

Artist Salon Webinar with Puya Khalili and Charlotte Wall

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SPEAKERS:

Puya Khalili and Charlotte Wall (artists)

Kathy Tycholis (host)

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Kathy Tycholis

Good afternoon everybody, welcome to the June 2021 session of the Richmond Art Gallery's Artist Salon Series. My name is Kathy Tycholis, I'm the Public Programs Coordinator at the Richmond Art Gallery. I'm coming to you today from my home in Vancouver, which is the ancestral lands of the Musqueam, the Tsleil-Waututh and the Squamish peoples. Welcome to all of you out there watching from wherever you're coming from, and supporting the Richmond Art Gallery's programs. I'm really happy to have my guest artists here today, we have Puya Khalili and Charlotte Wall, who are here to talk about their work in the field of public art, and to provide some tips and inspiration for all of you inspiring artists out there.

So for those of you who are new to the program, the Salon is a monthly program, it runs the last Saturday of every month from February to November. It's a combination of professional development and inspiration for visual artists to keep on making your work and expanding your practice.

I would like to welcome the artists. So I'll just give you a little bit of background on each of them:

Multidisciplinary artist and designer **Puya Khalili's** work straddles the lines between the fields of visual art, architecture, music and film. Within the realm of sculpture, Puya's work creates a symbiosis between the natural and fictional worlds through public art projects and spatial interventions.

Over the past two decades, **Charlotte Wall** has established an art practice that ranges from standalone works meant for private art galleries, to scaled up sculptures placed in the broader public sphere. Primarily a sculptor and installation artist, Charlotte Wall has also worked on a number of public art projects, with several pieces installed in British Columbia.

So today's guests were recommended to me by our friends over at Richmond Public Art, because they will be installing a piece in Richmond in a few months. So I thought it would be great to hear from them about this process of the work that they're making for Richmond, but I also thought it'd be really interesting for artists today to hear how artists collaborate in the public art field, as well as that might

Kathy Tycholis

continue in their own private practices. But I thought they'd be a great inspiration for our audience of artists out there today, because they have such wide range of work and different ways of working. I think they'll have a lot of great tips for us today on how to professionalize your art practice and in particular, your public art applications. So it will help us all just not in terms of public art, but just generally in your art career, giving us some tips and tricks that they've developed over the years. So artists out there, get ready for some great tips and the process of how you go from beginning of an application to seeing the project through.

So Puya and Charlotte I'm very happy to have you here today. Welcome. I am now going to go disappear into the background and I will monitor your questions and comments, and I'll come back at the end of your presentation. So you can take it away.

Puya Khalili

Thanks a lot, Kathy.

Charlotte Wall

Thank you Kathy.

Puya Khalili

Awesome. Yeah welcome everybody, thanks for showing up. We just have a short presentation basically about *Typha*, which is the public art piece that we're doing, we're in the process of making for the city of Richmond. I have a, we have a short presentation here that we'll go through, and then afterwards I think Kathy is going to open the room up for answers and discussions. So I can go ahead and share the presentation.

All right. So yeah, this public art piece is called *Typha*, which is a collaborative piece developed by Charlotte Wall and I. We've worked on a few different pieces as well, throughout the years, and we're really passionate in terms of bringing this piece to the city. We come from different fields, visual art, design, architecture, and we are interested to sort of create pieces that take on various qualities in those realms. Now I am going to talk a little bit about the setting of this piece, which is basically right by the Fraser River. I have, if you look at the circle, that's sort of where we are in the city of Richmond. We're right next to the airport, in between the two bridges that meet Richmond the Number 2 Road and the Number 3 Road bridges, and we're right by the Olympic Oval. So if you're familiar with the area, you know that the Olympic Oval is a very large structure there. So, at the end of Hollybridge Way there's a Cul de Sac that sort of terminates at the Greenway, basically, which you can see here. And the Greenway is a pedestrian only pathway that goes across, along the Fraser River, and that's where we are placed for this site. There's a park nearby that surrounds the Olympic Oval, and this public art piece

is being developed right at that intersection. As you can see here, we have a few steps that connect the street level to the Greenway. And this connection was the site that was provided to us by the city for this installation. So we, this was a given parameter in this project and that's sort of where we started to sort of think about this piece. So, Charlotte, feel free to jump in here.

Charlotte Wall

Good to be here. Yeah, I was actually going to say about the site that it was a very contained site in the sense that, that's what we have. And it was already, there was a box underneath it had electrical stuff and so on. So we had a very precise point that we could use, which isn't always true with public art, you have a little leeway sometimes, but this one was and the stairs were there. And so this is what we had to work with. And so I just was going to interject that.

Puya Khalili

Yeah, and there was actually a prebuilt foundation that was built for, in expectation of the art piece that was going to be there. Unfortunately, it wouldn't work for our project but they had sort of, we had to work around that foundation too, so it ended up being more of a challenge than a provision. But yeah, so that's kind of where we started, and as you can see this is sort of where the city meets nature. The banks of the river have been preserved, partially through the Greenway. And that's sort of where we started to think about this project and what that means, contextually. And that's sort of what we wanted to talk about.

So one of the interesting facts about this site is when you're on the street level in and around the site, except on the Greenway, you don't see the river. Because as you can see here, the Greenway sort of comes up, sort of, and creates, in a way, a barrier between the river and the rest of the landscape and it's at a higher elevation. And that means basically when you're on anywhere on the street level or the surrounding area, you don't really visually see the water. And we thought that's an interesting point about this site. And there's a, sort of walking around the sites, these are photos that are taken from the site. But the typha, as you know, as you might also know it by 'reeds' or 'cattail' as they're called, is a plant that sort of grows in and around the site. But it also is a plant that grows when there's any sort of subterranean, or even overground water. However, when it usually grows around small patches of water, and through time as the plants grow, they cover the water, but they sort of always act as a signifier. So whenever you see this plant you can be sure that they're sort of sitting on top of some kind of water. And we wanted to sort of use this plant as a symbol for this existence of water and to talk about the river.

Charlotte Wall

Could I just say, to me, I chose the typha for its historical significance as well, because it's a plant that existed in this area much before any settlements or anything was there. We don't know how long it's

been growing in this area, but it is an indigenous plant that was always there. So I thought, or we thought, that that was important to use a signifier that had a historical meaning as well, and was more ancient than anything else and any other plants on the site.

Puya Khalili

Definitely. Interestingly enough, I mean, there's also the usage for this plant goes back a long time, because they were used for various uses too, as insulation in housing or clothing or even bedding and stuff like that. So it has some very, very interesting uses by the Indigenous people here and it has a long history. So we sort of decided to use this plant as our main source of inspiration and use the formal qualities of it, to sort of arrive at a form that could, you know, become this sculpture. So I'm going to show you sort of where we ended up first, and then we can talk about the process a little bit.

But the piece is called *Typha* and there's basically three pieces that will be assembled in and around the stairs, at the middle there. And as you can see, they're going to be created out of stainless steel. The surface is going to be polished so they will have a very mirror-like finish to them. And the inside is created, will be painted in a yellow sort of golden hue colour, and they are going to be placed in the landing of the stairs as well as the top flight level of the stairs, as you can see. And there's a bench component that just accompanies the three sculptures. And that's sort of how big they are, so you can see the figure there for reference, to sort of get an idea of the scale. And as you can see they have slight, they are angled slightly in different directions. So, when you see them sort of right next to one another, you can see that the slight angled orientations create a sense of movement. And that's kind of the finished piece. Now, too, if Charlotte, do you want to say anything about the finished piece before we jump into the process a little bit?

Charlotte Wall

Well, I think you've covered it. I think, again, by the way we've placed them and angled them, we're going for like a natural kind of sense of the way they actually grow in the water. They kind of grow at angles, they don't, they're not totally straight up and down and I think we've achieved that with the way we've placed them. I think that's an important part of it. Yeah.

Puya Khalili

Yeah, so. Well I wanted to talk about the process a little bit then. Kathy mentioned that there might be other artists in the audience that might be interested in sort of the public art process that we went through, which usually starts from an artist's call. This is a few images of the artist call that we received. The artwork location was predetermined, and we had to sort of work within the parameters of this call. So, after receiving the call we responded to the call with a few examples of our past work, as well as other credentials. And through a process of the selection, a few different artist teams were selected to sort of pitch a presentation of the final piece, and that's where we started to work on the

Puya Khalili

design of the piece. We started by sort of a survey and study of the site, which included sort of imaging the site from various angles and levels, from ground level and aerially. And we also created a 3D model of the site by scanning the site with a drone, taking several images and then assembling them into sort of a 3D model that we had of the site, which really allowed us to work with the site and do different iterations of objects digitally.

So we had a scaled model that we could sort of put any object in and see how it's going to look like, and how it's going to interact with the surroundings. We also had to consider all the various technical limitations that we had to work with, from electrical layouts to structure. So having looked at all of those things, we arrived at our approach to this site, which was to accentuate the actual bearing of the two streets that meets the Greenway and Hollybridge Road, and then create a marker that could sort of talk about the river, but also something that could be, have a certain aesthetic quality that the residents could resonate with. And so that's why we wanted to also create something that had an intricate feeling, much like jewelry, that the residents could feel a sense of ownership towards, while talking about the ecological network that exists there and also sort of the setting that is very prominent. Obviously, it can be seen from the river, it can be seen from the two adjacent bridges, and it can also be seen from the air when you're landing at the YVR airport. So we wanted to take advantage of this 360 degree vantage point, and sort of create a piece that works from all various angles, but also can sort of bring a sense of belonging and ownership to the residents.

So the design process, these are some of the references we looked at. As you can see, there's a mirror, which was interesting, which was an important material because if you look at the site, there's these two qualities at the site that are interesting. On one hand you have the, the left-hand side you have a very green, sort of a lush riverbank and the water. But on the other end you have a very highly developed city landscape, and we thought using a mirror material could be an interesting way to sort of reflect these images back to the viewer, and sort of play on these two very different textures. So we kind of refrained from having, introducing a new texture to the piece.

So stainless steel was a natural choice because we could polish it to become a mirror material, but we also wanted it to become lighting at night. It's really important for us to sort of think about a public art piece as having a day life and night life. So lighting becomes a very important factor here. And so sort of looking at lighting and urban lighting, there's this interesting design language of sort of more industrial objects, and it was an interesting question to think about, how we can marry this more industrial language of city lights and furniture with a more organic feel of the sort of, some geometry that's inspired by nature. And that's what was the impetus for the design of this piece. So, in terms of developing the form, we started off from a very basic outline of this typha plant, sort of an abstract simplification of it, and we just tried to sort of see how we can work with the form. It's easy to, you

Puya Khalili

know, end up at a more comedic realm with the form of the plant, but we wanted to sort of maintain the relative form but stay in the more elaborate, intricate approach. And that's how we sort of arrived at this last form on the right, which is a sort of, as you can see, the beginnings of what it came to be. And that's kind of the form that more or less, sort of, is the final form. It's basically a main pod, and then the stem. The stem runs through the form but what we've tried to do is create the transition s between the stem and the form and the pod, very gradual and very smooth. And as you can see, that's kind of where we ended.

Now, this form that we, we kind of liked how the form looked but it did feel solid, so we wanted to create perforations in the main pod to create room for, just visual access too. So you can see through it, but also in order to create a lighting fixture out of this shape, we wanted to be able to house lighting inside. So we did think about perforating the main pod in some ways, we tried a few different approaches, but where we sort of arrived at was this geometry.

Charlotte Wall

Oh, excuse me. Yeah, I also wanted to interject that we needed to find a way of introducing texture into this form. And the texture on the real thing, the real typha, is like a furry kind of outside. And so we were trying to be mindful of that and find some way of introducing that texture. And we ended up with perforations, which was really a good thing because then we could have the light coming through. So, it was, you know, it was sort of a happy coincidence that we were able to achieve the texture and the lighting through the same manipulation.

Puya Khalili

Yeah, totally. Because if you think about it, I mean working with stainless steel, it's creating texture becomes a challenge, so in order to sort of, you know, abstract that feeling of texture we decided to sort of use, as Charlotte mentioned, perforations. Now how those perforations could look like, you know, it's easy to sort of move towards a direction where it becomes too industrial, so we did want to sort of bring it back to a more natural idea. And that's where we started to look at these patterns, they're called Voronoi patterns, which a lot of designers might be familiar with. But these are naturally occurring patterns that happen in bubbles, or cellular growth on leaves, or even animal skin. And what it is, is basically a basic geometric phenomenon where you can, you will have a few points as growing, as sort of origins of growth, and then as they grow and they interact with each other, they create these cells. Which you can see on the left-hand side a more geometric representation of it, and on the right-hand side you can see a more smoother, organic feel of it. So, and these are some of the studies we did in terms of creating these perforations on top of a form. So there's more geometric ones and there is more smoother organic approach. And we, in doing that, we also realized that it would be interesting to sort of create a graduation of these perforations.

Puya Khalili

So, at the bottom, you'd have much smaller openings and then as you move towards the top, the openings would grow in size and increase. So, just a look behind the scenes of how these perforations were developed on top of the form. This is a software, piece of software known as Grasshopper, so it's basically a way to create procedural geometry basically in the computer. And I wanted to share a bit of the process, so we're using these points, as you can see on the left-hand side, as sort of origination growth points for the cells. And then as we move from the left to right, we're decreasing from the frequency and then on the lower part of the geometry. Then we're using those points to create a network of Voronoi cells on top of, and then we're basically making them smaller, scaling them down. And at the end, we just kind of smooth them and make them much more of an organic feel. And that's how we arrive at the final form.

So, this is kind of, as you see here, this is how the sculpture will look like, as we showed earlier. The transitions on the bottom and the top are quite smooth, and the inside would be painted yellow. And as you can see, the thickness that is sort of the wall of the piece will also be painted yellow. And then it would terminate at the top, in the smooth stem, and at the bottom it will terminate at a very clean glass landing, which is also a light that illuminates at the very bottom. We really wanted to get away from having a bulky sort of base for the sculpture which, I think, takes away from the aesthetic qualities of it, so that's sort of how we're attempting to terminate the piece. And as you can see at night, it will have glow, both inside and at the base. That should look nice against the dark sky. And that's sort of, at the base we have this lightning assembly that I want to show a little bit of the inside of because it's quite a piece to sort of bring together, both the structure, the electrical components and other variable components that create this lighting fixture at the bottom. And yeah, that should be the effect, hopefully, once we're finished. Yes. So that's kind of the, that's as you can see, that's kind of the process with the work.

Charlotte Wall

Puya were you going to show, we just got an image from China, the first few pieces that they have created. And we have a...

Puya Khalili

Yeah. So I have a brief overview of the fabrication process. So basically how these are going to be made, except for the benches, is, these are some of the shop drawings that we've worked on with our fabricators. So they show the various aspects which might be interesting for people who would be looking to do something like this. There's a lot of technical issues that need to be resolved, from electrical conduits and cables, through structural components, and it ends up being quite more than what you would think, initially. But in terms of the forms, the basic process is that from a digital model, a one-to-one foam model is created, and that foam model is basically used as a basis for creating the

final piece. This is a piece that was done in a similar fashion. This is a piece that Charlotte had worked on earlier, it's already installed in Olympic Village, and it has, it's using a similar process. So it's sort of going from a one-to-one foam model, a digital model to a foam model, and then to, in this case, a cast, stainless steel object. So these are some images that we recently received from our fabricator in China. So these are, this is a one-to-one foam model that they're working on. We, as we're moving into production with this piece at the beginning of 2020, COVID hit us, so yeah and in terms of our fabricators being in China, that was quite a setback for a few months. We're scrambling and sort of figuring out what to do, but we're back in production and hopefully we're aiming to have this piece installed very early fall. So that's kind of our timeline, and hopefully you can see it at that time. And, yeah, that was it. So, thank you for being with us. And if you have any questions or comments or, and I don't know how Kathy is going to handle it, but there might be, we can have people offer discussion as well.

Kathy Tycholis

Sure. Well, great. That was great, a great overview for everyone. So we do have a few questions and I'll just go through them with you, and we can go from there. So the first one was from Lauren, "How do you both approach the design process when collaborating with one another?"

Charlotte Wall

Okay well. Should I go first?

Puya Khalili

Sure.

Charlotte Wall

Puya and I have worked together for a long time, he has done the digital part of my, a lot of my own art work, and we were in the same studio for many years, actually. So, we got to know each other's work very well, and we were looking for commissions, public art commissions, and so we were keeping our eye out for calls. And when this one came, it looked interesting, and we, because of, and we have slightly different backgrounds. Puya is an expert at all the digital work and technical stuff and that, and plus he's a great designer, so he brings all that to the table. While I am, I've had quite a lot of experience with actually making artwork and doing public art, and so I guess I bring more concept maybe, and knowledge of materials, maybe. But it's a good partnership because we both bring different qualities I think to the work, but we both have the same sense of what we want the piece to be, how it should read for the public and for the world. So we are very passionate about it being excellent and meaningful. So, go ahead Puya.

Puya Khalili

Yeah, and definitely working in the same space is also helpful because you know there's so many ideas that you can just easily, you know, send back and forth and work on mock-ups. We actually did do a few mock-ups using different materials and towards the end we had a one-to-one, or not a one-to-one, we had a scale model. I have one of the pieces here that we 3D printed. So, yeah, having sort of these actual physical resources is a big help. Usually you find that you can just basically, if you want to cut something and show it, which is just so much easier in person, a lot harder when working remotely. But yeah gladly when we were developing this piece, it was before the pandemic, so working at the same studio was also an easy way to sort of collaborate and communicate.

Charlotte Wall

Yeah, we were very lucky that we had actually finished the design and the fabrication, ideas and so on, just before COVID hit. So it really was almost ready to go. And so it was just a matter of waiting until China could get going and so, it was lucky that way.

Kathy Tycholis

Great. A question from Cindy, "I live in Edmonton and a sculpture was made with silver polished stacked balls. There is an issue with it, where it was placed on the side of the Whitemud, when the sun hits it, it becomes quite blinding. Was this something that was taken into consideration when developing your design?"

Puya Khalili

Yeah, so it's an interesting point. It, working with reflective materials outdoors is important, when you're doing that, it's important to definitely take into consideration sun and reflection. So if you are, if you have a flat surface, or a concave surface, you know, working with a reflective material can be quite challenging. In our case we're using, we're dealing with a convex surface, so as you can see, there's this, any rays of sun hitting the material would be would disperse. So you will never have sort of the rays or in sort of a flat material case, sort of a mirror setting. So yeah because our form is basically concave all throughout, even on the more flat side we have a slight curve to it. So you would always see a dot where, if you're sort of at the right position, but it would never be more than that.

Charlotte Wall

And the I think the perforations in it too, you know, make it much less blinding in any way.

Kathy Tycholis

Great and in relation to that, another question, "How did you come to deciding the light levels and the number of perforations?"

Puya Khalili

The perforations are basically enough to sort of cover the piece from all angles. And then, as you can see, as we go up in the piece there is more openings. Actually I don't even know how many perforations there are, we just basically, we did it visually so that it just looks right. So, and, as I showed you, I mean working with a prompt from parametric sort of environment allows you to tweak things back and forth. So we basically were working with sliders and sort of fine tuning the piece. It's purely visual, and I don't even know how many there are, looks like maybe about 100. And light levels we basically have to adhere to standards, in terms of street lighting. Now, this is not, it's not going to light up the surroundings, but the light will light the piece itself. So it's actually a very very graceful lighting at night. It's not something that, it's not a light fixture, obviously. And something we have to also look at is the light temperature, so we're using very very low temperature lights. So when we talk about temperature, it's not the actual heat level but the colour of the light, you would say. So these are basically very warm lights, warm looking lights. So at night, in addition to the yellow colour, should be a very, very warm feel to it, which, hopefully, it should feel good when we have long rainy evenings.

Charlotte Wall

Yeah, those winter days.

Kathy Tycholis

And Glen asked a question, I know he asked it right before you were talking about the fabrication, so I'm not sure if we fully answered your question for you, Glen, but he was asking, "how is the fabrication being done?"

Puya Khalili

So, it's actually, yeah, the fabrication for this piece is a very interesting process called panel beading where the, as you can see the piece is being segmented to much smaller pieces, and then each piece, so you're basically working with sheets of metal that are very small. And it's a very labour intensive process because the sheets of metal need to be hammered, so that they follow the form precisely. So they're basically, it's a very manual process, as opposed to how we came up with it, which is very digital. But yeah, the fabrication is very labour intensive and manual, and that's why there's, China is one of the only places in the world that has experts in that field. So we're working with one of the largest fabrication warehouses there, the fabricators there, and they've really perfected this technique where they can make massive sculptures from it. But it has its own sort of expertise and knowledge base that is mostly consensually in China. It cannot be cast, because, as you can see, casting it would create a much heavier piece that would also be compromised in terms of structure, or structurally. So we have a structure that is inside the piece, and then the sheets of stainless steel are going to be sort of wrapping around it. And that's how it's done.

Kathy Tycholis

Great. And Glen says, "Thank you. That's amazing. He also said it looks great. What was the budget?"

Charlotte Wall

Not enough.

Puya Khalili

So, the budget was, the budget was a lot less than what we needed. But it was preset by the city. It was the city of Richmond, was part of a development project that was done earlier. And the total budget for the piece is \$300,000.

Charlotte Wall

Just to say here at this point too, if there are people in the audience who are interested in applying for public art. One thing that is always true, it's very hard if you have a good idea and a good piece that you're pitching, and even when you've worked out all the numbers and everything, and you think you can do it for example \$300,000, it's very tricky to actually pull that off, for that amount of money. And I've done, I don't know, maybe I've done 10 public art pieces? And so I'm just saying, if you're in it for the money, I haven't really made any money doing public art. But what I do think is my reward, if you want to call it a reward for doing this work, is the fact that I feel I've contributed an excellent significant piece for the city, and that it exists, and it will continue to exist. So, saying this, I'm certainly not saying you shouldn't try to get some money out of it, to make some money, but it's hard, it's very hard to make money with public art, but...

Puya Khalili

Yeah and it tends to be a very tough thing to estimate, because when you're developing the piece, you want to be sort of free in terms of what you're, you know, creating. And it's really hard, I mean usually you're also working with a very tight timeline, you know, from the time you get picked, usually, until when you have to present, you may have a few weeks, or a month or so. But yeah, I mean it's a very hard process because on one hand you, you're creating, you're modifying things, but any move that you make has obviously budgetary repercussions. And sometimes it's the ones that you cannot foresee because there's so many different elements. I mean you might be able to get a quote from a fabricator, but then there's so many auxiliary things that go into it from, you know, structural requirements, electrical requirements, and there's, you know, you need to install it, there's installation, there's transportation, there is, yeah, there's always surprises and our experience has been that it's always going to cost way more than your estimates. So it's a very, very tough. Yeah, Charlotte said, very very tough to come out the other end without holes in your pocket, for sure.

Kathy Tycholis

I've definitely heard that from pretty much any public artist I've talked to, it's it is. And I think especially your first few where you don't have that experience quite yet of figuring out how much things are going to cost. So yeah, I've heard that a lot, which relates to Rick's question which I think is a great question. Rick is saying, "One of the biggest knowledge gaps for a lot of artists is in the area of installation design, rather than concept. How would you recommend artists fill that gap, would it be partnerships with engineers and designers?" Or, are there courses or mentorships out there that you know of, that could maybe help artists fill that gap? Because I do think that's a big leap from coming up with the artistic vision, then how do I then get it done?

Puya Khalili

Yeah, it's true, there is a very big gap, and the gap is partly installation, but the bigger part of is actually fabrications, so understanding how you're going to create something. And as the scale grows, there's so many other things that come into play. Certainly working with, you know, different consultants is a big issue we had. Just to give you an idea for this project, we definitely worked with a structural consultant from the very beginning. And we've had two different fabricators that are doing the benches and the main sculpture separately. Then there's electrical engineers, there's civil engineers, so we had to do a study of the dike and water processes that affect the site. So there's a lot of things that might not at all be on your radar, you know, soil restrictions and like all of these things. So yeah definitely you will probably need to work with several consultants, and picking the right consultants can always be a big lifesaver. So, then that's when you will have to sort of think about, you know, if that consultant has done a similar job before. Especially when dealing with art, because a lot of these consultants or various trades might not have dealt with art pieces, and something that might work in, you know, construction, might not necessarily work with an art piece, as we've learned through many damaged pieces and, yeah. So it's a tough thing. It's also very hard to find the right people, because there are not many, you know, sort of dedicated trades that work only with art. It's also helpful to work with fabrication companies. There are a few sort of, art fabricators that do a lot of the more technical sides for you, but you would have to have a good understanding of the materials you're working with and whatever goes into it. So it's very different to build something out of fiberglass than is to build it out of stainless steel, and you know working with wood is very different than metal, so you would, I think experience is key. It's hard to say what would be a good course of study, but, yeah, maybe other public artists which could be interesting, you know, could definitely help out. I'd be happy to help anybody if they have questions, to the extent of my knowledge,

Charlotte Wall

And we might be able to recommend, there are fabricators who work well with artists. But I think the bottom line is that you really have to do a lot of homework, and research, like of trades and whatever else you need. You're not going to be able to just go out there and, you know, pick somebody. You

have to sort of look at what they have done, and talk to them, interview them and see if that's going to work for you. And get prices, of course. It's, yeah, it's a lot of work, it's a lot of background work that isn't really necessarily about art, I mean or what we call art. It's about technical things and fabrication and getting it done.

Puya Khalili

Yeah, but it's important to know it so that it doesn't compromise your art, right?

Charlotte Wall

Yeah.

Puya Khalili

The last thing you want is for your piece to be value engineered, then cut down and you know, at some point, there's a point where it starts to not look like your intention at all. And to work around that, you want to be in control of all the various aspects that go into creating something like this.

Charlotte Wall

Absolutely.

Kathy Tycholis

Right, well in connection to, you know, sort of your careers as public artists, Lauren asks, "What percentage of your respective practices is dedicated to public art?"

Charlotte Wall

Well

Puya Khalili

It's a good question.

Charlotte Wall

I mean, if you're talking about public art that's generated by cities or contractors or that kind of thing, I've done three in Richmond, one in South Surrey and several in North Vancouver, one, two in Vancouver, so it's quite a few, about 10 I'd say.

Kathy Tycholis

And how long do you work on like one project like that? I know it's not dedicated like every day for a certain time, but just you know, on average, what would you say, what's your time dedication to a project?

Charlotte Wall

That's an impossible question.

Puya Khalili

There is a crazy time dedication.

Charlotte Wall

Because like any artwork, you know, your thinking time is a lot of time, and then you're talking and interviewing and, you know, all that time, I just couldn't put a timeline to it. But usually you have, we usually had about a year to complete a piece. So, usually that's, they need it by then. Having said that, you know I had a piece ready, a couple of winters ago when we had all that snow, and it was supposed to be installed in October, and the construction wasn't ready, so I finally, they asked for me to bring the piece there in late December, which I did. And then it snowed, we had this huge snowfall. It was buried in snow for a month and a half. So, it, you know, which is not where, a good place for it to be. But these are the kinds of things that do happen, and you just have to be patient, and, you know, try to work with it. And it finally did get put up and everything, but so these things when, when you ask about a timeline, it's, you can say like, usually it's about a year that you have, but it could be three years.

Puya Khalili

Yeah, and it's a very 'stop and go' process. So a lot of times you know you're working very intensely for a few weeks, then, because you're dealing with so many externalities you know from, permit bodies, whether it's the city or other government organizations, then you're dealing with a lot of other externalities. So there's like, at points you're very, you know, focused on something, then you can, you'd have to wait for some process to finalize, whether they're building something or installing or... So, it's a 'stop and go' process, and it can take as Charlotte said, a year, two years. So it's really hard to sort of manage a single public art piece, you might want to have a few that are sort of working in concurrently. But yeah, it can be a drag but depends how you manage it.

In terms of percentage, my work, most of my work is in other fields of design, architecture, and various other things. So public art is, maybe 15 or 20% of the work that I've done, or less. And yeah, certainly for Charlotte, she has her practice as well, that is not necessarily centered around public art. So, yeah, there might be people who are full time public artists but I don't know them, I don't know any. It's certainly, you would need many projects to happen at the same time, but it's very different from an art practice because there's so many elements that are out of your hands, both timewise and, you know, other aspects as well.

Kathy Tycholis

Great, thank you. Another question, "Thank you for the inspiring talk. Could you offer advice on presenting your concept to a selection panel who comprises of many backgrounds and beliefs and perspectives on art?" And maybe in connection to that, you can talk about the different, I mean there are different ways public art is funded and found, you know, whether it's through a city or whether it's through a private developer and just if there is a difference between those processes, if you can just address that for a bit?

Charlotte Wall

Well, I think what we've found is, on the brief that you get with a call, they do talk about things that are important to them. And you have to address those things, of course. And you have to convey a sense of enthusiasm and passion about it, and you have to be able to give them the feeling that you're going to give them something that they're really going to like or appreciate. And that is partly just having done some homework, and being able to present it in such a way that it's palatable and understanding to the people that you're talking to. And usually, I mean yes there are, you know, different people in every committee. But usually what they want to know is the same things: they want to know if you can provide it at the budget they have, and can it be compelling and interesting, and they all want sort of a 'wow' factor, which is often difficult to do with a click of the button. But, yeah, you just have to, you do have to be enthusiastic and very genuine about why you're doing it and that has to be true for yourself too. Because unless you are really passionate about doing it, and I would say there's just no point in doing it because, certainly it's not money. So, yeah.

Puya Khalili

Yeah, in terms of the first question, I think you want to leave as much away from guessing, as you can. So that's where renderings really help. With us, where having a physical model really helps, you know that's where having maybe even a sample of the material really helps. So, in terms of presenting, creating convincing presentation, you want to, people to have a very clear idea what you're going after. So, using multiple ways of sort of bringing that out, clarity is definitely helpful. And in terms of the different processes. Yeah, usually public art projects that we've worked with either are done through a developer or directly through a city, through a municipality. And my understanding is, at least in Canada, there's usually a percentage of the budget for any development that has to go towards a public art project, sometimes it's different. Yeah, and you're either dealing with the developer that is building the project, and they're basically taking on the management of that public art process, or you're dealing with the municipality directly. And there's definitely things to watch for in both of those scenarios, they tend to be very different. When you're dealing with a developer there's, most of the time, a building is also being constructed at the same time, or there's a project that's happening at the same time. So you really want to be careful with the timing around those projects, because they do tend to shift a lot. And like Charlotte was mentioning, it was a piece of hers that had to sit outside for

several months before they could install it because they basically were off on their timing. And it's tough to have them manage it, because on that instance, the way they managed it was very poorly. But, whereas where you're dealing with a municipality, you're probably responsible for mostly everything. There tends to be a higher amount of communication that is needed, I find, in terms of working with a municipality because there's many different parties that you have to respond to and just have to know, sort of, what every department does and what they're looking for. So yeah, and that's outside of those two, I can't think of any other situation that we've had to deal with in terms of public art. But they do tend to be very different, yeah.

Kathy Tycholis

Right. Do you have a preference for either one?

Puya Khalili

I don't know. Yeah, really depends I think it's a very, it's very different. Yeah, I guess there's like a third version, because there was a piece that we were in talks with in Edmonton, and they were representing sort of a community. But yeah, I feel like developer projects tend to go faster, but there's more room for error. So, depends on what you're looking for.

Charlotte Wall

I think each project is kind of unique. You know, it's hard to say that one group is easier to work with than another but because each project is just unique to itself.

Kathy Tycholis

Right, right. And just thinking about, as an artist working with all these different parties and people, I'm sure there is compromise that has to come along the way. So do you have any sort of tips or advice for artists on how to work with that? Because I'm sure ideas change, timelines change, things you did, like you said earlier in your talk like things you didn't even think about or something suddenly you have to know a lot about, so how do you deal with that compromise that's always going on?

Puya Khalili

Yeah, there's a lot of compromise for sure. I think a lot of it comes from the fact that you're, like, different from the way many artists might practice, doing public art you rarely are the person creating the piece. So, being familiar with that process is important because that's where, you know a lot of compromise can happen. And then another area of compromise is when you're dealing with things like structure and, you know, whether or not this piece will need other forms of support, you know. So I think doing a lot of homework, and front loading the work, definitely helps. Because if you're, if you want to figure things out in the process, you will have to be ready to face a lot of changes, which often mean compromises in the not so desirable way.

Charlotte Wall

Yeah, I think, you know, if you always consider that there are some compromises you can make. But as long as you can sort of hold on to the integrity of the piece, and you don't have to give up on on that part of it, then I think you can, you can make compromises. But there's definitely a line where you have to say, "No, that won't work, that isn't going to tell the story as I see it". So it's a matter of making those decisions and still having what you in the end envisioned.

Kathy Tycholis

Great.

Puya Khalili

I was gonna say holding on to the initial vision really tends to be the main thing. Like you have to sort of hold on to it, be able to say 'no' to a lot of situations and fights in a way to have it done, you know, closer than further from the vision.

Charlotte Wall

Yeah.

Kathy Tycholis

Great, well thank you. I mean this has all been really interesting and informative. We don't have any questions, so one thing I was just going to ask both of you to end on, if there's one piece of advice you could give to someone who's just starting or thinking about starting on this field. What would be your one little tidbit of advice you wish you had when you were first starting?

Charlotte Wall

Yes, well, I guess I would say, like I've said before, that it's very rewarding to do because it exists once you're finished. But be prepared to do a lot of hard work, and to engage a lot of people that you need, that you can't do without.

Puya Khalili

Yeah, I think my advice would be to sort of, if somebody is interested in the field, definitely work your way up in terms of scale of the project, because there's a point where, you know, as the project increases in scale, the complexity also increases. So it might be a good idea to get familiar with, sort of building something out in the open on a lot smaller projects with less variables, and, sort of, you know, allow yourself to adjust to all the other elements that might be unforeseen, and then you can scale it up as you go forward. But scale does tend to make things more complicated and complex, but that shouldn't be a factor to stop anybody, for sure. So, yeah, doing it would be the best way to, you know, get familiar with the process.

Kathy Tycholis

Great. Well, thank you. That was great advice. As a lot of people are saying in the comments, it was an excellent presentation and thank you for all your inspiration and all the information you shared with us today. So thank you both for being here and thank you to the audience for joining us on this sunny summer day. I want to also thank Melanie who's behind the scenes making sure all the tech is working for me. She will also be working on editing this as a video so it will come out soon if you did want to rewatch this again or share it with somebody. And that will be available on our website very soon. And while you're visiting the website I also want to invite you to our next Artist Salon, which will be July 31st. If plans go as they are, we will be doing this in person, so this potentially could be our final live-stream for the Salon for this year, and hopefully you can all come back and join us and meet in person, and we'll get back to the social part of the Artist Salon that I know I miss, and I'm sure a lot of us out there are missing. So, and just again, thank you everyone out there, thank you for all the nice comments and for sharing your time with us. Thank you, Charlotte and Puya for such a generous and informative presentation. So I will sign off for today. So thank you everyone, take care.

Puya Khalili

Thanks Kathy. Thank you Kathy and everyone else. Thank you.

Kathy Tycholis

Bye.