I can start. MASKED sort of gave me like a new confidence in myself, like my life has changed a lot.

Since MASKED has started. Like a year ago I didn't really pursue art, and I was back in Vermont. Since then I'm actually pursuing art. I’m selling posters of my own art.

And I'm living in New York City. So I think MASKED, sort of gave me, like, I guess, gave me confidence to go out and try more.

And so I guess, like, MASKED in a way means new life to me, like that and new, that new life to me. So MASKED is like always come back a very important part of my life.

**Heidi:** Hmm, thank you, David. Yeah.

**Kat:** That’s beautiful. That's really. Yeah, yeah, and even, like, so the other thing is David and Kate they did art, their own artist talks at the beginning of the series, and Dominick, and Paul, have done it later. And so I had the privilege of interviewing David and I remember, you know, it was new and you were still figuring out. You know, do I call myself an artist? What are those words? You know, how do I define myself? And to see the evolution that's happened is very major and so grateful that we could be a part of that yeah.

**Heidi:** Yes, does anyone else want to respond to the open ended and we'll kind of follow up with details? Like artist as identity, disability identity process. That sort of thing if needed. Who’s, who's next?

**Paul:** Hello! Hi!

**Heidi:** Great, Paul.

**Kat:** Yeah, go for it. Paul

**Paul:**

I would say for myself the show was —because MASKED (really helped me do other things with my art) which is on my website now, which I wouldn’t have happened if I didn’t do the other artist talk. And the other time back before I’m doing more with photography - I have a big, I had to start getting ready for, for another presentation. There’s a video now. Because people always ask umm me how do I do this, how do I do that being in a wheelchair. So I, I we were (SECS shared my pictures and website with the group. They were pretty impressed with that) like what I am doing. Eventually I hope. We’ll see. But because of MASKED, I’ve done a lot more with photography than I thought I would be able to, that is what MASKED means to me. It has given me a lot of freedom and independence in a way I never thought would be possible.

**Heidi:** Yeah, thanks so much, Paul, I, the volume for me was fading in and out. But what I was hearing from that is that I'm gonna summarize a little bit. When we did your individual artists talk, you shared that video because people are always asking you how do you, how do you do photography like, how do you do, it, you're in a wheelchair, and you created a video, that includes, your photography, and also, pictures of you taking pictures.

**Paul:** Yeah

**Heidi:** In response which, is, in your individual artist talk. And I imagine, one of the tech magicians will put it in the comments, but, but and also the, through the, the journey isn't your word, but through your photography practice, what MASKED means to you is that you can do the photography independently. That's something that you never thought or other people may not have thought you could do. But you have this setup where you push the buttons, and you do the viewing, and with some help, but the photography is your art, and your perspective, good.

Did I catch all the main points?

**Paul:** Yeah.

**Heidi:** And, and Paul, I remember from other hats of Inclusive Arts, from some of those early, you know, before you had your new camera and the contraption -

and I said, contraption. Maybe that's just the technology setup. It was really, really cool, for you know, just in hindsight if you will, that there were lots of possibilities even though we didn't know exactly what they were.

Yet and here you are with your website, and all the photographs and yeah, anything else. I, I wanna, make sure that I didn't miss something cause, I think the volume early on in what you were talking. I didn't quite catch all of that. But…

**Paul:** I would say without, without being in MASKED I don’t think I’d be where I am today with my photography. Because I had to do one (Every year - fall and winter- I go on an annual photo shoot.) I haven’t started prepping for it. I had to start for that soon and it’s right now because of circumstance I don’t really have a van so it's been kind of hard to get out to do photos. But once I get a van that works I’ll go back out and take photos.

**Heidi:** Yeah, you were mentioning the van not working, and how that logistic has impacted the photography.

But before that you said something Paul, that you without MASKED, you don't think you'd be where you are with photography today, it did…

**Paul:** I don’t, I don’t think I ,I be where I am with photography because being in the MASKED exhibit people have really noticed my artwork through my photos and (they’re like, oh man) how do you do this pic how do you do that picture that type of thing. And when I set the displays up people are always looking at them but they haven’t bought anything yet. I'm hoping eventually they will.

**Kat:** They will, Paul. We know it, Paul, is saying, people are looking at the art, but they're not buying them yet.

But again, yeah.

**Heidi:** I don't know if other artists can relate to that. Yeah.

Okay. Well, thank you so much Paul.

**Paul:** You’re welcome.

**Kate:** And I'd like to say to Paul, that I really, I really like that piece Paul. I mean, it shows that you truly do have an artist's eye. Of all of what was there that you picked out and captured a glimpse to share with other people and I'm glad you did, it's a very for me, tt’s a, a very peaceful image, and I like it very much. So thank you.

**Paul:** You’re welcome.

**Kat:** Hmm. Kate, Would you like to continue and share a bit about yours, and then we'll go to Dominick, does that work?

**Kate:** Hmm. Okay. Alright. What's the question again?

**Kat:** So it's, it's so you talked first about what prompted you just submit your work.But this is what MASKED means to you today, how has that evolved over the time?

**Kate:** Alright, because it's the name of the exhibition which introduced me to the Inclusive Arts Council and to the opportunity to exhibit this in several locations. Couple of them close enough to me that I was able to go to the receptions. Which was a big step for me, to step out and say yes, I am an artist with my photography, and it's actually on a wall where it's being shared with other people. And to be able to go and hear people’s questions, and comments, and then the conversations that came from that was very enriching for me. And just yesterday I actually went to Dartmouth College, Dartmouth Hitchcock Hospital where it currently is, is on a long wall in the main area of the open - it's really in a very good location. And I have a friend who will come to be blessed by my horses, who actually works in the can, the children's cancer unit, there. So we met briefly, and she told me how when she's bringing a patient, she chooses that hallway.

**Kat:** Oh!

**Kate:** To be able to show them. You know. And she was, had a patient with her I think in a wheelchair when she saw it, and she, she knew that that was my photo collage, so she says, “Stop stop I gotta take a picture!” So, so to know that it's blessing other people is very, very heart warming for me, and the, the masked word is another whole level of it, okay.

The masked word is that because my piece, I didn't really explain it, that the title is *The Hidden Grandmother*, and because I qualified for three the categories of disabled complex PTSD and ADH Difference, I, I don't use the word disorder. We just we're different, and that I'm Indigenous - I had to choose what to do. And I was only beginning to be more aware of my Abenaki ancestry. And for me it was very important for me to remove the masks

that my family has had to wear as Indigenous people in this part of the world. Because a couple said to before there was a lot of not good things happening, and my grandmother purposely hid her identity. Therefore my grandfather's identity, because she knew of the racism that would come against him if he was considered Abenaki.

So it was a long journey for me to finally find the truth that I suspected and not all of my family even knows that I've done this. During this, my sister did say to me, when I told her that it was on exhibit she says, “Well, how do you know that we're Abenaki?” So I had a chance to tell her that journey and then my daughter has been even more like uhhhh - when she'd see me dressed to go to a gathering where I'm using, wearing some traditional regalia. She’s like, “No I don't want to go with you."

But in the last month, but I was visiting them, and I got to go out to lunch with her and my grandson, she asked me.

So I got to tell her also the story of how I came to this awareness and that I hope that my piece is sort of a telling of my story, but also a telling, a story, of some of the family behind me that had to hide their stories, so that's significant. And this recording gives me another means. So I've also learned. A lot more about social media and zoom. So that gives me even more opportunities.

So I will have this even as a means, that, I could go put on my personal Facebook. I could send to other family and say, I hope you'll watch this and join me in honoring our family's ancestors.

**Heidi:** Hmm, thank you so so much. Kate. May I reflect something back, just of all that, you said, and we've had many conversations?

**Kate:** Yes, we have.

**Heidi:** So, if I have misunderstanding something.

I trust you can but one of the first things you said just now is that what does MASKED mean to you today, it was about claiming your identity as an artist, and you know this sort of artistic identity. And then you know the theme mask, to the the reasons we put that out, was that many people with disabilities, invisible disabilities have these, you know, marginalized groups and so that intersectionality. For you and again, this is right, I wanna make sure I'm not misunderstanding, but between your Abenaki ancestry and your disability, the invisible disabilities, there was a couple of choice points of where do you put the art there from these hidden things, that people mask, you know, put under veils and stuff, and so with that the process of creating the art there was some unmasking for you and then for your family through having your own loss and putting that out into the world, yeah, and you know the…

**Kate:** And, and it has also helped me, become more, feel like an accepted member of some of the Abenaki communities, because in a way some that responded to me it's like, “Wow, I'm telling their story.” You know and I'm getting to share it in a public way that is respectful and, and so the blessings are flowing.

**Heidi:** Well, thank you and I know we want to get to Dominick, then I'm just gonna put on the sort of organization hat for a moment, which is part of I'm gonna say if that's okay, to can get a thumbs up to interject something here? Kat, are we getting thumbs up okay?

**Kat:** I I think, I think it seems fine. It seems fine.

**Heidi:** Just, that part of what the exhibitions in general are a way to bring awareness, about access and inclusion, through the arts, for many things. You know, people with disabilities are often, you know, stories aren't necessarily told or disabled voices, and so Inclusive Arts Vermont does that through art, and you know the ongoing exhibitions. So the MASKED one when it started, you know, it has a theme of its own in life, of its own, and what I'm really hearing from you, Kate, is that multiple identities, you were able to look at and share in this art, and it keeps on going.

**Kate:** And I don’t - because, the outdoor, photography, in the nature are all part of my healing, growing journey for someone healing through PTSD and through learning healthier life skills to deal with my very, creative but active, energetic, executive lack of functioning brain, but to be able to celebrate, to be able to focus on the gifts part. And not feel so weighed down by, by my own interpretation or the interpretation of the society around me for how I'm labeled, okay, that's enough.

**Heidi:** And Dominick, how about for you? What does MASKED mean to you today?

**Dominick:** But MASKED has come to meet a lot more than the the exhibitions. More about the people at this point, and the small community that we have of open minded individuals. And as many meetings as I can attend it's probably my favorite part of my routine, on the week. As simple as it is, that we all just talk for an hour. So I also was not, I mean, I made art before MASKED. Obviously that's why it's the show, I hadn't made art for a decade, right, much versus every day for years. And since I've been an exhibition participant, taking my, my small, part I've been inspired to do more work to get more shows. So I found it to be quite easy to get into shows, much easier than I thought. I suppose possibly part of this is age, part of it is reputation. But yeah, so I mean the transformation is a little bit into being more into living, living arts, and making them again. I suppose, yeah, but again, I'd say it has gone past the exhibitions into the people, who I'm thankful to be able to have the opportunity to share time and, and thoughts with.

**Heidi:** Hmm, okay. Thanks, Dominick. I would like to just something, for the individual artist talk and from our other conversations, where one of the things for Dominick’s piece is that we have a tactile element where Dominick shared an extra mask so that people could actually touch it. You know and then we've had tours and, you know, people are doing selfies in front of Dominick's piece and because the masks are so inviting.

And when we did the artists talk with you Dominick, you said that the, that art was always meant to be played with and to be engaged with. So that it didn't go to your family because of Covid and then now it's on walls and in with school children, and in other ways it's kind of having a different life of being, played with and interacted with and you know having conversations start around different things. So not what was intended, necessarily, but I guess an evolution of its own. Maybe and I just I want to, to bring that up into the conversation here as well, just because you are so well, my, my sense is that you're like “Yes, play with this.” Like these are the the most important things about being an artist is the love of art always always like that and you're not talking about people and that sort of the relational element with the art, if that makes sense.

**Dominick:** Yeah, where, where can you draw from an endless pool of inspiration? It's gonna, going to be loving compassion.

**Kat:** Oh!

**Dominick:** I absolutely think that. Yeah, I wanted people to be able to play with the masks. I mean they're meant for, for half of them, for children. Almost so, you know, almost half of them. I'm glad that people got something tactile.

**Kat:** Yeah I love to you, know one of the things that we try to do is really think expansively about who gets to experience art. You know, and we're thinking about it mostly with a disability lens. But I think also Dominick, you know, we, I love that you said no, these were, many of them were made for children. And I think a lot of times they're all these barriers to art that exist and and you know a lot of people determining who gets to access art and I think, I love that in so many ways, we're trying to break those down. And I know that we've had schools go see this exhibit, experience exhibit, interact with this exhibit, make masks inspired by this exhibit. Inspired by your piece, and so I think, it really has been able to broaden it both with folks with disabilities accessing art, folks of all ages accessing art, rural folks around the state accessing art, and so gratitude to all of you, for just that expansiveness that's, that's happened because of this exhibit now.

Great, okay, so, just as a matter of time, because we're gonna be doing a dynamo, I'm, kind of gonna give these next three questions as a whole, and you choose what speaks to you. So the questions are, you know, and some of you you've already touched, on some of these - but think about your work, with MASKED and your experience with MASKED just the past year of yourself as an artist.

How has it impacted your artistic identity or process? Your sense of disability or connections? And opportunities? And you don't have to speak to all of those, to one or more. But just to go around briefly and kind of think about artistic identity, sense of disability, connections, and opportunities, whichever, one of those resonate to you. And whoever would like to start go for it. David yeah, it looks like you're ready. Wonderful.

**David:** Yeah, I can. I can start. Yeah, I feel, like, MASKED in a sense, gave me my own sense of identity, because MASKED came in a very like pivotal time of my life.

I was in the last year of college, like about to go into what my life is now, an adult life. So MASKED very much was my like, a step into my new life where I found out this new part of me I’ve never did - like I did sports growing up.

I never thought I would be an artist. So I did that one class that was the only art class I've done. And so I guess it's sort of MASKED created my artist identity because I really didn’t have an identity in art before MASKED. And so in the sense, that that definitely created my art identity.

With my disability identity I've always sort of been very upfront about my disability. I'm always having - I'm always usually the only one with a disability. Like I'm the only one in my family, most of my schools, and so MASKED was a way for me to connect to people, who have a disability just like me, in a way that I don't really get to connect with many people. And so I think disability’s already been a big, you know, always been identity piece for me, but MASKED has helped me explore in more ways than I thought. That's led into like opportunities of being in the exhibit and just the connections I've built through Inclusive Arts had been very rewarding. Like my life has gone through so much change in the last year, and MASKED was a huge part of that and I could not - like I would not be where I was if it wasn't for MASKED. Like I already have like a wall of like all my art on it. And then I have like, I went to some of the MASKED exhibits and I collected some of the pamphlets to put on my wall, too. So MASKED is just like, I will always be thankful for MASKED. And it made me like who the artist I am today, so.

**Kat:** Hmm. We will always be thankful for you, David. I know that. That's beautiful, thank you for that reflection and yeah, you know I, it's, it's, I think that this time is a really evolving time for a lot of folks. And so we're so glad to have been part of that process for you. And that this exhibit and the experience of the exhibit was that. Any other thoughts? Who else would like to share?

**Heidi:** And I'm gonna add into that if there's a, an artist who said something that inspires you to respond to that.

So kind of open ended at this point. And we will, we will wrap up with suggestions, and in just a few, yeah.

**Kate:** I, I will just mention that I really, you know, you mentioned the people, and the people I've met through this and the one that I've interacted the most withs with this group, is, is Heidi, and we've had some very interesting conversations, discussions. Different perspectives. And she's, always saying you know

“It's, it's a growing and a learning process.” And

I definitely feel less encumbered by what I perceived as negatives about some of these labels. And I, I know that when children would come to my horse program, and when I, I always know when someone's ADH. I have two horses that are ADH and they connect with those kids so phenomenally. And I, I, I can say to them, but I wasn't always saying it to myself. Sometimes they would say it almost in shame when they would tell me, “Oh, yeah, I'm one of those.” And I would say, give me a high 5, because I am too, referring to ADH. I say, I know, let me tell you what I know about you. I also know that you are brilliant, that you are curious, and you are innovative. You’re also very intuitive. You have a good sense with animals, creation, even people, but you get bored very easily. You do not like being bored. Okay, you could have a dramatic reaction to that. You could either just numb out or you can fight back. I see that my horse, Houdini Hoxter, for sure. And I said, “but there are some things that are hard for you, that are also frustrating for other people. But we can ask for help for those,” because when I was trying to figure out I wasn't sure I could pull this all together. There were so many complexities, but Heidi would just say, “Well that's okay. We know you're trying. You could get it to us on Monday.”

I won't even go through all the things I had to go through to even make, get all the way through those steps, but also fits with what I tell the children that come here, so I acknowledge there's a limitation, but it doesn't need to totally stymie us, and drown us. We can get help, we can learn new skills, we can get a partner that could kind of take care of that.

But I said, but so, they they the issue sometimes is a focus, and you're being able to focus in the way, other people want you to do and sometimes that's hard for you to do but when there's something that's really important to you you will focus, and you will persist long after other people would have, quit. Okay, and I know, that's true for me, with my horse program because a lot of people just say, “You're a crazy horse lady. Why are you putting so much of your efforts into this yourself?” Whatever okay. And, and I knew that what I'm doing with the horse program, is important and I’m glad I've persisted with it, because I, being able to see the fruit in other people's lives, that what I've grown through I could offer them hope and encouragement. And I'm only realizing now, as I'm talking about it. Wow, that is that part of me that got me through to even get my entry to you to be considered.

So thank you.

**Heidi:** Oh, yeah, it's it's mutual, and you know again, I'll put the Inclusive Arts Vermont kind of lens, on it which is the world have, there's people, there's barriers for people with disabilities in the world and sometimes there's a little healthy dose who says this timeline? You know, like at some point there needs to be a deadline. But access is about creativity, and we build in wiggle room, for our own capacity, and yeah, so there's some flexibility within that. And I think Inclusive Arts Vermont, my hope is that we're a little bit different than a traditional organization, that just sees the rules, without seeing people, because we talk about humans first, so, yeah.

**Kate:** And I remember being at the Saxtons River, that, how a person there spoke about how it really kind of helped cause them to stop and relook even technical things like at what height do you put a piece of art on the wall. And oh, realizing there's not a handicap parking sign out in front, it's way, down the road. So there's ripple effects in many, many ways.

**Kat:** There, that's a great point. And so you know it's both with the individual artists, but it also is with communities, and Saxtons River, for instance, there are now, there's now a permanent accessible parking spot right outside of their facility. They advocated to the town to make one because of this exhibit and because the work we were doing around inclusive practices and so we're so grateful for the artists but also for the venues we get to work with

who are making those changes and who are learning. So, that, thank you for bringing that up, Kate, that's great, yeah.

Dominick or Paul, did you want to share just anything about how it's impacted, your artistic identity, or sense of disability or connections?

**Paul:** Hello!

**Kat:** Yeah, go ahead. Paul.

**Paul:** One thing that I'm noticing is that for me because because I have my work out now, it’s made me become more self, made me become more self aware of what I’m, of what I’m putting out there for the, for the public to see. Because everybody always, always gives me compliments.

**Heidi:** Yeah, makes you more self aware of what you're putting out for the public.

**Paul:** Yeah

**Heidi:** Nice

Kat: Yeah, it's interesting, because this, you know, a lot of our artists talks, we had a lot of our artists say, you know, I, I think the majority of our artists said, not and this is not you know everybody, but said that they make art for themselves. You know, they make art, because they're inspired and that creates, creative process, but an exhibition by nature is a reciprocal process between the folks who are experiencing art and the artists. And so you know it, it's putting that art out there, into the world. And so there's a great, you know, an increase to awareness of that reciprocity, between artistic audiences and creators.

And so, yeah.

**Heidi:** Dominick, I know it's always okay, to pass.

But we're just gonna invite you in and also we might skip into the, the final question while you're still here before you have to head out so Kat, if you want to remind of the question.

**Kat:** Yeah, perfect, so Dominick, if you, what we'll do is kind of have you speak to those questions, if you want but then also, because we know you have to head out if there's anything else. So Dominick you've got a hefty thing. How has this impacted artistic identity, or process, a sense of disability, connections or opportunities? Any or all of those. What suggestions might you offer to disabled artists in the audience? Or anything else you want folks to know? So kind of this is your wrap up Dominick, like share with us whatever from that you would like.

**Dominick:** Okay, so MASKED How has it affected my artist identity or process? I think that at least during the time, that the exhibition has been going on I've returned to a sense of my own artist's identity and realized that there are many people, far more than I realized - numbering over 100, that think of me as an artist, and have wondered where my artwork is and why it wasn't available, or why I haven't been making gifts of art over the last few years. And that some sense of, some sense of it, some sense of inspiration, no, no pride at all, no ego, nothing I always saw as troubling signs. Just a small comfort and you know a reason to make some more things to give away, and find homes for. So, I suppose that's part of how it's helped my identity.

**Kat:** Yeah

**Dominick:** I would add that well, I'll get into some of the connections. But I've also realized looking at my art from across I don't know thirty-something years, 40 if I looked further, I've seen paintings that I've made that I couldn't even believe I made. And I realized I I taught myself how to paint them in that day that were like a mix of a Renaissance painting, and another artist I can't remember. And I've seen color combinations that I, I wouldn't even think or dare to do nowadays that I've, I've done very simply. And I found architectural renderings hanging on my parents walls and I, the painting of shoes that was timeless, I somehow made and all this just completely different, completely different things I've never had a, you know. I've always loved to draw and I've always loved to, to explore painting, but I hadn’t really realized for everything from graphic design to video game design, to digital art, to sculpture. I mean I, I don't have a particular style. And though I can do almost any style I guess it's a skill, maybe it's a rare skill, but, so I'm glad of that. And it reminds me, and so I'm saying, as an, as an identity I don't have a particular style, and the same with Martial Arts. When I was 18, I just you know, just, I would study 4 or 5 more styles of Martial Arts. Which is something you guys probably don't know about. But at one point I just realized that the greatest form of martial arts is just to be ready and to have a serenity of mind and have absolutely no style. Because no style can prepare you for what can happen? So I, those hard to say but that's my best attempt at it.

And then sense of disability. Well, it's, it's been reinforcing that I don't have to be a handicap, I mean, for instance, I'm very exhausted today, in the last couple of days. But I, with the healthy diet and some exercise I'll get to this pile of work that I have all these paints for and I've done my drawings. So I mean. There's a few things. Also it's, it's not necessarily me alone, but I've been part of the community of people, with various degrees of disability who would, you know, the people with severe Lyme disease and you know to see us all persevere is inspiring. I think that I don't know how to say, but that's more, more valuable to me that I could possibly say to you, it's in fact, I wouldn't change it for not having gotten sick almost to see some of the persevering spirit is, I might have, I might have missed it had I not been able to see it first hand and and that would that would have been quite a loss. And I, I, I really don't have a better way of saying that.

How has it facilitated connections or opportunities?

Well, and I might add as well great inspiration has come from all this well within this group, the connections are all boundless, you know there's no there's no limitation, we haven't all met in person, if any of us have. I don't know I haven't been to these exhibits, mostly because of Covid, and then placement, where I was located, but being in the shows has definitely inspired me to find other shows, which have maybe more, found me. To take on those opportunities with less fear or trepidation, more willing to to take on even art making and not so worried, or precious about the end product but know I'll get there

in this or the next piece you know? But I mean, I think that question also has to do with more tangible connections, and simply an internal dialogue. So I don't think a person could say enough what it is to have their work shown from a place of solitude and sometimes desperation.

When you're sick, and to suddenly be propelled into any form of show let alone give them a community of artists of like minds, to speak to. But that in and of itself is the greatest value in this journey or experience, for me. So that has opened my mind to other opportunities I would not have considered. I wouldn’t have considered taking on any of the shows, even co-hosting shows. I wouldn't even consider even talking about them, and picking up the paintbrush to look at them.

What suggestions might you offer to disabled artists, artists in the audience, anything else? I'm not you know full of suggestions. But I mean, I'm sure we've all self arrived at the same conclusions that it's your work in your time you put in derived from your inspiration gives us an opportunity to share a moment. A person, most of the people that see our artwork they'll never be in the moment that we felt inspired to, to create it. However, we can bring them to that moment through our artwork, and through a dialogue at times as well.

This is one of the greatest gifts of, of making, of any kind, of writing, of drawing, painting, the film, fashion sculpture, design, performance art, anything we bring up we bring some, carry something, we share something, like, like a film, so to speak, is a way, clear example. Also that you know whatever it is I found and I don't know if I'm saying this necessarily to you, or just with you, that a therapy that's very valuable for me is my creating my of things. Writing of images folding paper but they you, know I'm, getting something yeah, I may not feel well on that

day, but I will have made something.

And people don't see into our disability. I think it's nearly impossible for most people to see into a disability. Sometimes the more educated they are the harder it is for them to actually understand, instead of know, what's wrong, but not actually to understand what it's like. There's a very big difference. And as people with any form of health concerns, mental physical, anything, emotional

I guess you could say is third wheel on that or spiritual.

you know. As people experience it there may be a way that we can show people what we see, how we feel, also that we're not so different from other people.

It doesn't make us less or necessarily, more, you know.

But I have found in a way of a blessing that disability can give us an added strength, a sensitivity to others. Coming from a place of suffering I may, I've learned to take more consideration for others. I've appreciated my conversations for when I have the opportunity to be outside, and to have them with somebody you know.

I think that's so. Perhaps some of that sensitivity that comes from a bit of physical or mental suffering gives us an insight. can give us an extra intuition to connect with the subjects that we try to create our way, and the people that we speak to. I, I have noticed that and I've started to notice that in many people who have chronic illnesses that they tend to be given an extra sense of compassion and a deeper insight into human emotion about the people around them, and they connect with people very deeply, and in a much more effortless fashion. And sometimes we appreciate, we appreciate more of the connection, so I don't know if that's exactly something I can offer but it's something I’ve, I've witnessed.

**Kat:** Thank you so much for that Dominick, yeah, that's a powerful reflection. Thank you, and thank you for being part of this and sharing the compassion and receiving compassion. Being open to receiving it and we're glad that this has been an inspiring experience for you and knowing you has been an inspiring experience for us. So wonderful. I know it’s 2:30, and I know you had to go by 2:30, think yeah. Thank you for being here and then for other artists, we're gonna go around and just kind of, the, the final prompt is: What suggestion might you offer disabled artists in the audience or anything else that you'd like to share?

**Dominick:** Thank you guys.

**Kat:** Thanks, Dominick.

**Dominick:** God bless.

**Kat:** Go ahead. Paul, yeah.

**Paul:** What I (was saying in the first place) is I know for myself I, I always have to keep something in the back of my mind to, to have motivation to go in a place take a good photo and very I've been inspired by the SSTA bus, the SSTA buses around, but, the for what I haven’t brought my camera on the bus yet. So one day, so one day on the bus I might take it - photograph what is going on through the bus windows. (Where they park you on the busses I enjoy the ride, and want to take pictures out the window of the bus but it’s hard to have a technique to photograph through the window - it would be hard to see out the window) so that’s one of the challenges I have right now and I have been inspired by all these bus rides but I don’t have my camera. That all I say for this. But we’ll figure it out.

**Heidi:** Yeah, thanks Paul, for adding a little bit more about some of your challenges, and, and I just heard you say at the end there you'll figure it out, you know, that sort of sense of flexibility, adaptability, perseverance.

**Paul:** Yeah

**Heidi:** Yeah, yeah, thanks so much Paul, I think, probably other artists and other disabled artists might relate a little bit to perseverance, and also frustration. You know, like, sometimes, sometimes things are challenging. yeah.

**Paul:** Yeah

**David:** Yeah, I was about to say, like, I'll relate very much to the perseverance and like that's very much like in tune what like my suggestion was going to be like artists, and all that if you show any interest in art and have the courage to try at least once. Because you just never know what is going to happen, and that’s sort of what led me to MASKED. It was just like “Hey, like let me just try this, try this and see what happens.” And it just led to this whole different path.

But I think just not just disability artists, or artists, but just like people in general, actually, with life, is just if you show interest in something, if something generally interests you, have the courage and bravery to try at least once because if you try and you don't like it then I, you, you can say you tried instead of holding on to like, “What if I did that?” And I'm happy that I did the MASKED because I probably would have gone through my life back, what if I did the MASKED, like what would have happened? And now I got to see what happened.

So I think that would have been like that's my suggestion to just anyone, is if you can show interest. Just try, just once to see what happens.

**Heidi:** Hmm.

**Kate:** And and I, I would just comment David, cause I, I listen to your, your first artist talk. And I, just you, you just express so much more confidence. I can't really say, can't even really, it, it's very very tangible, and, and it feels like this even a joy. There's something more that comes from within you, because you did take this risk.

**David:** I appreciate it. Thank you

**Kate:** And yeah, and then you took the risk to be willing to be interviewed. And that was I know for me all that was really scary.

**David:** It definitely was.

**Kate:** You're obviously feeling more comfortable with that. And yeah, now, I'm gonna have to look up your art more of what you're doing.

**Kat:** Yeah, and, and I think you know, I, and I'll let I'll go back to just to or actually I won't say, David anything else

you wanted to share too about suggestions? Those are beautiful suggestions that I think especially in this time, when a lot of folks have not felt you know, it's, it's a hard time to be inspired right now, in some ways. But I think sometimes we get so caught up in final product in what you know what if I mess up, but just I, I think what you're saying is just play and play with that creativity and allowing yourself. If there's an inkling of interest, allow yourself to play and go into those creative spaces because who knows what will come with it? Whether it's just a therapeutic creative process, or whether it's a total shift in life. You know, allowing yourself to play and explore and trying to kind of remove some of that fear from it I think is, is, is huge and really important right now, in the world.

**David:** I, think, like, what I love about art is the final product is great and like I love like with my exhibit and want to like out about my favorite part of it with like creating process, of it and it's like it's a good reminder, to me, as like someone who's just like living life, and I'm about to turn 24. About to have time, my first birthday in the city like somebody just going into a lot in life. It's well, reminder to enjoy the journey, like going through don't always think about the destination. I feel like we get stuck with like, especially my age.

People always want to invite, once the future going back to what's your career? What is your family gonna be like? When will you get married? All that like, everyone's always thinking about the final product and what art has for done for me is just remind me that what gets the journey that I enjoyed so the final product could be great too, but don't forget to also enjoy the process to it, because that'll just make the final product even better.

**Heidi:** Thanks, David.

**Kat:** Nice Kate, any final thoughts, any suggestions, or final thoughts that you'd like to share?

**Kate:** Yes, I will like. I'm not sure that came directly as a result of the MASKED, though, though the MASKED giving me the confidence that I put that together,

I got it in, helped me respond to a request from a local gallery who learned about my Abenaki story, and said, well, I would love to have a display of Abenaki traditions, and she knew also I'd been to South Dakota, and have many images from my Lakota friends. And so fortunately she gave me a year to do it. So a good thing, and so last spring, I, I had an exhibit called Tradition of Abenaki and Lakota people. And it was a challenge, pulling it together. I didn't have a lot of money. I couldn't afford what I want, is really quality matting and frame that enhances the image not to just put it into any old thing. And I had to make do with one I had what I could find at Hobby Lobby.

When it was 50% off. But I got it together, and it was just a really nice display. And it was the first they hosted, their first open event that they've had since Covid and for, for me to talk a share, and she said I'm not sure if we'll have very many people, you know, but counting all of us, we ended up with 17 people there. And and I got, I, so I get, I had that opportunity to share the stories that were behind

the images, Did I sell any? No! But I'm, I'm not past believing that I have a value that I should financially be able to gain from my art. At this point I'm just very content and grateful to have the opportunities and keep working on improving my skill set. and I also feel that what the whole Covid thing is done helped me become more aware of much more online stuff. Right now, I don't have a website, yet but I am getting very intentional and I'm

asking, some people have offered to help me cause I know that would help if I could say to people you could go look at this. But I think because there's so many changes in the world because of Covid and businesses that couldn't stay functioning in the Covid world very well many of them have moved to be coming online businesses and I think that that is an area where there's an opportunity for us as artists to be able to promote our artwork, you know across the country, across the world. So I still got to keep working on the tech skills.

**Heidi:** Don’t we all. This is Heidi, but I think at this point we're winding down and Kat is there any any other questions, or other wrap up I mean? Thank you so much to all of you, for your time, your presence, your authenticity, your creativity, and I am looking forward to whatever’s next, those are a few things with MASKED. But as we wind down today, Kat, anything from your perspective that we've missed, will we move on to include?

**Kat:** Just it's been such a beautiful experience to witness all of you in, as your artistic selves, as the humans you are and, and I think there's such a generosity of spirit from all of you, and what you've given each other as an artistic, community, what you shared with us as an organization, and what you've shared with the folks who have been able to engage with your art, whether it's through these talks, or through folks who are seeing and experiencing the art on the walls. So it's just a real immense joy and honor to share a space with you and to know you, and to to, to be part of your community. And I will forever have gratitude with, for, for this group of humans. Yeah.

**David:** Thank you for having us. Like I've always wanted just I think we have to thank like Heidi and Kat, and everyone who works at Inclusive, but like all of this is thanks to all the work that you should be put in. So I think that's all it is too, we are very appreciated of all the work you put in behind the scenes cause that's like we have we've put the artwork, but none of this would be like put together, without the work that you just want to be with so just thank you for all the hard work, you do.

**Kate:** And, and I add that to for the gallery. You know it.

It reminded me how much I love, used to love just going in galleries and enjoying the art of other people. I mean, I would go into fancy galleries, and say, I can't afford to buy anything, but I could just stand here and look and admire and consider what that's speaking to me. So I wanna thank all the folks that are part of that. And I'm really looking forward to when we're at the State House. I think it's time for us to all consider ways that this might be able to have an impact on legislators, and legal and funding and more education opportunities for all of what you're doing.

**Heidi:** Yeah, yes, thank you. And stay tuned we will be inviting artists into planning for the next exhibition.

So you know it's a process, right. I'm a forward thinker and we value input from people who are doing the art.

And you know, have the lived experience. So we're, we're wrapping up winding down. I wanted to merge those words, apparently 2022, as reflective, and 23 is on its way, not yet but you know, stay tuned. We, as I say, we know where you live, but we also have your email addresses. I think, is is part of the 22. Or the text messages, and we will. It is a joy and a privilege, and a pleasure to be able to do this work with you. So, yeah, I'm glad it's appreciated, but it's really a joy from, from my inside out. Yeah.

**Kat:** Alright, I think, thank you all so much. Paul, David, Kate, Dominick, who is no longer here. And Megan, thank you from behind the scenes. Heidi, thank you for being just the artner of my heartner. You know, it's been such a joy working with you and major gratitude. For this community, yeah.