

SDPC - Arts Writing

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SPEAKERS

Elizabeth Rooklidge, Seth Combs, Kristen Nevarez Schweizer, Nicole Vargas, Susanna Peredo Swap



Nicole Vargas 00:00

Good evening everyone. Our moderator this evening is Susanna Peredo Swap, the founder and executive director of Vanguard Culture, a 501(c)3 nonprofit dedicated to advancing San Diego's creative industry workforce. Vanguard culture provides award winning arts journalism, professional development for creatives and unique cross industry cultural events. With that, Susana, please take it away.



Susanna Peredo Swap 00:28

Thank you, Nicole, thank you. And thank you all for being here. Thank you for taking your evening out to meet with us. I recently joined the board of directors for the San Diego Press Club. And it is my pleasure to welcome you today to this conversation about arts writing. Whether you're an aspiring arts writer or a seasoned professional dipping your toe into arts writing for the first time, we hope that you will walk away feeling empowered to take the next step in your arts journalism journey. And just to provide a bit of context, San Diego's arts community is on the verge of a renaissance right now. The state of California recently received a huge influx of federal funding for the arts. It's also the first time in our city's history that the mayor and entire city council is in support of increased arts funding. And as many of you know, San Diego and Tijuana were recently designated World Design Capital 2024. It's the first by national designation, and it's the first American city to receive this honor. So you can expect that there will be plenty to write about as the arts and design community gears up for 2024 celebrations. In partnership with World Design Capital, Vanguard Culture is producing a major Visual and Performing Arts Festival this September, bringing together film theater, dance, visual arts and music creatives from both sides of the border. So stay tuned and get ready for a very exciting year of arts coverage. And now it is my pleasure to welcome our guest, Kristen Nevarez Schweizer. Schweizer earned her Bachelor of theater arts at San Diego State University where she was named the daily Aztecs most valuable features writer of 2010 She has worked for San Diego Business Journal, Scatena Daniels PR firm, the San Diego Repertory Theatre and served as cultural chair of the Downtown Community Planning Council. In addition

to covering theatrical events for Vanguard Culture, she profiles behind the scenes artists in her art scene series, which was awarded first place in the San Diego Press Club's Excellence in Journalism Awards for a feature series-light subject in 2022. Welcome, Kristen.

K Kristen Nevarez Schweizer 02:24

Thank you for having me.

S Susanna Peredo Swap 02:27

Elizabeth Rooklidge is an independent curator, writer and educator based in San Diego, California. She previously served as assistant curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, and associate curator at the katana Museum of Art in New York in March of 2020. She founded here in journal and online publication for exchange around contemporary art in San Diego. Elizabeth currently acts as editor of the journal and frequently contributes writing and interviews. She also teaches Modern and Contemporary Art History at the University of San Diego. Thank you for being here, Elizabeth.

E Elizabeth Rooklidge 02:57

I'm excited to be here. Thanks.

S Susanna Peredo Swap 02:59

Thank you. And Seth Combs is the former arts and music editor and editor-in-chief at the alt weekly San Diego CityBeat. He also served as an associate editor at Revere magazine covering nightlife arts and society. And for the last two years, he has been a regular contributing writer and columnist for The San Diego Union Tribune, covering the city's visual and literary scene, visual arts and literary scene as a freelancer. He's also contributed to Spin, the Hollywood Reporter, and Zagat. Welcome, Seth.

S Seth Combs 03:25

Thanks for having me. Appreciate it.

S Susanna Peredo Swap 03:27

Thank you. Thank you all for being here. I brought this group of writers together because of the distinct angle that each of you bring to the table when it comes to arts coverage. So I want to start with you, Kristen. You're part of our organization and you primarily cover theater for Vanguard Culture. And because that's your background, it's your comfort zone is your biggest strength. You also write a bimonthly column called art scene which highlights the behind the scenes creatives who make our city arts, city's arts and culture sector thrive. And what I've really appreciated about your style through the years is your fearlessness. When it comes to

sharing your genuine voice, you write with a sense of humor and authenticity, and you often incorporate who you are as a mother and as a theatre professional in your stories. I wonder I've always wondered where do you pull that sense of freedom and and what advice can you offer to aspiring arts writers on how to incorporate their authentic voice into their writing?

K

Kristen Nevarez Schweizer 04:24

Thank you for that kind introduction and such a great question. So to answer both of them at the same time, I was lucky enough to start my journalism journey with two years as a humor columnist for San Diego State's Daily Aztec. So I was writing to my peers. And I was released from AP style guide book. I was writing in first person and then my first paycheck writing job was for the San Diego Business Journal. So that's all AP Stylebook very, by the book hard facts, just the facts, ma'am. And when I went into arts, writing I got to combine those two styles. And along with my sincere love of theater, having been working in the theater, as a marketing person, before I moved on to there. So I would advise any aspiring writer to try different styles, even if you know for sure you want to go into one style, still do other things, still write poetry, still write fiction, still write hard news columns, profiles, and then go back and be a really harsh critic of your work. Because where you see that truth and sincerity come together, that is your authentic voice. And that is what you have to polish and showcase until it becomes your brand.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 05:45

Yeah, it absolutely is your brand. I mean, every time that a write up comes from you, I can't wait to read it. Because I know I'm gonna laugh. I'm gonna be shocked. I mean, there's always something really fun. That that becomes a part of like, I feel like I know, you, you know. And I really do appreciate that in your work. Elizabeth, I'm bringing I want to bring you into the conversation. Your background is in contemporary art. And indeed, your expertise in this field is the core strength of your arts journal here in your journey, though, has been somewhat unique, and has affected the way that you approach arts coverage is with an increased focus on accessibility for the visually impaired. Can you please share a bit about your journey with accessibility and what you would like to make sure the next generation of arts riders considers in their coverage?

E

Elizabeth Rooklidge 06:30

Yeah, I appreciate this question so much. No, I actually had a pretty traditional art history museum track for most of my career, I went to grad school for art history, I was a new sort of official museum curator, and I thought that that was what my path was going to be forever. But actually, a series of illnesses sort of derailed that, in unexpected ways, I have multiple chronic illnesses, I identify as disabled, and disability really is at the foundation of everything, that herein is everything, all humans characteristics really boiled down to, for me, you know, living with with a disability, I started it in March 2020, you know, partially because of the pandemic, that, you know, we sort of realized, oh, shoot, like San Diego doesn't necessarily have sort of certain types of digital platforms that would that would be really useful here. And that, especially in this time of, you know, locked down, that will. So, you know, that was part of my reason for starting here. And but the other part was that I had a really serious chronic illness, and I wasn't able to work a regular job. And I had a couple of mornings, a couple of good hours

every morning, where my brain was kind of on point. And so I was like, What is something that I can do that I can sort of, you know, go with the flow with my illness, but that's going to be meaningful, and it's going to connect me to my community, and then it's going to, it's going to give something? So So yeah, so the fact like Hearin does not do hard deadlines here in does not make money. Yet. well, we fundraise just a little bit from the community. But you know, fundraising is really is not part of the package, because it's not within my bandwidth. You know, and then and then the, I think the the part of this that people actually see on the website where the rest of this is kind of invisible, people see that we do image descriptions, and image descriptions and alt text. I don't know if people are familiar with kind of the difference. But both of those are features of a website that allow people who are living with visual low vision or who are blind, who use a piece of technology called a screen reader. And so it does exactly what it sounds like. It's text that describes what is in an image so that people using the screen reader kind of know what's going on. And I actually when I started hearing was looking to other journals that were created by people with disabilities. And so I learned a lot from them. And so yes, so we feature image descriptions, I have a couple of web resources that I would love to share in the chat. I would highly recommend checking these out. I also I would I would really like to encourage arts writers kind of moving forward future arts writers to really think about accessibility not as an obligation not as something that's like a duty that's going to take your time and energy but rather to think about it as a joy. And that doing things like writing image descriptions or alt text is a way of connecting and sharing and making sure that the things that you are interested in the things you love that you're working on, are accessible to everybody.

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Susanna Peredo Swap 09:58

Thank you beautifully said And, and it is really so important. There's a, there's a big movement in the disability community community, even in programs like this, right? So I've seen where they say, Hi, my name is Susana, I'm a 40, something year old Latina, wearing a red shirt with, you know, silver rimmed glasses and short hair and red lipstick. And then we get started. And there's just something about giving a mental visual to someone who doesn't have that opportunity to see the, you know, the full picture, if you will. So what the wait your net, your descriptions are really beautiful in the in. And we put the link by the way up here and journal in the on the website, so that you can give it see an example of what a true image description looks like. So thank you for sharing that. And if you can also share, potentially, if that's available to you, or maybe we can email it later, if there are any resources, where journalists could find this, these types of tools or examples or anything like that, that would be very helpful.

E

Elizabeth Rooklidge 10:59

I actually just put a couple of my absolute favorites in the chat for you. And we can email them as well.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 11:05

Wonderful, thank you for that. said, let's let's bring you into the conversation. Your role in arts coverage has evolved through the years and as someone who's worked on both sides of the aisle as an editor, receiving story pitches, and as a journalist pitching stories to an editor, I

wonder if you can share a bit about your journey, and anything that you've learned in the process? And, like, do you feel like being an independent journalist has given you the freedom to pitch stories for the type of coverage that you truly want to cover such as the literary arts, for example?

S

Seth Combs 11:38

Good question. First I just want to say it's really great to be here with the two other panelists, like I really, really admire their work. And I'm really glad that Elizabeth explained that the alt text because I didn't know what that was for a good amount of time until somebody pointed it out to me. And I was like, Oh, my God, like thank you for so yeah, thank you for, for sharing that and explaining that because I was ignorant of it myself until somebody much smarter than me pointed it out. Anyway, yeah, I will answer your questions. In two parts, I would say yeah, it's certainly not exclusive to me. But I do have a somewhat unique perspective of having been on on both sides of the computer both as a starving freelancer and as the person calling the shots at our publication. So to answer the first part of your your question, what have I learned? And what is my journey I have? A lot. You know, I've been invited to speak in some college classes, and I did some work, you know, some freelance workshops at San Diego writers Inc. and I've been in the business for over 20 years. So I have a very clear idea of how editors operate and what they're expecting, depending on the publication or website, of course. And of course, there's everyone is different. And editors vary from from publication to publication. But I would say there are no hard and fast rules to what an editor is like. But there are some sort of core rules that I found when it comes to sort of how to conduct oneself as a freelancer, and I'll talk about that in a little bit in a little later. But as for the second part of your question, do I like the freedom? I mean, it depends on the day you ask. Really, I mean, yes, it is afforded me the some freedom to write about what I want, which I really value don't get me wrong, like I, I don't particularly like working in an office. But that being said, I the the time I've spent with other reporters, and creative people within those environments has made me a much better writer. It's just if you're writing a novel you want to workshop it with, with people, even if they don't agree with you, like they are often the ones whose words are invaluable, who's you know, whose edits are invaluable? So, I would go so far as to say that it does offer more security to work at like a news organization or a magazine or a website, in the arts department. But you know, but that being said, we are arts writers, our job is never secure. And not to be like a like, you know, you know, I'm not gonna I'm just gonna keep it real on that one. So, yeah, I look, I'd like the independence, but at the same time, you know, I'm not above like, if somebody came and said, like, hey, we want you to, to work at our publication. I would probably consider it, you know.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 14:47

Yeah. No, I hear you. I, What's interesting, too, and I started off this conversation with that is that things are changing. You know, that conversation is changing in terms of the breadth of arts coverage available. You know, we need more arts writers. And that's why this this workshop really is more important that you know, the more the better. San Diego is promoted in tourism as a sleepy beach town fun hikes, you know, sir, Sun sunbathing all the things. But you know, I've been very lucky, very privileged to have lived in Paris, London, New York, Mexico City, like art mecca of the world, and San Diego has that type of capacity in terms of its continual arts, and especially with the Bible with the border, the border region, the other side of

the border is thriving in arts and culture also. So that's why standing with the piano received this designation, because of this sort of underground activity happening. Unfortunately, it's not getting as much coverage as it needs to get and now that everything's, you know, we're expecting the world audience to start paying attention to this region in the next year and a half. We need arts writers. So thank you, all of you for being here. You know, for being a part of this conversation. We hope that it encourages you to take the risk. I know that arts writing can seem a little bit daunting for people, sometimes. They feel like oh, well, you know, I didn't technically study music, but I love it. And I go to a million concerts, and I'm just someone who has always been passionate about and I can read, talk about it with my friends, well, that you can probably take that gamble, you could probably try it, you know, and be a really great music writer. So I want to take just a quick moment to remind everyone in the audience that you can add your questions in the q&a. We are monitoring them and we'll get to as many as we can. Okay, do you have a question for your panels? Okay, there it is. Thank you, Nicole, for spreading the word. The next questions are directed to the full panel. So please just speak up if this is something that you can speak on. With the recent social justice, reckoning the me to movement, artificial intelligence, chat GPT fake news. There's no question that we are living in historic times for the future of journalism. How do you think arts coverage will evolve? Or perhaps how should it evolve in the years to come? I can call on you.

K

Kristen Nevarez Schweizer 17:24

If you don't mind me jumping in first. I love ChatGPT. And one of the first questions I asked it was, why is human art superior to AI art. And it said, because humans have to struggle. Which was fascinating to me. Because the title of this panel is beyond the press release. As Art journalist, we don't just get the press release and regurgitate it. In our own words for our readers. We're not curators just picking the things that readers need to know in the words of the artists we are giving. We are the filter, and our struggle are wrestling with the art is what makes it arts journalism, and not just arts, news, if you will. And what's exciting about what you said with Susanna about if you really, really love concerts, go to a concert and then write about it, and then pitch that story to somebody or just put it on your social media and get those conversations started. Because that struggle is how you're going to develop your voice. And it is what sets your your work apart from just PR. That's, that's that human element that tweaks it. And I hope that we will evolve our journalism should and can evolve beyond the who and what and where to the why.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 18:47

That's one thing that I always try to remind our writers is telling me why I need to care. You know, don't just give me the facts. i Anyone can do that. I want to know why I want it. Why should I care about this? Why does this story matter? And how is it relevant to the society we're living in today? That's, you know, as an as an editor of my own magazine, that's what I care about. And each one has their own focus. So it might not be for everyone, but that's definitely the thing that I always pay attention to. Seth, Elizabeth, do you have any thoughts on that?

S

Seth Combs 19:24

Can you can you repeat the question one more time?

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Susanna Peredo Swap 19:27

Yeah, I mean, just you know this this moment of societal sort of upheaval the #metoo movement, artificial intelligence, ChatGPT. We're living these historic times. How would you like to see arts coverage evolve? How should it evolve in the years to come in that context?

S

Seth Combs 19:45

Yeah, I mean, I think as far as as those those changes, you know, they're they're of course you know, long overdue and slow moving. You know, I a bit tentative about you know, speaking to this because I am, you know, A white passing man, you know, I do consider myself queer. But as that's also been a big, tough journey for me. So that being said, I think I need to first acknowledge that I know, you know, my skin color and my gender has afforded me opportunities and privileges that others perhaps didn't have that being acknowledged. And that being said, I have always made it my mission to be like a good ally. You know, whether it was to take chances on on queer writers or writers of color, right, I write a column in the UT for for going on three years called Art of the city. And, you know, I started it under sort of a personal rigid premise of bringing attention to visual visual artists who I considered underrepresented or from communities who are underrepresented in, in media coverage. Another way of saying that it's just not white men. Speaking to the, to the arts, it is it is in the arts community is a vastly more progressive and community and it's making huge strides when it comes to diversity. But I believe the makeup of publications and editor ships, still has a long way to go. And it's playing catch up in a lot of ways, I think it's getting there. But what you see more often than not, is that is that those arts editors are under the under the, you know, a corporate structure sometimes, and the person at the top is still quite men, but I don't know, the the entire, you know, I, it's, you know, I do see things getting a lot better. And I think that there are a lot of opportunities, especially when it comes to like social media. And so I, while I feel the power structures might change, it's still highly problematic. Like any organization that is rooted in these things, it's systemic, and it's going to, it's not going to change overnight, but I'm very optimistic about it.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 22:02

And as arts writers, you know, it's our obligation to continue pitching those types of stories, you know, they don't, they will if you sort of cover the circles that you're in, and so if it is led primarily by white men, as you say, then they're not hanging out with the folks that have the the stories, you know, the BiPAP folks with these stories. So it's our obligation to continue sharing, Hey, did you know this woman is doing this amazing thing? And did you know, you know, otherwise, they won't be exposed to it as easily? What was it that? Did you want to say anything about this?

E

Elizabeth Rooklidge 22:35

Sure. Um, so I feel like I need to give the caveat that I emphatically do not identify as a journalist. And I'm sort of a little uncomfortable, even with the Term coverage, like Chris, and I don't know what the AP guide is, like, I don't know what that is, I come from an art history background, and I identify as an art writer,

S

Seth Combs 22:57

It just stands for Associated Press, that's all.

E

Elizabeth Rooklidge 23:00

Okay. So yeah, cuz I don't, I don't consider myself to be objective in the least. And I don't want to be I want to write about art that I love art that I am obsessed with. And I want that to come through in my writing. And I really set up here in to make room for that. Because I know that when people are working for publications, that are sort of journalistic, there's, there's a different, I don't know, set of responsibilities that I even don't fully understand. But I found myself as a curator, as someone who was writing for museums, you know, I have all of these different sort of facets of my relationship to art that I was not able to write about, or communicate about things that are personal things that have to do with my position positionality in the world, with my emotional life. I just had been really, I think, for many years hungry for those kinds of conversations. And so I wanted to make a space for that with hearin. And I think that it has, I think that's gone. Well, I think even in my own writing, when I look at sort of how I was writing when here and first started to how incredibly personal my writing has become. It's a big change. And, you know, I understand that this is probably not feasible for many of the journalists in the room. But I think anytime writing about art is just a little bit more personal.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 24:33

That's, that's what I want to read. I mean, I think everyone here would agree that that's what we all want to read, right? I mean, we want to we want to know the human story behind, you know, again, going back to the why, if you just regurgitating a press release, okay, you know, well, thanks. It's worse. We still appreciate it, though. You know, we still appreciate the coverage. That's all you can offer. But, but, you know, we're just inviting people to take that extra step and try to see if you can find a deeper meaning behind it for you personally, and I think people just love to hear that they love to know. And even if, for example, in our, in our, in our parts magazine, we don't, you know, there are, we have writers that are very focused on theater are very visual arts are very, you know, music or dance and that's really their passion. But I invite even a dance fanatic to go to an art show, you know, to go to Visual Art Show and say go cover that and then it's okay to be completely sincere and humble and say, in your writing, I don't really know much about this, but it moved me because it had this and this and these components and, and, and almost speaking to it as a layman, but connecting to the to the reader for that exact reason. Because it's giving, almost giving the audience like permission that even if you're not a you know, if you don't speak art speak and you're not, you know, a great contemporary or contemporary art, you know, fanatic or professional, you can still go and enjoy and have a wonderful time and get something out of it. that's meaningful to you. So crossing across different industries for me is is in coverage is always really exciting. Thank you, though. Yeah, please.

K

Kristen Nevarez Schweizer 26:17

I've been writing for Vanguard Culture for eight years. And like I said, I came from the San Diego Business Journal, like you want to know everything. And you sent me to the San Diego opera. Which I've never been to the opera before all I knew about the opera was Julia Roberts and Pretty Woman. So I did all this thing. And I was gonna pretend I knew the difference between an aria and a cantata, I don't even remember, I did all this research. And I went in. And I talked to I want to say it was the LA Times journalist was sitting next to me. And I was just thinking, why would I just write a little bit worse, have a straightforward critique? There's enough noise on the internet, we don't need to have this. And so audience isn't, well, I'm the youngest person of color in the orchestra section. And I wrote, like almost a BuzzFeed style listicle five reasons why millennials should try the opera. And it was just almost a humor column, take a respectful ah, builds for the art form I never experienced article and that was what I submitted, and fortunately liked it enough to run it.

S Susanna Peredo Swap 27:25

And it was wildly shared by the San Diego opera, they loved it, they shared it and shared it and shared it because they just thought it was so fun. You know, tongue in cheek quirky and hilarious. And I think though, I think the article, it might have been missed one or maybe another one. That was why you should take your husband to the opera. What was it that one? Maybe Maybe it was that one? But anyway, it was like top 10 reasons. Same thing. Very, very simple. And to the point. Seth, you had ...

S Seth Combs 27:54

Oh no, I just wanted to, to sort of piggyback off that and agree with it, because it's one thing that I've always found is so true. And in doing this is you you will write something and think that it's like, the best thing you've ever written. And your editor will come back and be like, This is shit. I'm sorry. I, this is probably a PG-13 panel. So it's fine.

S Susanna Peredo Swap 28:18

It's fine. We're all grown. it can be hit or miss. But you know, I think if you're being respectful, right to the organization, and you really feel like they someone can take away something meaningful from the story, in any in any way, shape, or form, whether it's the top 10 version, or whether it's, you know, I got a babysitter in order to be here. And this better be doing good, you know, whatever it is, whatever it is, I think people really it resonates with people, the human that just the human connection portion of it, you know, to be fearless about that and having an having a voice having a voice. So I want to keep looks like there's a lot of chat activity. So Nicole, please do. Let us know if there's any if there are any questions that we can.

S Seth Combs 28:19

Yeah. And then like, you will write something that you think is like a complete, like, throw away or whatever, you know, maybe not to throw away but just you're like, Yeah, this is i and then you'll send it if it gets shared wildly. And the editor loves it. And you know, yeah, it's really like, there's no there's, I feel like there's some rhyme or reason to it. But it's, it's wild, sometimes.

N

Nicole Vargas 29:28

Absolutely, actually I would love to cut in. And I do have a question from Marty, who's curious about how or excuse me who was the team and the PR professionals who worked on the proposal that landed San Diego and Tijuana, the designation as a World Design Capital 2024?

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Susanna Peredo Swap 29:45

Yeah, okay. I couldn't tell you who the PR people were, because I actually don't know who the PR people were. But this was put together through UCSD the Burnham Center for Community Advancement And, oh, there's a third group. UCSD Burnham Center for Community Advancement and oh. I want to say San Diego Design Week or the entity that I think it might have been San Diego Architectural Foundation. I might be wrong on that third one. I know there was a third entity. But yeah, really exciting. And it's been a binational effort. Of course, incredible things have had to happen in order for this designation to happen. I mean, mountains were moved in order for these two governments to work together to make this possible. And that alone, I was a part of the committee in the early in the early days of the once we received the desert. Once we were in the running for the designation, I was a part of this committee. And even if we had not gotten the designation, all of the partnerships that were forged because of this designation, even that it was worth it just for that alone. Because of the because of the the collaboration that happened across the borders, it was just it was just a beautiful effort. So it's something really to be proud of. And there will be more, more information on that to come. Any other questions out here before Oh, there it goes. Design Forward Alliance, UCSD Design Lab and the Burnham Center for Community Advancement. There it is with supports from the cities of San Diego and Tijuana.

N

Nicole Vargas 31:26

Thank you Arturo. That's super helpful.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 31:28

Thank you. Arturo.

N

Nicole Vargas 31:30

Amanda also has a question making a story personal can definitely make a story better. But we've probably all read stories with too much of the writer and/or meta narrative. Amanda must have it in my classroom. Any tips from the list on keeping things well balanced?

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 31:47

That might be a Seth question. I think because as an editor, you probably had some of those. It's open to all. though.

S

Seth Combs 31:55

There's there's nothing wrong with writing, and I write sometimes in first person, I just the only, the only rule that I really have had as an editor was not to write in second person, I hate it. That's just a personal style thing. But when somebody refers to you, or your, I find that to be very, I don't know, I it makes it sound like you're trying to be friends with them or something as opposed to like a reader service. Like, I don't know, I understand that. It's quite popular. And I might just be old fashioned. But I think that if you want to write from a more personal perspective, you can use first person, I would just if it go with your gut, if it feels like you're embellishing or you're talking about yourself too much, you probably are, right. And I've done that, like I have been I'm very guilty of at times, like, you know, putting way too much of myself into something and I have to reel reel it back. That's probably because I do consider myself a journalist. And I had that sort of like, beaten into my head at school, like, you know, proverbially speaking, I didn't wasn't literally beat, but like, you know what I mean? It's like, you know, I was told more often than not, you have to be objective, you have to be objective, but it's hard to do that when it comes to like writing about arts that we love and writing about books that we love and, and offers that we love for that matter. So yeah, I would just say like, just just trust your instincts, if it feels, I mean, if you're on like a your own blog, you know, first person away, but like, if you're if you're writing for another publication or website, I would I would consider just maybe like, you know, have fun with it. You know, it depends on the article, obviously. But yeah, just if he feels like too much, it probably is. Along with it.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 33:59

No, I think that was good. So let's move on to the next question. Then we'll come back to more questions from Q&A later. I had a question about what you would say to someone who wants to cover an area of arts and culture but feels intimidated to try so, you know, this makes me think of you Elizabeth is you know, when you have someone who really loves contemporary art, but maybe they didn't study contemporary art, I mean, should they feel intimidated to even go try? I mean, or would you encourage this person? How should an aspiring arts writer sort of prepare for something they've never tried before for an area they've never covered before?

E

Elizabeth Rooklidge 34:40

Yes, I mean, I think the word intimidated is perfect because people feel just completely I mean to say they feel daunted isn't is a understatement. You know, I think people feel very shut out of the contemporary art world. They feel like it's elitist like you have to have a really specific kind of background. You know, whether that's such a Whether that's class, and I feel like my one of my jobs as editor of herein is to give people permission to write about art, but also just to sort of consider that your your ideas and your opinions might be valuable that they are valuable. And what I really encourage people to do, you know, I probably wouldn't, you know, even if you have a journalistic practice, I wouldn't necessarily just start out pitching a piece before you've really ever written about art, I would start writing about art for yourself, as well, you know, reading about art, reading all different kinds of things. But start writing about art for yourself, go to shows, maybe go to MCSD, and pick one work of art, and do a free write and then take it home and develop it into some kind of piece really just for yourself over the course

of like a couple of weeks. And really to get into an art writing practice, I think is incredibly valuable, and to give yourself the room to learn and to experiment. I mean, like what Kristin was saying before about, you know, you should be sort of trying all of these different kinds of writing, I think that that applies to even you know, writing under the art umbrella.

S Susanna Peredo Swap 36:18

Yeah, that's such a good idea really, is just do it. Just write, write and write and write as often as you can. I love that. This is another question for the full group A what has been the most challenging piece of arts coverage that you've ever written? And why? How did you tackle that challenge?

S Seth Combs 36:42

Um, yeah, I'll give you two and for different reasons. One has to do with my lack of knowledge. On the part that I was basically, the I was the main food critic for like a hot minute at Riviera slash modern luxury here in San Diego. And, you know, chefs are artists, and I would consider like a form of art writing. And I'm, I'm don't get me wrong, like, I'm pretty adept in the kitchen. But I have no business writing about food. I think the second one would be when I was I was assigned not too long ago, I didn't pitch it, but I was assigned to do a story about a Jeff Koons sculpture in one of the Radies hospitals. And I didn't think there was any, if anybody knows, doesn't know who Jeff Koons is, is a sculptor artist. He does the very famous, the balloon dog sculptures. One of them was broken recently in Art Basel, I believe, anyway, I never thought in a million years that he would agree to an interview with some reporter in San Diego, but he did. And so he has a sculpture in one of the hospitals and I, I was interviewing and I and I, I asked what I thought was a very simple, straightforward question about what was the inspiration for this particular sculpture? Because it was one of a series of party hat sculptures that he had done huge, huge sculpture. And he said, Oh, you know, it was inspired by my son and I think I'm gonna get this very heartwarming story. And he just starts going off on this belligerent tangent about his about his ex wife and how horrible she is. And like, how do you know and I'm, I'm playing therapist is very, very famous artists. It was very awkward. So those were, I mean, I know those were very anecdotal. But.

S Susanna Peredo Swap 38:46

How did you handle those two pieces? So you, you went ahead ...

S Seth Combs 38:52

I didn't put that in the piece. I didn't put the, I didn't put, you know, I didn't write an article saying, Jeff Koons goes Oh, no, I mean, he used very, very colorful language very problematically.

E Elizabeth Rooklidge 39:05

I think that story has also been written multiple times

I think that story has also been written multiple times.

S

Seth Combs 39:09

Right? On that note, like, I, you know, I would have loved to have written that story, but it just this was a very, like, straightforward news piece about you know, a sculpture that was unveiled at a hospital I you know, it wasn't wasn't that forum you know, so but yeah, as far as how I as far as the food stuff like yeah, like I I did it I did it for like four or five issues. I was told that I did a great job. Much like you know, Kristen's you know, opera experience, you know, you just go into it and you you have ears eyes, and in this case, taste buds in an opinion and worked out.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 39:54

Well, don't feel intimidated keep writing about food. I mean, if it is if it is your passion, what you love, that's that's the message we want to get out here.

E

Elizabeth Rooklidge 40:01

Because I do think sometimes it is helpful to acknowledge your own limitations, and that maybe not everything is your jam. But I can say that I, for me, and this was something I had to do more when I was working for museums not so much with Kieran. But for me, it's always most challenging when I am tasked to write about an artist that I am not super interested in their work. I try to be broadly curious, I am interested in so many things. But there are artists who are making work that is great. That just I don't, I don't, I'm not obsessed with it. So that can just be challenging to kind of, you know, get something on the paper that that you can stand behind. And that is good. And frequently, I deal with that by trying to sort of transport myself into the artists position and, and think of them first and foremost as a human and think about where this work that they make is doing for them. And why why it matters, why they're dedicating their entire life, their entire practice to this thing. So to sort of, you know, leave the, I don't know, as objective as I get, I guess, which is not very, but try to leave like the art historical sort of stuff, just to put that on a shelf and sort of center myself in the humaneness of artistic practice. And that that's really the foundation of what art making is. And that just gives me a kind of attitude shift. That allows me I think, then to write more easily and to be more excited about it.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 41:39

That's so beautiful to focus on the humaneness of it. And I think that can probably go across, you know, all industries is, you know, remember these people are passionately dedicating their lives to this. So what is the why for them? Even if it's not as interesting for you? That's interesting. Kristen, did you have anything to share?

K

Kristen Nevarez Schweizer 41:59

I would say something that continues to be challenging is when I go into a CES show, especially a comedy, and it's a dead room. The difference between theater and film is very much the

interaction between the audience and the the players and no two plays are alike, there's always just a little bit different. And it can especially during a comedy just be because you have a great room, or because you don't. And when I first started having children, when I started making humans, I really was limited to matinees. And that's just not a great time to see a comedy. I mean, I see why we do it. And it's not a bad time. But comparatively an evening performance of a comedy and a daytime performance, the room really matters. And so what I have done is I will out of my own pocket or if I can beg borrow and steal a ticket, I will go see the show again. Like if I can tell that this show didn't come off the way I could tell the director intended it, or I found myself very bored, or I really didn't like it. I asked myself a lot why. And I give the piece of art another chance if I can. So that's something I would offer any writer whether it's performing arts or visual arts, check your mood. Were you in a bad mood before you walk into the museum? Because you're bringing a lot of yourself into it. Even if you are writing not in first person and you are doing a straight news piece. Art is incredibly, incredibly personal. And we need I wrestle all the time with was that bad? Or do I just not agree with what they were saying?

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 43:43

Well, what about so generous of you. That's so generous of you to come back and give it.

E

Elizabeth Rooklidge 43:48

On that note, eat eat a full meal before you go to museums.

K

Kristen Nevarez Schweizer 43:54

Wear comfortable shoes.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 43:56

Yeah, don't be grumpy. Don't walk in grumpy. So we have, oh gosh, we're less than 15 minutes out. So I'm going to move into let's see if we have a I'll take a question from the audience. Let's see Nicole. Which one can you say?

N

Nicole Vargas 44:13

Yes, thank you. Yes. Kaz has a question. I write papers for peer reviewed journals about my personal work and aesthetic values. I live in a very niche world, but would like to connect with more diverse people. Do you have any advice on connecting arcane subjects with the general public?

S

Seth Combs 44:33

That's interesting. I'd be very I'm very curious as to what the arcane subject is. If there's any

way that Kaz can can can mention it. But like no, I think that there are a lot of subjects like that, that that we feel that like, oh gosh, like Would anybody else be interested in this and and absolutely like the, you know, one of the biggest pieces of of of advice that I've I've given to to interns and other writers over the years is if it's interested, it's interesting to you, there are going to be hundreds, if not 1000s of other people who will find it interesting as well. So I think the challenge really is putting it into a form that is accessible to the average person because, you know, I had a writer who wrote a book the other day, tried to explain quantum physics to me, and I was just my head was spinning. But he wrote about it in his new book in a way that made it extremely accessible and robotic in a from a very personal perspective. So I think that that's very important to like, if you are able to convey what that particular arcane subject means to you, that goes a long way.

N

Nicole Vargas 45:55

For you actually, unfortunately, this the words don't do it justice. Kaz messaged us and said it's mathematical visual poetry.

S

Seth Combs 46:05

Um, yeah, I remember cuz yeah, okay. Yeah. Cuz I think I believe I spoke to him about a, a exhibition they did on mathematical poetry art at the Bonita Museum, if I remember correctly.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 46:23

Well, if I can sort of, I think I've met Kaz, myself, one of our events as well. Go ahead, Elizabeth,

E

Elizabeth Rooklidge 46:30

If I can just give my my very specific tip that I have for this. Because, yes, like I work in academia, I write about contemporary art, there definitely is, you know, an art speak international art English, they call it. And it can be challenging to sort of, you know, transition to a more general audience. And my tip, and it's something I use myself all the time, is to choose as a specific person, a specific, actual person in your real life who you know, and think about that as the person that that you're writing for. So for me, that person is my mom, she likes art, but she does not have an art specific education. And I know that for her, if she were to read something that was full of jargon, or even a little bit of jargon, she probably would roll her eyes and put it down and say, okay, if I'm writing this in this way, is this going to be accessible to her? And even more importantly, is it going to be interesting to her? So for you that it could be a friend, a colleague, a family member, but it's helpful to think of one person as opposed to this kind of a amorphous blob of the public?

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 47:45

That is, so well said. Thank you. And do you want to share that about your writing workshops? By the way, this? Oh, yes, thank you.

E

Elizabeth Rooklidge 47:52

Thank you. So for HearIn and I do something called the HereIn Writers Workshop that takes place every summer, folks have to apply this and writing samples and a CV and I select a small group. And we work together over the course of the summer to develop written pieces that are then published in here in. So yes, the application is now open, it's on our website, and it is due May 1. So please, please check that out. It's a lot of fun, it's chill, but just a total joy. And you'll learn a lot.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 48:26

Thank you. And I did want to follow up with Seth on something that you brought up, which is, you know, with the literary arts, right, so it takes dedication to go through a full book, if it's not something that's really exciting, right. So how do you move through a book a literary works that turned out to be a disappointment versus those that truly compel you? Like, how is covering the literary arts are different or the same as covering the visual arts for you?

S

Seth Combs 48:56

Um, yeah, I'll answer the first first question. Well, I what I really do with with literary arts, just as with visual artists, I want to cover local creatives, especially, you know, when it comes to literature, which includes of course, fiction, nonfiction, poetry, graphic novels. So I'd say, first, I find the book or the author, author, I contact them or their representation and sort of go from there, more likely than not, I haven't, I do get books sort of galleys sent to me. But more often than not, I find I find them sort of more organically and it is sort of similar in that regard to visual arts. However, visual arts is obviously much more you have to go out. It's one thing to see an artist's work on Instagram, it's quite another thing to see it in their studio or see it in a gallery, or even a museum for that matter. So, you know, books is a much more sort of solitary, sort of like Hey, like, I can just be here and read this or whatever. And then to answer your other question I, I'm, I think you would know, if you if you read my articles, you'll know when I liked a book. I don't like all the books that I cover. But I think to what Kristin was saying earlier, is that it's really important to, you know, sometimes and I'm paraphrasing, of course, take a step back and realize that this is somebody who worked hard on this. And while I'm certainly snobbish and are guilty of being snobbish in my opinions, like I do, you know, recognize the fact that they put this out in the world. And that's when I will write something that's much more sort of straightforward without, you know, perhaps embellishing or using, you know, fancy adjectives, if you will.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 50:50

Yeah. Thank, you know, I always wondered about that. I'm like, Wow, he's really moving through all of these books, but they can't all be good.

S

Seth Combs 51:00

No, they're not. But at the end of the day, like, I mean, you know, that there was, you know, there was one recently that was, that was fantastic. And I, I think what you can do is, is, is embellish a bit. And really, one of the biggest like highlights recent, like recent highlights was picking up a paperback in the airport, of a book that I had had written about. And I was like, Oh, I never like actually bought this, I'd love to support the author. And it was just released in paperback. And one of my quotes was in the book, you know, from your, I mean, like, that's, like a cool feeling, you know.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 51:38

And that's what you're all giving that by being writers of the arts is you're giving the artists the tools to promote their work. And so it's really important work that you're doing. I have one follow up question for Kristen, for covering performing arts. And, you know, Kristen, your background in theater has given you the tools to speak confidently and eloquently about the nuances that make the theatre community tick. How has your role as a journalist influenced the way that you experience like theater now? So are you still able to suspend disbelief and enjoy the storyline? Or do you find yourself sort of stuck analyzing the the technical elements of the performance.

K

Kristen Nevarez Schweizer 52:17

Um, when I first started, I was paralyzed by the idea that I had to write and it was incredibly difficult for me to transport myself. So I did two things. The first thing is, usually, if you're covering theater, if you're invited by the theater, they will give you a plus one. And my plus one must not be a theatre professional, because most of my friends are. And I only invite my friends who are not because that's when you're in shop talk. And it affects your ability to be a good audience member. So I'm careful to do that. The second thing I do is I barely write notes. Because if it doesn't occur to me, two hours later, it probably wasn't that meaningful, these repeaters should stick with you. And those two things have helped me submerge myself into the story, and to be an audience member. And again, it's not the who, what, where, it's the why, what is this adding to the community, not just did the actors hit their lights. And that was great. And then I also remember, I was lucky enough to work at Scatena Daniels and the San Diego Repertory Theatre, which are a theatre company and a PR firm. So I know how it feels the next day, to open the paper or Google your show the day after opening and read everything. And I will always respect the exchange that comes between journalists and the writers and the artists because we don't get to look each other in the eye. But this is my way of saying, I see you. And thank you. And that's why I love Vanguard culture, because it's so many different kinds of writers coming together to say, I see you. And that's why my column is called art scene. And I encourage all writers to always submerge themselves in the right and the writing, not to just try to say something clever, or to pursue their what they're trying to say. But to really look into that why. And if you do that you can submerge in the story.

S

Susanna Peredo Swap 54:26

Thank you. Well, that's a great way to end this conversation. There's so much more that we didn't touch on and there's so many questions, but we're two minutes out. So I need to pass the torch. Back to Nicole. Thank you all so much for being here. I really appreciate it. This is a very

thoughtful discussion. And I think that everyone's going to really get a lot out of it. Thank you so much.