

Transcript of Interview with Helen Brechlin by Alex Brice

Interviewee: Helen Brechlin

Interviewer: Alex Rice

Date: 08/10/2020

Location (Interviewee):

Location (Interviewer):

Abstract: Alex Brice interviews Helen Brechlin, who is an administrative supervisor at the Boston Institutes Contemporary Art Museum. The interview begins with Helen discussing the onset of quarantine and the transition to working from home. She explains the intricacies of managing a team digitally. Additionally, Helen goes into how living with a partner who also works from home, you have to develop a new routine and learning to balance time and space. Helen then explains some things she did teleworking to keep her team strong, including having weekly communications and diving deeper into some of the artists displayed at the museum. Then Helen is asked about the George Floyd incident and how it impacted her and she expressed the importance of community, advocating change, and separately the importance of real communication over social media. Lastly, Helen talked about the differences after reopening the museum and making it safe and comfortable for visitors.

Alex Brice 00:00

Great. So to get started with the script, we're recording. My name is Alex Brice. I am here with Helen Brechlin. The date is August 10 2020. The time is 1:10pm East Coast time. I am located in Boston, Massachusetts. Helen, where are you located?

Helen Brechlin 00:22

I'm in Boston as well.

Alex Brice 00:25

Great. I want to briefly review the informed consent and deed of gift document that you signed. This interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project, which is associated with the Journal of the plague year a COVID-19 Archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experiences of the COVID 19 pandemic. We have designed this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their oral histories to our open access an open source database. This study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time. recordings demographic information, and the verbatim transcripts will be deposited in the Journal of the plague year, a COVID-19 archive and the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer?

Helen Brechlin 01:24

I don't think so.

Alex Bice 01:26

Great. Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in the study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University by UPI IUPY or the Indiana University pui Arts and Humanities Institute. participating in this project means that your interview will be recorded in digital video and or audio format and may be transcribed the recordings and possible transcriptions of my interview copy of any supplementary documents or additional photos that you wish to share. And the informed consent and deed of gift may be deposited in the Journal of the plague year, a COVID-19 archive in the Indiana University Library System and will be available to both researchers and the general public. Your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Do you have any questions?

Helen Brechlin 02:26

No.

Alex Bice 02:27

Great. In addition to your signed documents, would you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms?

Helen Brechlin 02:36

I understand and I agree.

Alex Bice 02:38

Fantastic. I am also asking that you verbally confirmed that, verbally confirmed that you have agreed that your interview will be made available under the following license, the COVID-19 Oral History Project journal of a plague year, and the trustees of Indiana University.

Helen Brechlin 02:57

Yes.

Alex Bice 02:59

Fantastic. And then sorry, one last confirmation. And can I get a verbal confirmation that you would like this oral history to be made public immediately?

Helen Brechlin 03:13

Yes.

Alex Bice 03:15

Fantastic. Great. Thank you so much for all of that. To get. To get started. Could you talk a little bit about your background as well as where you work currently in the position that you hold?

Helen Brechlin 03:30

Sure. So again, I'm Helen Brechlin, and I'm currently a gallery supervisor and administrator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. Before coming to the ICA, I studied painting and art history at Massachusetts College of Art and Design. And I always had always went to museums growing up. My parents weren't necessarily outdoorsy people. So we always were at museums and they felt like a comfortable and a familiar landing point for me after school. So I've been at the ICA now for about four years, and an enjoyment starting right in the frontline role as a visitor assistant, the gallery staff member responsible for security, customer service and education and now I supervise that team and also do some administrative work for it. And I think I need I think I did I answer that question fully. Is there something else that needs to get answered?

Alex Bice 04:45

um, no, I think you've covered all of it. Did you Sorry, go ahead

Helen Brechlin 04:51

Im also an artists and I paint when I when I'm able to.

Alex Bice 04:57

Gotcha. Could you describe what An average day at your position would have looked like before the start of the pandemic.

Helen Brechlin 05:06

Yeah, so I have a dual role being half of the time. I'm in the administrative offices, again, doing things like scheduling, answering emails for the team, you know, working on like the back of house, necessary admin work, like planning, training planning, these morning meetings that we have payroll, are approving timesheets, things like that. The other half of the time, I'm directly on the floor with the visitors assistant team working with the public. You know, while the [inaudible] museum is open, so, you know, checking in with the visitor assistants, making sure that they have what they need also checking with our visitors making sure our visitors have what they need. And fielding questions, feeling concerns. I would be walking around the galleries, talking to individuals, making sure that the galleries are running smoothly, whether that's from a staff standpoint, or a visitor standpoint.

Alex Bice 06:14

Understood. Right. So let's sort of go back a little bit to towards sort of January, February, and I guess early March, what were some of the things you heard about the Corona virus? Or did you think about it at all much during that period of time? Did you have any concerns about it sort of in those early months?

Helen Brechlin 06:40

It was like, you know, on the periphery wasn't at least in in January, early February, very much on the periphery. Once we once it became end of February, early March. I remember talking with a co worker. And that coworker has mentioned that their roommate had ordered a lot of toilet paper. And we were starting to talk about the Corona virus in the US and what that meant. I think at that point, we started hearing about the Seattle area like the West Coast, having a large or beginning to be large outbreak.

The Boston area it was kind of heading in that direction to I think fairly soon. So there was some discussion, but it never we kind of were still under the impression that or at least I was that the museum would never close. Since it was such an unprecedented thing to happen. But unprecedented times call for unprecedented responses. I remember the day that we decided to or that the museum decided to close. I wasn't sure you know thing. The Boston area was beginning to shut down a little bit more. at a government level there sounded like there were a lot of talks happening. At an individual level, I wasn't sure exactly what was happening wasn't sure how to be feeling or what to be concerned about. And when the museum made its announcement, it was a Thursday, the 12th. One of the first things that I thought about was my the team that I supervise, they're a part time staff. What does this mean for them? I know myself as a full time employee, if museum closed that there would be things that I could work on at home, ideally, even if if my position was kept on but the staff that I directly work with all of their work is is frontline is in the galleries. It's something that needs that has to be done present to be [inaudible] working with the public talking to them about the artwork in the same space. Having conversations and how does that translate? How does that work? If the institution closes, but also about the safety of everyone? This is a [inaudible] It was a scary moment is a scary time there was an outbreak that was happening in the area and how rapidly it was spreading. This was another thing that really stood out.

Alex Bice 09:55

Understood, sorry, go ahead.

Helen Brechlin 09:59

I was gonna say Like so we, the museum made the I don't know if I'm jumping ahead of your questions, but the museum made the decision to close. And at office staff were given Friday, Friday the 13th of all days to be on site one last time to kind of get everything together, that we would need to begin working from home fully. There wasn't a clear idea of how long this would happen. It was kind of just indefinitely. I had never worked from home at that point. So I was like, trying to figure out what, what do I need from this desk? That needs to come home with me? In order to do the work that I do? So that was a question. I think I just ended up taking most of the snacks I had. Go back, not knowing how long it would be. And you know, maybe I think I left like an important notebook there. And I was like, but at least I got the snacks.

Alex Bice 11:12

You can never you can never overestimate the importance of snacks. So

Helen Brechlin 11:17

yeah. Yeah, I was joking with a co worker because I had a can of soup at my desk. And she they were saying that, you know, that's going to be pretty valuable.

Alex Bice 11:36

Do you have any idea or if not, that's totally fine as well, any idea what the reaction was or how some of the part time staff you supervised felt when the announcement was made that Thursday that the museum was going to close?

Helen Brechlin 11:54

About like, I can't speak to all of their experiences, but I think there was like, there, there ended up being a staff meeting. Because we were still open. So there was a lot of part time staff there. Thursday's are a long day at the museum. That's where we see a lot of staff come into work. So there's most of the team, I think, ends up overlapping on a Thursday. And I think there was concern about being able to attend this, like on site meeting, where our director announced, the museum would be closing. There was certainly a lot of anxiety when it came to compensation. What that meant, you know, especially for part time staff, who are hourly, who are compensated for the hours that they physically work on site. So if that ability to work on site is taken away, what does that mean? That doesn't mean that the museum will move forward with furloughs or layoffs. I think that general uncertainty was pretty apparent overall, you know, again, it was one of the first thing that I thought about, and I'm not, I'm not a part time staff member. But again, I work with them so closely. So it's hard not to think about that. Especially, you know, while we all many of us, I could say, you know, have come to the, to work at the ICA because we enjoy the work that we're doing. But isn't necessarily everyone's recent, some, you know, this is a job and how they make ends meet so when that comes into question, it can be really scary and on top of, you know, a looming pandemic.

Alex Bice 13:55

Absolute

Helen Brechlin 13:56

that ability, I think was like shaken a bit yeah,

Alex Bice 14:05

definitely.

Helen Brechlin 14:07

I think also because the way that our position works, it's pretty flexible to add hours as needed and, and reduce hours as needed. So if you were in a flux, where you were actually trying to add hours and then suddenly that that ability to you know, make a little bit more money for a short amount of time was taken away and and even, you know, put into question if you had a form of income and this is pretty scary moment.

Alex Bice 14:45

Definitely. In terms of so moving past sort of the sort of first reactions as things got started, what was what were you What did you experience mostly during quarantine when the museum was closed both like personally and professionally.

Helen Brechlin 15:09

So when quarantine first happened when we decided, okay, go home stay home. It was a real, you know, a real adjustment, I would say, I feel like I adjusted pretty quickly, I feel like I have a pretty privileged position for this, you know, professionally, my, the ICA decided to keep me on payroll, decided to work with its staff, and they ended up keeping all of their part time and full time staff on payroll, which I think was a really important thing, especially in the arts and culture sector, when

compensation can be really limited and can be difficult at all levels. Both for employees and for the institutions themselves. Funding is something that's constantly being discussed. And for our, for the ICA to continue paying all of its full and part time staff was a real relief, I think also helped, you know, provide some some dignity to those who are working, and, you know, didn't have a choice to not be working. While I ended up working from home working on thinking about okay, what do I need to do for my team? How do I, what is the best move right now? Because this is something that is, you know, its health, its safety. It's also, again, the income stability might have been changed. How do you? How are you there for your staff? How do you make them feel supported? How do you give them space? It's what it is that they need is space? How do you make them feel connected to an institution, they're no longer able to, you know, physically do and how do you keep the community going? And I think we, I'd like to think that we have a fairly strong community amongst the team. I think at that time, we had about 40 visitors system altogether 40, part time staff members who worked in the gallery, so we really tried to emphasize a team feeling in this, this community. And how do you do that digitally, far from each other, at home? Personally speaking, again, I have a good amount of space to live in, I have rooms that I can go into two at least, to have a space from those I work with, have a dedicated space to work in Wi Fi that's available, pretty high speed that gives me the ability to work well. More time with my cat has been kind of nice. I think the cat likes it to be sitting right next to me. So if you hear any meow's at any point during this, that's the catch. But I think what I've really appreciated is I live with my my longtime boyfriend, and I've gotten to spend a lot of time with him. And that has been really nice. And we've really begun a new routine, we began a new routine. So in the beginning, it was like, Okay, how do we do this? We're going to work we have now have to work at the same in the same place together. We're now essentially kind of co workers. So figuring out where where does one person work? Where does the other person work? What do we need to set up to make that comfortable for both of us? It was a great actual, it was actually a pretty great trial run since my boyfriend will be starting a Ph. D program. And we'll need a lot of time to and space to work and to do that studying. So I guess it kind of worked out in our favor. And we've begun cooking a lot of meals together and going to the grocery store together, which has been very nice. I think I've been eating a lot healthier. It's an added bonus. But because we could only go to the store once a week and we really try it took us like a moment to get there. But we have now been going to the store just once a week for months now. And that has really helped keep us on a specific meal regiment. I guess. regiment sounds like too. too strict but planning out our meals for the week. Being conscious of over eating, being conscious of how many times we're leaving the space. I think being inside all day is something that was pretty hard at first. So taking at least that first couple of months, being really deliberate about taking walks, you know, however, move and go out for a walk, make sure you have space. That kind of adjustment. Wearing a mask is something that I think I've adjusted to more recently, due to reopening of the museum compared to the beginning of the quarantine, since it was only something I had to wear outside. So it was like false. Well, false, like comfort. So I'm at home, I don't have to wear a mask. I kind of like being a homebody. I like doing like the work that I was doing at home is the administrative side of my position. And I was finding that really interesting and kind of wanted to grow in that part of my my professional life anyway. So this was a great time to do that. I have a lot of time to also research artists and and listen to artists talks, since artist talks can be you know, like an hour long that other time that I don't always get to dedicate. So it was nice to have time to do that. Did a lot of puzzles.

Alex Bice 21:30

Good. Good choice.

Helen Brechlin 21:32

Yeah. I always really enjoyed puzzles. So it was great to have like time to do that, too. It was not, it was not great to run into the difficulty of finding a puzzle.

Alex Bice 21:45

Yes. Fantastic. That's all very good to hear. I wanted to go back. So one thing you said, just because I found it really interesting. What did you think? Or in terms of trying to like keep a sense of community with your part time staff while everyone is sort of separated, How did you go about that? What did you find effective? And what do you do think? And were there any parts of it? Or any things you tried that you feel like just didn't work for your staff for your institution?

Helen Brechlin 22:25

Yeah, so that I, for some background, there's myself, another supervisor, and we have the direct manager. So we are we kind of make up the management team for the visitor assistant team. And this was a question that was pretty big in the beginning. My manager was really cognizant of, of giving space to everyone, both us as supervisors and and to the visitor system team, to trying to make herself available as much as needed to know her staff. So there was this big question, the big question is, you know, this is a scary time, we don't know how this is affecting everyone. We don't know what they're going to want. That we took some time. We didn't want to just email everyone, you know, like, incessantly? That's not a great feeling. It. We also know, the, you know, the question was, how often would staff be checking their email, it doesn't feel like a time where you can really require that, since the position is so different. And, you know, they don't have necessarily specific hours. So if you would be requiring them to check email, kind of sales wouldn't go into it, great. But they're, you know, more important things, or other things that might meet their attention, or compared to a simple working out of the house. So you didn't, at first a lot of individual check in a little, you know, those who I talked to pretty regularly on the floor, I reached out to an individual and now it's kind of checking in, but trying again, to provide that space to not ask someone to share more than what they felt comfortable sharing. After about a month or so, or actually even before that, we were still sending out some sort of like weekly communication because we felt there should be some sort of communication. And that would keep us all together on the same page. It was part of the program before to have weekly communications. So it made sense that we would be doing these but that they would be a little bit different. So each week, they would come from a different member of the management team, we kind of rotated to share into spread out that, that work and also that giving that voice to each of us. So, in these like little emails, there wasn't really much to report on in terms of work. If we worked actively working with visitors and needing to do updates about the schedule or anything, it became more like, you know, here's something that I've been thinking about or noticing, here's some, you know, interesting news that I've read, the only there was often like a link about to some sort of animal. Those are nice and fun, to be like a little, put a little smile, hopefully. And then we wanted to do an artist's highlight. So whether it was an artists that might be coming up in the future, or we tried to stick to artists that were in our collection, and taking the time to actually, you know, dive deeper into them, which I kind of like said before, but sharing that with the team sharing interviews that we found sharing some articles that we found, reading a little blurb about the artists, and maybe why we found them interesting

or, and trying to choose artists that, you know, might be relevant to the time or help us have a different perspective. The first artist that I talked about was Kara Walker, which in hindsight, you know, feels more relevant than ever. And she's always been an artist that I enjoyed for wanting to promote her work. And while she's quite well, known, it was so fun to to listen to her talks again and interviewed her interviews after so we did those weekly. And it came to a point where we like, you know, we miss seeing everyone's face, she really missed that. It was like a big part of what we did when we were in the galleries. And on site was, you know, seeing everyone having this team talking together talking about art together chatting with everyone. So we wanted to figure out how can we do that virtually. So after some time, it was like a month and a half or something, you know, trying again, trying to make sure we provide a space, we set up a little virtual meeting, and it was over zoom, as most things are now. And we have great attendance, it was completely optional, no one was required to attend that. But it was that for the first one, we have most of the team present. And we were all kind of just talking and commenting on how you know, we missed seeing each other. And I think we had a prompt, I think further to have some sort of icebreaker. So the meeting of I think it was like show something that you've been working on, because a lot of us were working on that. And that was just a really nice moment to go through, you know, reflect, show share something creative, we might have done over the course of the time, and begin to like, connect more in that community. We we also have a group of, of individuals who have the title of visitor assistant lead. And they're a step up from visitor assistants or leaders and kind of rely on them to do a little bit more with the team. So over a closure, they chose individual projects that they wanted to work on to help this community building during this time apart as the sources of these community building is kind of built into their role. So it made sense that they would take these on and again, they were self identified projects. We sent out weekly little puzzles for the team to do so that was you know, word searches crosswords, little like picture, scrub like scrambles all kinds of connected back to the museum in some way. But just something fun and light. Again, completely optional, but something that went out there to look forward to very low stakes, you know.

Alex Bice 29:44

Gotcha.

Helen Brechlin 29:46

Yeah.

Alex Bice 29:47

In terms of you mentioned that, about sort of what people have been making or how they've been relating to this creatively. I was wondering in your own sort have experience as an artist, how has that been the case for you?

Helen Brechlin 30:08

Yeah, the beginning of quarantine, I was able to actually do a lot of making which was really, really nice. That extra, the extra time that I got back from commuting every day, I think a lot of people have felt that that the commute can really grind you down and also take up a lot of time in the day. So having that extra time allows me to do other things like like making, so I made a lot of paintings, able to finish up some other some projects that were kind of lingering, which was nice. And I think I'm painting for me

is, you know, stress relief. It's something that can occupy my mind and just be really, I can be really instinctual about and I don't have to overthink, it can go in there, relax, paint. And enjoy.

Alex Bice 31:11

Fantastic. Um, I have one more topic or thought I wanted to cover in relation to sort of what you experienced during the quarantine. And that is obviously, during that time. The Coronavirus wasn't the only sort of, I guess, major story at the killing of George Floyd and sort of all that came with that, or what became more. What was what became more prominent in the news sort of was very much also part of this period. And I'm wondering, did that have any effects for you either personally, or in relation to the work you do at the ICA?

Helen Brechlin 31:59

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, the killing of George Floyd, which was really upsetting moment. It's unfortunately, not a surprising moment. We've had these moments before. But I think, personally, what stands out about this time, and I think many of us have had this, like, same reaction was the sheer response to it, the fact that because people were home, because people had time, they could really stand up for this injustice, really go out and advocate and protest and share their, you know, feelings, just content, just like being distraught, being frustrated, because it isn't the first time is it? You know, we we want it to be the last time I want it to be the last time I can't say that that's the case. I'm sure that there have been cases since that. And it's, it's really, it's something that stands out, it's something that, you know, should give you cause that does give me pause. And I thought a lot about, you know, it's it's that taking inventory, you know, self inventory of, what are you doing in your life? How, what communities do you have around you? How are you engaging with those communities? What can you be doing more in those communities than you already are? If you are even, you know, connected to them in some way. So I was thinking ok about know, my hometown, I'm originally from Connecticut from a very white town. And the implications of that, and how to get involved there. My, you know, my schooling from Massachusetts College of Art and Design, what, how am I still connected to them and that community, and and also currently in living in Boston, working at the institute's contemporary art, museum, a cultural organization, cultural organizations, and museums have quite a long history. Not always good. And how can I? What do I need to be doing especially in my role as a supervisor, to support my staff? To advocate for changes within the museum within the institution? How can I be using my voice and my privilege as a white woman in a supervisory position to make space and promote, you know, equity and inclusion, belonging, diversity. And we've had a lot, I've been part of many conversations now. And the institution is trying its best to make space for those conversations. I think staff are also, you know, speaking up more and making their own space when there isn't one. But I think it's there's a lot of room for improvement in all spaces, not just at the space that I'm in.

Alex Bice 35:43

Definitely.

Helen Brechlin 35:43

So it has to be, you know, everyone, in my opinion, should be doing their own part, to, to help to support to advocate. And that can take so many forms. And I think that's where a lot of confusion happens. And I know I struggle with that myself, like, what, what is the right move, and it's really hard to

know, to doing a lot of I've been doing a lot of listening, I think we should all be listening. And that's a way to make space is to listen to those around you, especially voices that are not your own. And it is, it is really draining. And that's part of it. And it's just a matter of pushing through that and, you know, doing what you can. So I've been thinking a lot. I know, it's definitely like affected my practice to as an artist. Does it make sense to continue to make the work that I make, which is just like, again, really intuitive? I do like abstract landscapes. Is now the right moment for that. Does that make sense? Since especially because I was posting on on social media, what is the role of social media? I feel like I've just come out of quarantine with a lot more questions than really any answers. But that's probably just a life thing. I have a lot of think,

Alex Bice 37:22

sorry, I was just gonna say I have also shared that experience. So if I understand that feeling.

Helen Brechlin 37:30

I don't know what it's like, but like an endless series of questions. You know, and I've done a lot of thinking about communication. And I think that's something that can be overlooked. Especially in this in this age of like, instant communication, you know, of social media. Oh of, like quick bytes of information. It How is isn't communicating effectively? How do you encourage people to go beyond those, like, quick, quick summaries, because the world is complex. And if you don't understand or if you don't try to understand its complexity. It's, it creates a lot of problems. You know, you can be erasing key points, key identities key, you know, key context. And that is something that I'm always concerned about. It's a lot, it's a lot to think about. And you know, if you can, if you can make space to communicate better, I think we would, I think we'd be in a better place.

Alex Bice 39:02

Absolutely. In terms of next question is I'm wondering sort of more about after the quarantine, sort of the ICA at this point has reopened to the public with, obviously, limited numbers, but could you talk a little bit about sort of what that has been like for you what your experiences have been with that.

Helen Brechlin 39:32

Yeah. So, I mean, how much information do you want to know?

Helen Brechlin 39:39

Like where would you like me to start like just before we reopened when we reopened now,

Alex Bice 39:47

I suppose just when you reopen to now.

Helen Brechlin 39:52

Okay. The first week of reopening we You know, you can plan as much as you want. And I do find that it's better to over prepare than underprepare, but how do you prepare for something you've never dealt with? So that's where we ask a lot of questions. But the first week, we were free to the public from Thursday to Sunday. And then the first two days, we were free for members and members to bring a guest, the first two days are very quiet, very limited numbers. And then, when we were open to the

public, we definitely saw a steady increase in the weekend was was quite busy. But since then, and when I say busy, that's another thing. This, our terminology has completely changed. The way that we refer to things is so different, because busy before was being you know, we're sardines in here. But now, busy just means Oh, like they were. There were individuals, there were guests or visitors in each space. [inaudible] when it's slow, you know, you have a couple of people here and there. But we had great attendance that first weekend. And I think that gave me mixed feelings. Because it was great to know that people wanted to come back, that people valued our space, and valued the work that we do, and wanted to see the art to like I've met or when I've spoken to visitors, a lot of them have actually never been to the museum. I think that first week, it was a lot of repeats, like, Oh, thank you for opening, and we're so glad that we can come back, we just we really missed the space, we miss being [inaduable] Some people, you know, wanted to be really chatty, because I know I'm kind of that way we're been in isolation for so long. And I want to talk to people and have conversation but kind of what drew me to like a more front facing role was was having these conversations. So it was nice to have those after so long if not into just that them. Talking about artwork is something that you know, I've done for a while between going to school for art. And that kind of a requirement is you have to talk about art there to going into a position that's a front facing role where you're there to educate about the artwork, and being able to be back in the space. And to talk about these artworks. was so gratifying, I guess, is kind of a word that I want to use. It was familiar. I it was. I don't know. I don't want to use this nostalgic as a word. It's comforting. I guess it's kind of the word that I want to use, like, oh, right, like being in a space with a work of art is so different than seeing an image on a screen at a different scale. We can't see the texture, I can't see you can't really appreciate the scale that the art is made in some of the color isn't right, you know. So physically being in a space, looking at an artwork and just having like talking to someone and asking them. What are they thinking about when they look at this work is it's those small moments that you can't do from home that were really nice to get back. But it's this double edge where you know, that's really great. It's great to be working to remind myself why I'm working when I'm doing what we're trying to do here. But then it's the other side where it's like, well, we're still in a pandemic. And we're providing a safe for people to gather. The museum has done a great job of reducing the amount of ticket sales to make it come to make it safe, safe and comfortable. The museum has done a great job of promoting and putting into place requirements for visitors for staff for everyone. While they're in the building what is expected, you know, masks distance. health assessments, you Things like that. So Oh, and making like, hand sanitizer accessible everywhere. You can't take your corner without seeing like freestanding hand sanitizer dispenser. So the museum has been if you if you raise a concern if when I have raised a concern for staff safety, I feel like the museum has given a good response, which I've been appreciative of, of when I say, you know, I think the staff would be concerned about this thing for their safety, they go Oh, okay. And then they they make a solution. That immediate response has been really great to see. But it's still this underlying question of, you know, what is the role of a cultural institution and a pandemic? And what are they asking staff to do if by opening? And I mean, we want the museum to be open, and we want it to be available, and we want it to succeed and to be there after all of this. So it just brings up a lot of questions. I do feel pretty good about what the museum has done and how it's being how it's trying to provide safety. But it makes you wonder, is it a false sense of security?

Helen Brechlin 46:34

Because it's, you know, it's a, it's a virus, you can't talk to a virus. Yeah. You just you, you have to make the right decisions. And I see the museum is trying to do its best. But it's just, you know, it's that big question. Is this the right thing to do? I keep talking to my my team, and remembering when we're working in the galleries together, of how we used to do things are so ingrained in me, so I've been doing them for years now. And over like the first couple of weeks, we were all talking, we're like, oh, right, this is like a little different now, because we've had to make some slight changes, just to make things safe. But you know, I would just stand next to somebody to talk to them before and now I have to stand six feet apart to be safe. And I keep telling them, you know, it's like riding a bike, but it's just a different bike. And I have to remember, this is the new bike. It's not the old bike, but I still know how to ride it. Yeah,

Alex Bice 46:34
Absolutely.

Alex Bice 47:50
absolutely.

Helen Brechlin 47:52
An adjustment.

Alex Bice 47:54
Definitely. So I do want to be mindful of the time, I was wondering, just, before we start wrapping up, are there any questions that you wish I would have asked in relation to this oral history that didn't get asked?

Helen Brechlin 48:12
Well, I have a question for you, actually. If you I wonder if you had reached out to any of the part time staff that work at the museum...

Alex Bice 48:23
I have...

Helen Brechlin 48:23
their experiences? Yeah,

Alex Bice 48:25
yeah.

Helen Brechlin 48:26
Because I think that would be great to add. Because again, I can only speak from my experience. And, and what I've seen from a supervisor level, and I have been in, in many conversations with various you know, whether it's my direct manager, whether it's senior staff, I feel, I have been more privy to conversations of how the museum is going to handle things than, you know, a part time staff member. And we try to, we try to communicate things that need to be communicated. But I could easily see there

being this feeling of what is happening, especially while we were closed, and the problem is, no one really knew what was happening, because it all had to be decided. It was again, it's an unprecedented time. It's an unprecedented state to be in. And there are so many things to consider. And there were so many, you can't start making plans if you don't know what the parameters are that you have to plan around, you know?

Alex Bice 49:39

Absolutely.

Helen Brechlin 49:40

So I'm really curious how the, what the part time staff perspective was, and while I've had many conversations with them, I'm still their immediate supervisor, and I'd like to believe that they can be honest with me, but I think they can be even more honest when it's not me.

Alex Bice 49:59

So Okay all right well thank you very much for participating in this it has been very interesting to hear your thoughts on everything