

Event Transcript

June 30, 2020 – *Performance-in-Place: From the Personal Collection of Eileen Myles*

Sara Reisman:

Welcome, everyone, to *Performance-in-Place* from the personal collection of Eileen Myles, in which renowned poet and novelist Eileen Myles will give a guided tour of their art collection installed throughout their home in Marfa, Texas. Their extensive art collection includes paintings by Robin Bruch, Xylor Jane, Charline von Heyl, photography by Jack Pierson, Ace Morgan, and Gail Becker, and assemblage by Morgan Norwood, among others. Myles will elaborate on specific pieces, drawing connections between artists whose work is in the collection, reflecting on memories associated with the object and artworks in their home.

Before we begin, I'd like to ask everyone listening... Every one of you to please set your sound on mute. Everyone except for Eileen, in order to reduce background noise. We can also mute you, but it helps if you do it as well. If you have comments or questions, please use the chat function, which is at the bottom of your Zoom screen, and I'll call out specific audience members to pose questions following the tour of Eileen Myles' personal collection.

A few points of introduction; my name is Sara Reisman. I'm the Executive and Artistic director of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, which is based in New York City, where we support art and social justice through grantmaking for the last 25 years. Since 2015 at The 8th Floor has presented exhibitions and public programs that address themes of social justice and political import.

Normally, we would be hosted at The 8th Floor, but as is now customary, we're meeting virtually, enabling us to connect in a time of social distance. Eileen Myles' collection tour is the third installment of *Performance-in-Place*, a newly launched virtual program series which complies with current social distancing safety guidelines.

These virtual commissions highlight the artistic potentials inherent in our current reality, reflecting the adaptability of artists whose practices are evolving in response to the isolation and the restricted mobility being experienced across the globe. Recent performances have included Alice Sheppard of Kinetic Light, [inaudible 00:02:01], and in the coming months, we'll include the artists Maria Hupfield, Latasha N. Nevada Diggs, and Baseera Kahn. For more information on these upcoming performances, please visit our website. It's www.the8thfloor.org.

I want to mention access information. This performance includes live ASL interpretation and captioning. Please read the chat section for instructions. For ASL interpretation, refer to Lydia Callis. Hi, Lydia. I don't know if you can wave. She'll be providing ASL interpretation during Eileen's talks. You can pin her for that so the screen is bigger.

Before I introduce Eileen Myles, I'd like to take a few minutes to recognize our respective relationships to place. We're gathered virtually in many locations at once. Marfa, Texas and New York City, including Manhattan, Brooklyn, and other places. Most, if not all, are unceded lands. As this event is organized by the Rubin Foundation, I've chosen to address the specific site where our offices are located, near Union Square, thereby acknowledging the Lenape community past and present, as well as future generations.

The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation and The 8th Floor acknowledge being founded upon exclusions and erasures of many indigenous peoples, including those on whose land the Foundation is located. This acknowledgement demonstrates a commitment to beginning a process of working to dismantle the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism, a commitment that I think many of us [inaudible 00:03:30] all the more poignant and important in this time of political upheaval, that has already resulted in transformative activist engagement across the country.

I'm also adding a virtual land recognition from language devised by Jill Carter, who teaches in the indigenous studies and drama theater and performance studies departments at University of Toronto. She writes, "Zoom has erected its headquarters in San Jose, California while Skype has erected one [inaudible 00:03:56] operations in Palo Alto, California. This is a traditional territory of the [Me-wuk Wekma Alom 00:04:02] Tribe nation. Current members of this nation are direct descendants of many missionized tribal groups from across the region. We who are able to connect with each other via Zoom or Skype, are deeply indebted to the Me-wuk Wekma Alom people as the lands and waters they continue to steward now support the people, pipelines, and technologies." And I love this line. "People, pipelines, and technologies that carry our breaths, images and words across vast distances to others. Thank you."

And so now it's my pleasure to introduce Eileen Myles, who came to New York from Boston in 1974 to be a poet, subsequently a novelist, public talker and art journalist. I think we're getting the public talker today. Their 22 books include *For Now*, an essay talk about writing from y'all press, coming in the fall of 2020. *Evolution Poems*, *Afterglow: A Dog Memoir*, a 2017 reissue of *Cool For You, I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems*, and *Chelsea Girls*. They showed their photographs in 2019 at Bridget Donahue gallery in New York City. Myles is a recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship and American Academy of Arts and Letters award in literature, an Andy Warhol Creative Capital Arts Writers grant. [inaudible 00:05:17] the PSA of poetry award from the foundation of contemporary arts. In 2016, [inaudible 00:05:24] capital grant and the Clark prize for Excellence in Art Writing. In 2019, they received an award from the American Academy of arts and letters.

So they live in New York City and Marfa, Texas. For best experience, I'm going to recommend that you select speaker view. You can find that in the upper right hand corner of your screen, so that when Eileen is speaking, you can see them and the artwork most directly. Also, those of you in the audience should please set your sound to mute in order to reduce background noise. I'm starting to hear some, so if you haven't done that, please do so. During the Q&A, you can send

your questions using the chat function. Write them in, I'll respond, and then I'll ask you to ask the question.

Eileen, welcome. It's wonderful to see you here. How are things in Marfa, Texas?

Eileen Myles:

Thanks Sara. Things are great. Though without going into it too much right now, Texas is having its own pandemic moment today and lately. So it feels a little different. Also, it's very hot, it's probably 90 degrees but dry. So Marfa's great, but it's changing right now, even as we speak. People knew this would happen, but the state of Texas didn't quite agree, so here we are.

Sara Reisman:

Yeah. Where would you like to start?

Eileen Myles:

Well, I'm going to start outside my house at a very special window. I wanted to start here because when I first moved to Marfa... I'm going to stay still. I have a tendency to walk and you won't be looking at anything but the ground. When I first moved to Marfa, I was doing a residency at the Lannan Foundation and I happened to be reading Bob Dylan's interviews. Something he said was that he had an orange roof on his house. The reason for that was when he was coming home, he would always be able to see it. That seemed like such a sweet, cool thing. I bought my house here pretty soon after that, and this didn't happen for quite a long time.

I guess I wasn't thinking about... When I did it, it just looks more East Coast and nautical, and not at all West Texas. But part of the thing about the landscape here is that we believe that there was an inland sea and it was all under water at one time.

So possibly I'm taking the long view, but weirdly my friend Tim Johnson, who is the head... Runs something called Marfa Book Company, which is just one of the great bookstores of the world, said that Bob Dylan might be coming to town. So in celebration of that, I think one of his people asked for a bunch of books. Tim was sending some books of mine to Bob Dylan and said, "Is there anything you'd like to say to him?" But I basically just thought, "I think I have just said it." I think this little note about the window is Bob's gift to me, and I want to thank him because I guess I know I'm coming home when I see that window," which at first I thought, "Am I nuts?"

So I'm going to start in the living room of my house and here's my dog, Honey, which... Is who I live with most. I might I turn off the swamp cooler, because I think it might be a little loud.

I'm going to start with this piece right here, which is a painting by Charline Von Heyl. And the thing I must say about this, I'm going to show you my art collection, but Charlene's piece is on loan. I wrote a piece a few years ago for ICA Miami about a show of Donald Judd's paintings. I was kind of intimidated 'cause Judd is sort of the big guy in town in a certain way. He's a huge absence and a huge shaping force of the art reality of Marfa. When I thought about writing about

Judd, what I did was I wrote sort of a Eileen as institution piece. I thought the only way to talk about...

I'm looking at people who are looking at... Is the sound okay? Is everything working out okay? Okay. I'm people gaze, but I don't know who you are, but that's OK.

Anyway, yeah. I sort of wanted to frame myself as a counter institution. So one of the things... Own art, but borrow art. So this is a piece that's on loan from Charline. I was in her studio not too long ago. There's a massive piece that had something to do with Botticelli. This is sort of a fugitive piece with a black shape which is kind of an owl. Years ago, I do meditation, but we would also do walking meditation. Part of the thing with walking meditation is that you just go in this big circle and right against the wall there was a picture of a Zen master who kind of looked like an owl.

What it started to do was kind of make the owl be kind of in motion. The thing that's kind of cool about this piece is it replaced another piece that had been here for a long time. When you have art that you look at every day, sometimes you don't so much look at it as it holds the space. When I put Charline's owl into this space, it kind of made my house lurch a little bit. So the house has never exactly landed, but the owl has sort of pushed it into another... I don't know. Kind of swoosh. But it's a terrific painting, which is like also very kind of mad. It looks like wings, but it's kind of mad paws too, which I guess is the artist's hands. But it's a fugitive piece, rightly so.

I'm going to take you over to what used to be there. Oh, you know what? I wanted to show you something outside before I came in and it's a dinky thing, but I'll get to it, which is just a little pig. Can you see this little pig on the ground? It's kind of like a carny... It's a little pig sculpture. I'm not showing you that because I'm going to show you my collection of pigs and turtles and frogs in my house, but I am a little obsessed with pigs.

I think for the reason that they are, as we know, the most slaughtered, most intelligent animal there is, and it just occurred to me lately. Every time somebody studies pigs, pigs' intelligence goes up 10 more notches. So one thing I just think about pigs today is if the millions of pigs who are being slaughtered in America today were asked if they would prefer to put on a mask over being slaughtered, I think all those pigs would put on a mask. So I think the pigs are evermore important right now and evermore a demonstration of why they should be living, because they would make the right choice.

Here's just a little guy right here. It's a simple painting by somebody named D. Ellen. I bought this in Provincetown and it simply is a pig with a kind of an edge, kind of an attitude. He's scared, and I would be too.

Right here, right here is a painting by, there's a photograph by Ace Morgan. One of the things... It's cool, it's street photography. In a way, it's a very Middle Eastern looking Jesus, which is awesome as opposed to the European Jesus. There's a pair of funky sneakers. It's a very speechy photograph. I just feel like it kind of represents the urban landscape, which is always, which is... Oh, what happened? Which is always talking. I got this at a art auction, a gay art auction in New York. I'm going to go over here now.

I should show you... Oh, actually. Just a tiny, tiny little piece by Lisa Mascon, who was here in residency. It simply says, "Clothing for Eileen," and it's a pair of garters. It's a drawing.

This is a piece by Robin Bruch, a gift. Close up, it's just a very kind of thin wrinkly piece of paper and quite transparent. Robin is a painter who's... I mean, I guess she's approximately my age and I've known her and her work for years. She was one of the painters who got turned on [inaudible 00:14:55] in the '80s. [inaudible 00:14:55].

Sara Reisman:

Eileen, you're breaking up a little bit.

Eileen Myles:

I don't know what to do about it.

Sara Reisman:

Okay. Just maybe you can repeat what you said about, like the last couple sentences.

Eileen Myles:

Robin, okay. Robin was a gang of people. She was one of a gang of people who discovered the work of Hilma af Klint in the '80s when it first came out. They were also ceramicists. So I think it was her, it was Carey Heilman, a guy named Stephen Mueller, who's no longer with us. That kind of funky geometric extraction kind of started to happen at that point. And it's funny because Robin is a very... She sort of like is a bit of a fallen royalty person, a person who's got a very scratchy voice, very campy person. I think the work has that quality. It's sort of brash and orderly and slightly insulting.

This piece right here is [inaudible 00:16:09]. It should be properly hung. I've never figured that one out, 'cause it's on kind of a sort of kind of board also. Also, I don't know how to figure out from Marfa how to hang things. I mean, there's somebody in Santa Fe. It's a trip I always planned to make, but it hasn't happened. But this is Kate Schaffer. I met her at the Art Institute of Chicago. I did the thing, which I heard Julian Schnabel used to do, which is a no-no, which I just... I really liked it. I saw it in her studio and I said, "Will you sell this to me?" Because I heard Julian Schnabel did that too, which is considered sort of unethical by the visiting artist, but we were very excited about each other. I like it 'cause it's spray paint. It's kind of moon-ey. It's like got great, bright colors. It reminds me of the kind of work that people were doing in the '80s in New York, a lot of just kind of graffiti influenced stuff. It seems butch and quick.

There was a whole stream of them. I wanted to get a bunch of them, but I just got the one. She's sort of moved on to... Here's some books. We've got books. Kate sort of moved on to... Last I knew, soap sculpture. It had a very kind of armored look, and sort of tidy and weird, a little bit like the sculptor. There's Texas. It's like, this is a sign of somebody who's really a newcomer. I think nobody really wanted to look at the map of Texas in my kitchen, but I continually didn't know where I was.

There's one more Robin Bruch here. I bought this for my gallery in Provincetown. I like it. I like it 'cause it's round. I like it because the colors are just in your face. If you look at the brush marks, they're kind of messy and kind of mixed and weirdly controlled. The boundaries are all kind of blended and sharp. I don't know, I just... I'm a Robin Bruch fan. She did live with a guy named Blinky Palermo in the '70s and there was another Julian Schnabel moment, because I think he kind of went to her studio at some point and swept up all the Blinky she had.

Let's see. Oh, okay. Here's Nicole Eisenman. What it is, is lots of... The lighting is really bad here. I'm sorry about this one. It's a drawing on paper. It's a lot of little flowers tittering at a larger, manmade flower. I mean, I have to say it seems like the art world in a way. It seems gossipy. It also seems sort of gendered because somehow the flowers down below sort of feel like girls and something has been sort of implanted in their space, which is an oddity, which is an imitation of them, which is funky and constructed. I guess when Nicole gave me this piece, it was the cover of a book that I did, published in the '90s called *Maxfield Parrish*. I think part of the idea was artificial nature. I felt like Nicole had done this, done that in her drawing.

Let's see. I don't want to forget... Okay. Yeah, let's go into... Here's my office. There's one piece in here that... Well, this piece is by Glen Hanson. What it is, is a piece of cowhide. When you get close, it's all these tiny beads. There's something completely mournful about a piece of cowhide. It never stops being intimate and sorrowful, that it was part of something or somebody's body. Yet the bead work is really devotional. It represents hundreds of hours. Glen is somebody who had a Buddhist practice. He was also involved with Chinati Foundation, I think maybe in conservation. But as a piece, I mean, for the longest time, it was the only piece of art I had in the room where I, most of the time, do most of my writing because it has this kind of... It's still, it's really still, and yet it's very emotional. It's never sedate. You can feel... I have two pieces, this and maybe the last piece I'll show you, that seemed to be so about time, and just living with it and living in it.

This is not exactly a piece of art. It's a lamb named Boris who managed to escape. He was one of those lambs that made friends with somebody who worked at the 'health lambs walk free and then we slaughter them' place. Somehow this young woman said, "Can I have this one?" And they said, "Yeah," and Boris came home with her. So I think he's supposedly in a sanctuary in Florida.

Here's Jack Pierson. This is... Well, it's an amazing... It's a very sweet homage to one of my books, *Chelsea Girls*. It's just bathed in light. I think Jack has a photographer is just drunk on light and times of day and then intimate spaces. It is one of those hippie Indian print blankets that everybody had in the '60s and '70s. Then there's like a weird little bowl of probably cantaloupe juice or something. There's my book smack in the middle of it. So it was a gift, but I have to say what Jack did when the book came out is he sent this to art forum as a review, which I just thought was one of the coolest ideas I ever heard of. But whoever was in charge of Art Forum in the '90s was like, "What?" So they didn't run it, but happily Jack gave me the photograph and we can know how wrong they were.

This is one of those nothing rooms. It's kind of great because my funky heaters have become plinths in the summer. So this piece on top here is a very raw, cool, heavy sculpture by a guy named Anthony Desimone. It's this kind of garish purple and it's this very degraded paint materiality. The back of it says something beautiful and anthemic and very regional, which is... There's my dog. "Fracking is fucked." That has a lot of meaning in Texas at this time because near Austin, which is the Hill Country... Honey! No. In Hill Country near Austin. Right now people, where they've been doing a lot of fracking, people are getting this kind of pink, gray water. When the company of course had said that, "We'll be very careful and we'll do a really good job." As we all know, and as everybody knows, once you start drawing into the earth, you don't know what you're going to get, and you don't know what's going to happen.

Aptly, in this corridor of art, here's a piece by Zoe Leonard. This is my most... I believe this is a gift. This is my most recent acquisition, meaning that she gave it to me a few hours ago. 'Cause I was like, "Zoe, I'm doing this house tour and I don't have any of your art in my house." So what this is, is she's doing a piece of like a study of the Rio Grande in all its ways and moments. This is that Matamoros, Brownsville, that one of the detention centers for people seeking asylum.

It's so weird because if you look close, the American flag, it's sort of goofy. It just sort of looks like round and weird, but obviously it's taking a mean flap. Then what we've got here, of course, is scads of horrendous barbed wire. It says Laredo Field Office, which apparently... According to Zoe, those are the really big guys. She took this picture and in moments they told her, "Get out of here." She was with Tim Johnson, who's helping her on this project. But I can't help thinking the only representational thing in this is the flag. All the rest is utility. It doesn't have to be true, but it seems to me that that combination often hides a secret. As we know, this is a very dirty secret decided here.

Oh, here's a little, very funky, little piece that I'm really fond of by an artist named Morgan Norwood. All it is, is several pieces of wood, and wood on wood on wood, and carved into the wood are these tiny little houses. So for me, it's sort of imitating film in the most tactile way. It also has this kind of like home vanishing too. I guess you could be on a train, but I also, I just think of it as a film reference. It seems sweet to me, exactly as that. [inaudible 00:26:27], there was a moment in Provincetown in the '90s when everybody was like, as distressed furniture was coming in, distressed art was also coming in. So this is a piece of that, but I thought it was more ironic than most.

This is an Eileen Myles. It's, it's simply a shot of a bed in Mohaka. I find it really tender in that way. When you travel, you encounter the most kind of pathetic and folksy and unforgettable bedspreads. I think a lot of my final photography is just an inventory of angles and moments and stuff. Yeah.

The piece right here is by an artist who lives in Marfa named Diana Simard. I have a feeling that this might be the piece that will suffer most from this kind of presentation, which is that it's just simply a little corner and there's a snake in the corner. She gave me a very long description of how she makes her work. There's a lot of gesso, and there's a lot of layers, and there's a lot of time. It's another one of those pieces. What it creates is this very... I don't know. It's a great bathroom piece, which is where it recently landed.

Because it's a really intimate piece, which is to say that it's like the simple... It's like the red wiggle of a snake and the tiny wiggles on the walls around it. It's weird because it's not a... It's not a bad snake. It feels like a surprise, like an omen. Yet all her work, she had a great show at Wrong last, year and all her work is really simple things: horse in a yard, a house. They seem like folk paintings brought to some higher level by just so much meditation and so much... I don't know, I guess, feeling, but it's a quick, deep, valuable feeling. So her name again, Diana Simard.

Okay, walking through the bedroom. Let's see. Okay. Yeah. This is a piece by Philip Shinnick, and he's an artist who lives in Montreal, and he also does stuff with architecture. The one thing I want to say about his work, which is it's always really simple, it's so minimal. He looks great in Marfa. He seems perfect for this place. His work makes me think of one word, which is cleaved, and that weird way that cleave is about cutting things, cutting things apart, and then holding things, and putting them back together. He continually takes these blocks of wood and cuts them and rejoins them, and in this kind of awkward way. So it's geometric and it's austere, and yet it's sort of funky, and it always has this bodily feel. Of course, it's gotten more bodily. It's been in my laundry room here and it's a little chipped and distressed. It's got these distinct colors, but I have a very strong feeling that Philip would not care.

Not art, but a joke, which is that classic... Is it Michelangelo? I bought that in Rome, but it's right here next to the wireless, 'cause it often goes in and out here in Marfa, so I figured that might help. This is like the dumpiest part of my house, which is that room where you just put all your stuff and everything. But I have this one little Robin Brew plate that I thought if I put this on the wall, the whole thing quickens. It's more Robin's funky geometry.

We're going to go outside and go to another little structure. So I want to show you one more thing, which is this is Carey Heilman. She gave this to me I think for birthday, many years ago. She said that she thought of it as an inverted nipple and that its name was Marilyn. And I thought, "Is it a plate or is it a nipple?" But that seems very Gertrude Stein, that kind of thing, like plate or nipple? It keeps sort of trembling in that place. I only recently... I often sit outside and then I thought, "Why is there no art outside?" So I think Mary has gotten this spot.

We're going to go to this little building right here. I think we started a little late, so we're not doing too bad for time yet, are we, Sara?

Sara Reisman:

We're good. Yeah.

Eileen Myles:

Okay, cool. So this used to be a real shabby shack and I had it renovated, which is massively adult thing to do. I kind of think of it as the poet shack. So at night it's sort of illuminated and I think of it as a planetarium.

I'm going to start with this photograph by Gail Thacker. The name of the photograph is *Me and Lanelle White*. It's just devastatingly naked and innocent, and then not so innocent because if you get really close you can see... I mean, Gail's the photographer, that's Gail. So this was totally like two women like, "Okay, let's jump on the bed really fast. Let me take this picture." I don't know. Gail is part of that crew that, the Nan Goldin, Jack, Mark Marceau people. A bunch of people that under Pat Hearn and Lia Gangitano were briefly called the Boston School. Gail is in some ways, and this may be the same way that Mark Marceau was, was the real rough edge of it. Her work has this kind of jumbled... I mean, just all these different textures.

I have added to it, unfortunately, because when the photograph was getting transported, somebody threw my art in the bed of a truck and covered it in plastic and brought it out here. So there's damage, but I have been assured by another photographer, Ellis O'Malley, that Gail would like that, and it would keep within the aesthetic of the work. I felt reassured by that because it did make me think of the artist Elka Krajewska, who has something called Salvage Art Institute, where all the art that's been destroyed in transportation, like orphan art, that just goes back to the insurance company and Elka slowly made a collection out of all those pieces.

I will tell you something else about Elka before I stop talking.

Sara Reisman:

Eileen. Elka's on here.

Eileen Myles:

Oh, cool.

Sara Reisman:

Yeah, I think she says, "Hello."

Eileen Myles:

Hi.

Sara Reisman:

Yeah.

Eileen Myles:

She's doing a project now called *Distance*. I think *Distance as Community*. I'm one of her patrons. You could be one of her patrons too, and she does these very cool drawings that are completely out of the time we're living in. Interestingly enough, so this is a piece by Ellis O'Malley and it's a portrait. It's from a body of work called Community of Elsewhere. It was portraits of people who are mostly her friends, people in our community. This one is of Paige. This is also a little, slightly distressed on the road. Ellis will give me a new print. But Paige is a trans woman who was living in New York and died soon after this photograph was taken. I can't help looking at Paige's legs. They remind me of grade school, the girls in grade school, I went to a Catholic school and we were always standing in line and you got to look at everybody's legs. This is very Karen O'Donoghue, those sort of skinny legs with this kind of gap in them. Really, Paige's face, it's funny how it's sort of on two different planes, like Paige's face is sort of blurry, and the body is very precise. There's something about Paige's own woman becoming that is so held by this piece.

This you know. This is van Gogh's *Starry Night*. The reason it's here is that, in high school, I went to Catholic school and I worked in Habit Square. There was a wonderful foreign language bookstore called Shern Hoffs. They had this there, and I bought it for my mother, and she thought it was the greatest thing in the world. It lived in my house in Arlington, Massachusetts my whole life. Then she went to senior housing and she kept moving and went to a nursing home. This piece, this print, traveled with her, all those... And she died under it. So I have now won this piece and it just simply is my mom. So.

Weirdly next to it is... This is the first painting I ever bought. It's by an artist named Janice Bridgers, and she lives in Brooklyn. She was part of that kind of East Village bad painting moment, but I've never thought that this or anything I've ever seen of Janice is a bad painting, but there's a weird way that it's very diagrammatic. It seems like it's almost a diagram for a painting. Then she went and made the painting. But it was in an ugly frame for years that was black, and it made the black just overwhelmed the painting, but now it's naked and out there, and I love this painting.

Aha! You know what this is? This is another loan from Caitlin Marie. This is a Donald Judd chair. It seemed impossible to be doing an art tour in Marfa and not have a Judd piece. I thought of that very pretty late in my planning, and so Caitlin generously loaned me this piece. Apparently there are in-life Judd furnitures and posthumous ones. This is a posthumous chair.

Sara Reisman:

So you did get the loan.

Eileen Myles:

No! Oh, I know it's a loan. There's no question it's a loan.

Here's a photo by Jack Pierson and it's been on a book cover of mine, *Cool for You*. It weirdly became considered a portrait of me, which it isn't at all, though I have to say, the name of the photograph is *Rocky AKA Raquel*. I saw this in a gallery in Los Angeles many years ago and I just, it was big, and it was across the room, and I was like, "Whoa." I just thought it was this cute, Matt Dylan-y looking boy. Then I got closer, and then I saw these incredible long fingernails and realized it was this very tough dyke and a very young queer person. Jack knew Rocky and said that she was very tough and hard drinking. I mean, it's again, light. Beautiful, early morning light. Rocky was very like, "I'm going to see the ladies," and real, real kind of hardcore. We don't know if Rocky is still with us because Jack had a big show in Miami, and this was on a billboard, and hoping that she would come to the show, and she did not. So Rocky may be out there, but...

Also, just makes me think about... I slapped it on the cover of a book and people kept making it be me. It just struck me how interesting book covers are, because they really are... They're a photograph of the book, not of a person. I mean, they're... how can I say this? They're not autobiography. They're pictures, they're not autobiography. They're actually a picture of a text, which is very strange. I think a very strange function for a piece of art, and yet I think lots of pieces of art really traveled that way metonymically.

This is the last piece we've got here, which is Xylor Jane. I put it here because, well, look at my little shack. It's like I tried to unwittingly... I have a bathtub in the middle of my studio and I kind of did a bit of a reproduction of a New York apart. The thing that's cool is you can kind of lie in the bathtub and look at Xylor's drawing. It's kind of incredible because it's, as I stand on the incredible black disco toilet. It's a geometric shape again, and it's yellow and red, and then it's red and yellow, and then it's... It's both formal and really funky and shaky. It seems like almost an organ, in a way. But it's sort of like an inside and outside of the body organ. I'm going to say, just the fact that the piece is so woven makes it feel like something that doesn't... It holds, but it doesn't end. It seems to me like Glen's piece in the office. It's kind of a completely still meditative piece, but still in the way... Because it holds all this movement and holds all this time. It's just... It's arresting.

Sara Reisman:

Beautiful. Yep.

Eileen Myles:

I think that's all I've got. I don't know it I... Baseball cap, tape measure. Dog. I think we're done. I think we did it. Backyard.

Sara Reisman:

So, I'll start with some questions. To everybody tuning in, if you want to ask a question, just make a note in the chat section and I'll keep checking. Eileen, do you do tours of your collection very often? Do you get requests?

Eileen Myles:

No, this is my first. I think when you guys asked me to do a *Performance-in-Place* in my house, I thought, "Oh, god. The last thing I want to do is..." It's like as a poet, this is that moment where you're continually asked to sit in your house and read to your iPhone, and then send it to somebody on WeTransfer. I thought, "No, there's something else I can do." Thank you. This was fun.

Sara Reisman:

Yeah. Well, thank you for thinking of this, and for being candid and letting us in. A colleague of mine, George Bolster, who I think you know, asked the question, which I noted. He says, "Is meditation an intrinsic part of your practice as a writer?" I was noting that meditation came up a few times in the works that you were talking about, or just people, the artists that make the work, the stories behind the artworks. So the question is, "Is meditation intrinsic to your practice?"

Eileen Myles:

Oh, yeah. I think absolutely, though I think the thing with medication is that... Oh, with medication? With meditation is that almost... The more I get... I'm being literal now. It's sort of like if I persistently meditate for a period of time, I'm likely to have a big rebellion and meditation ceases.

I'm part of the community of people that, like the New York School and Saint Marks Church. It went to Naropa, there was Buddhist links there. I had no interest in meditation when I was younger. I couldn't see why you would want to stay still when I just wanted to be more active. I started to understand that the whole school of writing that I've been brought up in is full of meditation, because it's improvisational, and it comes out of that '50s and '60s awareness of attentiveness, and taking writing out of the academy, and thinking of writing as a practice. Yeah, as a practice rather than an academic discipline.

So, yeah. It's totally, it's right at the heart of it, I think.

Sara Reisman:

We have a question from Christa. Christa, if you can unmute yourself and ask the question directly, that might be more interesting than me delivering it to Eileen.

Christa:

Sure. Thank you. Thank you, Eileen, for giving us such an intimate view of your life. I wonder-

Eileen Myles:

You probably saw more than I know!

Christa:

Does the art that is on the walls where you're writing influence the mood or the attitude of your writing? So if you're in your little outside studio versus your office in your house, is what you're surrounded by influential in what you write?

Eileen Myles:

Yeah. Personally, I think the less you have to look at, the better when you're writing. That's why Glen's piece is great, because it's like a focus as opposed to... Gail, the photograph. I always wanted to put the photograph of Gail and then Ellen in my office, but it's too sexy and too naked. Somehow I feel like, "I don't think I can write with that around." I was really happy to put it up.

Generally speaking, I just feel like less art is better than more for writing. I always think of visual artists, get to listen to music and listen to books on tape. I like silence, and a few birds, and very little art. Not much.

Sara Reisman:

There are a number of questions scrolling in. I'm going to point to Audrey [Horowitz 00:45:39] first. Audrey, if you want to unmute and ask your question, 'cause it was about the orange circle [crosstalk 00:45:47].

Eileen Myles:

Oh, yeah.

Sara Reisman:

Audrey, do you want to ask the question? Are you still-

Audrey Horowitz:

Oh, sure. Hi. I was wondering, did you say that you painted that window orange because of the Bob Dylan thing you'd read? Or you found that out, and that window was orange, and that's why you got it?

Eileen Myles:

Oh. No, no. I was totally... I got the house and it needed a new bathroom window. It's so funny, when you have a house you realize, "I can put in any window I want." I thought, "Why not round?" Then it was like, "Why not orange?" I kept raising the ante of what this window... Yeah, but it was, by the time I was done, I thought, "Oh, my god. I have done that thing that Bob Dylan." You could see my house coming, you know?

Audrey Horowitz:

Yeah. Cool. Thank you.

Sara Reisman:

So, question from Jody. Jody, if you can unmute and ask your question about the Marfa landscape.

Jody:

Hey there. I was just wondering, you've traveled a lot and lived in different locations, if the desert landscape out there has influenced your taste.

Eileen Myles:

Huh. Well, the thing I can say about the desert... I like taking picture of it. I think I probably have... I've absorbed it in my writing, like in my fiction, it's starting to be the background for things that have happened, and landscapes my dog walks through, and so on. I think the fact of its emptiness and that it's not personal to me... You know, I'm from New England or New York. This is not my landscape. That strikes me as really liberating and open, in that same cliché of people going west. It is that. It's going to a bigger, more open space. So, yeah. Yeah.

Sara Reisman:

Here's a question from Rebecca about daily routine. Rebecca, if you want to unmute and pose the question directly.

Rebecca:

Sure. Hi, Eileen. I was curious about-

Eileen Myles:

Hey, Rebecca.

Rebecca:

... your daily routine in Marfa, and if you found that the setting of Marfa influences it, or if it's different from your routine in New York.

Eileen Myles:

Well, anything is different from New York, because New York is actually really a hard place to work. I feel like New York is great if I have a deadline, or I just really hole up. But it's so much obviously more pleasant to hole up in a place where you... The yard, and room, and you can roam more widely. You can keep having your thoughts and you probably won't see anybody. Even more so in the pandemic, it's been kind of an amazing place to be in the pandemic, too. Yeah, yeah. It's really different from writing in New York. I just feel like New York, there's just so much information, and there's so many conversations, and it's so social. It's absolutely a different space to write in.

Sara Reisman:

I'm going to turn this to [Amber Cinema 00:48:52], has a very interesting question about medium. Who is Amber Cinema?

George:

That's me, George. Sorry, I just renamed myself. [crosstalk 00:49:01]-

Sara Reisman:

No problem, [crosstalk 00:49:01].

Eileen Myles:

Hello.

George:

Hey, Eileen. It's great to hear you and see you, and also to hear the trails of your Boston accent, as someone from the area. There's no [inaudible 00:49:12]. I was noting that you seemed to really mention the medium: the distressed wood, the burlap. I was wondering how you, as a writer, think about where your work is going to end up, whether it's into a [inaudible 00:49:27] book or a novel, or if it ends up online. Do you think about your work related to the medium it's going to hang up on?

Eileen Myles:

I feel like... Yeah. I love knowing some things going into a book. It just feels like all this wiggly impermanence is going to wind up in some permanent-seeming position. That's reassuring and kind of a relief. You know, when you're done with the book, you're done with that thought and that thinking. But I think the thing that I do think about, but also find kind of wondrous right now as a writer, is that we are starting to... Like audiobooks. You'll write a book and then sometime close to publication, you sit down in the studio for three days and you read the book. It's so great, because you never, no matter how many readings you do of the work, you never hear it all at once. You really never hear your book. Then you have this incredible experience of being in a studio for a few days and reading the whole damn thing.

Then you release it, and then you just meet people for years who are like, "Oh, when we drove across the country, we listened to blah-blah-blah." It's really a whole other adventure in being received as a writer. I like it so much. I grew up on a lot of radio and listening. There was a moment in the '60s and '70s when talk radio and DJs who would tell intimate, lonely stories late at night. I think I was influenced as a writer by that stuff, as well as singer-songwriters at that time. So, I think it's so cool that we can be recording artists now, in a way, and really accompany people. We can be soundtracks, which I think is so fun. Yeah.

Sara Reisman:

There are two questions that are kind of interrelated. One is from Jordan Horowitz who asks, "Have these pieces traveled with you from home to home?" Then Nico asks, "Do you ever get rid of the work?" So it's a question of: have you brought everything from New York? Or has it been... I think it's been collected along the way, but it seems [crosstalk 00:51:45]-

Eileen Myles:

Well, some work, like Nicole's piece, has been all over the place. Nicole's, that particular piece, has been in New York. It's been in San Diego. It's been in Provincetown. The older the piece is, I think the more traveling we've had together. Other pieces, either they were sent to me here or I bought them here. It's really kind of how long. The Janice Bridgers has been with me since the

'80s in New York. They're like relationships, like different kinds of friendships, in a way. New ones, older ones.

Sara Reisman:

Then do you ever... It's kind of a tough question to ask, but do you ever... Deaccession work from your collection? I won't say 'get rid of,' but the question was posed as [crosstalk 00:52:35]-

Eileen Myles:

No, I guess... Yeah, no. I don't, but I put stuff away. I put stuff away. Some stuff just doesn't... It's not alive for you anymore, or at this time. Later, "Oh, my god. I want to look at that." Also, they're like dishes or they're like books. You just can't look at them all the time. This walkthrough gave me the opportunity to put up a lot of work that hasn't been up.

Sara Reisman:

We have three questions, and maybe we'll end there. One is from Sarah Greenburg-Morse, Stephen Burns, and then Cassandra. Let's start with Sarah Greenburg-Morse, if you can unmute. It's a good question to follow up on the friendship trajectory. Yep.

Sarah Greenburg-Morse:

Hi, Eileen. I was interested in your experience in the past writing about art, and obviously your longstanding friendships with artists, and your life in the art world of New York, and how that has influenced your writing: your poetry, and your novels, and the intersection of visual art and writing.

Eileen Myles:

Well, I think looking at visual art changes the story. I think that writers, you build narratives from so many different sources. Well, literally. Actually, literally, the truest thing is that looking at visual art taught me how to write, because I went to college, I never learned how to write a good term paper, I briefly went to graduate school. They were like, "What is this?" I dropped out. But I wrote poems. Poems can pick up and drop off. They're good for somebody who has a short attention span and maybe an unusual sense of what a sentence is.

So when I started to write art reviews, which are always very formal... The first one was 400 words, then there was the 1000 word, and then the 2000 word. You don't move on to one 'til you've mastered the other. You work intimately with editors, and they're so controlling. I also did journalism, writing about books, too. Those are my first teachers, my first writing teachers. So looking at...

I remember Elizabeth Baker, who is the editor at Art America. She would say, "When in doubt, lean on the information." I was like, "What?" She was like, "Describe." You know? You really got good. Being an art writer really taught me to describe things. Also, I decided to be less precious about my writing, because they would just take a piece and throw it out, or they would move it around. Sometimes they were right and sometimes they were wrong, but it made me see how malleable my work was. But also just having to be coherent. I'm not a huge fan of

coherence necessarily, but to have to have kind of a relational thing about writing. It taught me to write prose. I couldn't write novels, I couldn't write stories, until I did art writing, honestly. Because I just didn't know that I could write good prose.

Sara Reisman:

We have a question from Cassandra that's partly about writing. Cassandra, do you want to unmute and ask the question?

Cassandra:

Sure. I think you just addressed it mostly, but I feel like as enamored with your descriptions of the work, as the work that you've shown us. I'm particularly thinking of the word 'cleave.' I wondered if that just sort of floats into your head as you spend time with the work, or how those descriptions appear to you when you're thinking about the art.

Eileen Myles:

Well, in a weird way, I feel like doing this thing that I did today was a little bit like a cross between performance art and art writing, because I thought, "Okay..." I mean, I walked around my art collection a number of times, and took mental notes, and wrote little notes and stuff. If I'm lucky, I said the thing that I wrote down. But cleave, cleave was really Phil's. Because cleave, I think I was just having a conversation about that word to somebody lately, and thinking how weird it is, that it means two things. It was so lovely to be looking at a piece of art that did that. I feel like there's a lot of uncanniness with language, right? I think art is kind of like a singularity that sucks in those weird language coincidences.

Sara Reisman:

We have one more question that is more practical. I don't know, are you up for a practical question, Eileen?

Eileen Myles:

Sure. Why not?

Sara Reisman:

Okay, so this is from Stephen Burns. Do you want to unmute yourself, Stephen, and ask the question?

Stephen Burns:

Hey, here I am.

Sara Reisman:

Hi.

Stephen Burns:

Hey, everybody. Thank you, Eileen, for this really nice departure from everything that's happening in the world, which I think is where this question came from. The question is: have

you encountered any creative or generative barriers during the pandemic? If so, what routines or strategies have you developed to overcome them? I ask this as somebody who's about to launch some online workshops, and I also have students as well who are kind of struggling to break through, so that's my question. Thank you.

Eileen Myles:

Yeah. No, I think the lack of... You know, what I would normally think was an obstruction or relief, which is seeing people and getting out there, and getting in my truck and driving someplace, and going into a room and sitting down with people, and feeling them and all that, and then going back. Sometimes I'll be doing that and think, "Oh, I've got to do that," and I'm writing. I'm writing something, I don't want to be interrupted. The opposite problem of having unending privacy and aloneness has been really... I mean, I think it's been really... I've had to use physical exercise, and phone calls, and different schedules. I still haven't resolved it, but...

I feel like it's the difference between living in New York and Los Angeles. I think I would often get very lonely in LA, because I feel like the social life just wasn't organic. You always had to be very deliberate and make dates with people. You didn't break dates because there might not be another one. I just think, this, I've had to become very deliberate in terms of how I work and how I stop, and how I refresh myself. Because otherwise, it just keeps being more and more of... Because I've been here alone with my dog, and more and more of me, and uninterrupted time. It's weird how it's not so fruitful necessarily, and it's not so flowing.

Because for one thing, I think if you're alone a lot, what you fall into, the pit you fall into is the pit of yourself. I've had to create obstructions and ways to get out of that inner space so that I can come back refreshed and want to be with myself, as opposed to like, "Oh, it's you again." You know?

It's been a real workshop with solitude. I think I've learned a lot. [crosstalk 01:00:08]-

Sara Reisman:

There's a lot of gratitude coming from the chat. I think that's very generous of you to explain how you've managed to stay productive or balance the productivity with the isolation and the pit of oneself.

Eileen Myles:

Right.

Sara Reisman:

[crosstalk 01:00:26] with that myself.

I want to thank everybody for coming... Well, for tuning in. It's not 'coming' anywhere. [crosstalk 01:00:34]-

Eileen Myles:

Right! I feel like we did.

Sara Reisman:

Yeah. We feel like we did. It's wonderful, actually, to zoom in after the tour and sit down with you. Really, big thanks from the Reuben Foundation, the 8th Floor, and thank you, everyone, for joining us.