

Jennifer Lauren Gallery in conversation with Sarah Galender Meyer from Creative Growth and Paige Wery from Tierra del Sol Gallery – two American studios and galleries

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Jennifer Gilbert | [Sarah Galender Meyer](#) | [Paige Wery](#)

Jennifer: Hi everyone, I'm Jennifer from the Jennifer Lauren gallery. And thank you for joining me today with my conversation with Sarah, and Paige.

So we're here today for a conversation about American art studios and galleries. I've popped a link in the chat box to a live transcript so if anyone needs to see the text live alongside the video please follow that link. There's also two interpreters with us today for sign language Siobhan who's on the screen now. And Alex will swap over halfway through, if you need to pin them to your screen. If you hover over their image, and go to the three little dots, then it will say pin. And if you pin them they should come up larger on your screen for you to follow.

Right, I'm going to get started if anyone wants to ask any questions at any point please pop them in the chat box. This talk is being recorded today. And it will go on the website afterwards for anyone that's missed it alongside the live transcript. So without further ado, let me introduce you to Sarah Galender Meyer I think I've said that right, Yeah and Paige Wery. Paige is from Tierra del Sol and Sarah is from creative growth. So to begin with creative growth was founded in 1974, and is a leader in the field of arts and disabilities, establishing a model for a creative community guided by the principle that art is fundamental to human expression, and that all people are entitled to its tools of communication. Tierra del Sol is a not for profit founded in 1971, empowering people with the development of disabilities, through workforce development, college to career and career in the arts. So we're going to talk a bit about those studios today, a bit about the artists they support, the work they do in the community, the work they do to further the the careers of the artists that they work with and a bit of general conversation. So do join in with questions in the chat box, whenever you want to. So to start with I will hand over to Sarah who will tell us what her role is, and a little about creative growth.

[Sarah: Sure. I'm the gallery director at creative growth, I've been there for about four years in this role, and before that I was a volunteer on an off for many years. When I moved to the Bay Area from New York, creative growth was one of the first sort of arts organizations that I visited and I totally fell in love with it. I went to the studio and gallery at the time and became a member and started buying artwork and he was just really, really into creative growth and very happy to be working for this incredible organization. So, yeah, and it's true, you know, it is an old organization starting in the 70s and I was, you know, looking at some of the history, and it's pretty cool because it was established at this very sort of groovy time in the 70s you know the](#)

disability rights movement was starting to pick up. And, you know, in terms of the art world, there was a lot of experimentation happening in all art forms you know and a lot of questioning about what art is and who can make art. And also it was at a time when the National Endowment for the Arts was really booming in terms of their funding model and structure. So it was this confluence of really great ideas and events that sort of provided a very auspicious beginning for creative growth.

Jennifer: And here is it in its shell form. And how many artists do you work with?

Sarah: to this day, in the studio, it fluctuates. You know it's anywhere from like 130 to 160, but when we were in the building there were about 80 to 90 artists everyday working at creative growth, which is quite large.

Jennifer: Yeah, it's a lot of people and the space is very large, which is really nice.

Sarah: In 1980, Florence and Elias Katz who founded the organization, moved it from their garage in Berkeley. They bought this old auto body repair shop and I think there's a photo of it, and renovated it so it's this nice open beautiful space and creative growth owns it, which is lucky.

Jennifer: could you talk us through a little about the different areas that we can see within the studio space because you work with artists in all different mediums there.

Sarah: Sure. Let's see, there's drawing and painting. There's ceramics and we have our own kilns, which is really great for firing work, there's a woodshop. There's a digital media lab. There's a textiles area for like weavings and all kinds of soft sculptures. And I would add that sort of recently the gallery has also become and is on its way to becoming more of an experimental space like multimedia installation projects for the artists.

Jennifer: So if we look at your gallery space, which we can see here, can you tell us a bit about your role, and you know how this gallery space connects to the studio and what you kind of do in this space.

Sarah: Sure. Yeah, you know, I think we're really lucky to have the gallery, right next to the studio. You know it, I feel like it is a very essential part of the organization that we can be so close just from the gallery perspective that we have, you know, daily and easy access and flow of information back and forth with artists and their creative process I think it's really important. So it's nice to sort of have that connection, obviously, things are a little bit different now when everybody is remote. But at the time, you know, it's great we can easily wander into the studio and talk to the artists and the teaching staff and you know just really sort of have that and

artists can come into the gallery anytime they want and they can work in the space so it's a nice. It's great that we have both spaces and the gallery is nice and big, so we can really accommodate a lot of sort of creative visions that they have.

Jennifer: And so how often would you in any normal time have different exhibitions in the space and what sort of exhibitions are they - are they solo shows are they group shows? Do you ever bring in external people into that space?

Sarah: Yeah. All of the above. There was about six to eight exhibitions in the Oakland gallery a year and a couple of them are annual shows that creative growth has been producing for a number of years like the holiday show and the Home Show. We have group shows of some of our artists in the gallery that we will curate. we often have guest curators come and curate shows of our artists. And there's also, you know, an interest, you know some of our artists are really interested in having a larger role in the curation and presentation of their work so we started doing that and then also bringing artists in to just, you know, create their installations and things like that, like Nicole storm here. so this is from 2018, but she recently came in and did a new installation.

Jennifer: so can you explain a bit about the process of you know how that worked and how she worked within the gallery space.

Sarah: Yeah, well the first thing she did was in 2018. You know, was really an experiment, she hadn't done anything like that before. But her process is so interesting and so organic and, you know, she really uses the whole building as her workspace - she walks around with her work. She likes to sort of retreat into corners. And, you know, I just thought it would be cool to give her the gallery space to really see sort of how she wanted to manage her work, essentially, and she really laid it on. you know we put everything out there, she was hanging it from the lighting grid and up on the walls and all over the floor and at the time there were these great boxes and it was pretty cool and it was sort of always this evolving thing and she started using it as a workspace and changing it around every day and you know, I think, you know, none of us knew what to expect and, and it turned out really beautifully, and we were really really excited about that and yeah she did another one recently, because you know it was a single artist allowed during COVID. She was able to come in and safely do another installation, which was really great which is pretty incredible.

Jennifer: Yeah. And then you have more pared back things, so it's not always full on everything everywhere like Nicole so there's more paired like this image.

Sarah: Oh yeah sorry I can't see your screen so but you're looking at Joseph. Yeah, that was really interesting how that came about too i mean i think that's another example of how great it

is that all artists are working together in one large space and seeing the gallery. Joseph saw Dan Miller working on one of his big scrolls which is the big paper that you see there, and he asked Kathleen who was also in that photo, you know he was like, I want to work on big paper, can I work on big paper? So, we did and he's not the only artist, there was another artist Barry Reagan who did the same thing and we have other huge beautiful pieces. And so that's how it came about and so you know we put it up on the wall and he made these two incredibly beautiful paintings that were a part of an abstract show that we had at the time.

Jennifer: It's so wonderful that you've got all of this space that you know artists can work so large, on these works because lots of the studios, especially when I think about studios in the UK, they're so limited in their space and it's incredible that creative growth has this incredible building with all this space in it that people can create you know tiny works to huge works.

Sarah: Yeah, it is really great. I can't say that we have a lot of space to store all of these large pieces but it is really exciting when it happens.

Jennifer: That's true. Storage is always an issue. so here we can see Larry and Paulina in the ceramic studio, and I love that we can see all of this artwork in the background as well which is obviously pretty inspirational to kind of be surrounded by all the time.

Sarah: Yeah, I mean that's how it goes. You know, they're everybody's working on their individual projects but they're all very close and they're surrounded by all this artwork in different mediums. I mean it really is is a great environment, you know.

Jennifer: And so when I think about the studios here the people that work in the studios are all artists that are brought in with particular disciplines, is that the same in creative growth so there might be a specific ceramics tutor and a specialist in painting is that similar?

Sarah: Yeah that's right the instructors are all practicing artists themselves, and you know that was the original intention and I think that's really great. You know, it's a little challenging right now because we're remote and, you know, there are a lot of emotional issues coming up with our artists and they're, so far apart so it's difficult to sort of have the same kind of interaction about artwork and artistic process and supporting the artists in the same way that they used to, but I do feel like there is a particular sensitivity and artistic intelligence that that artists have in working with other artists you know and you know the philosophy of creative growth is very hands off and so our staff is particularly good at just being really adaptable and willing to be flexible with each individual artists in terms of what their creative needs and desires are.

Jennifer: And when the studio is open, if there's one facilitator how many people are they normally working with in a group?

Sarah: It varies, it depends on the medium it depends on the space limitations. You know it could be 10 people, it could be four people could be two people there are some one-on-one scenarios as well where you know, they're assisting one artist throughout the day.

Jennifer: And Paige is that a similar sort of setup at Tierra where there's different sections of the studio space or does everything happen in one area and all the mediums are kind of all happening at the same time?

Paige: They are separate pretty much i mean it's not one huge room, like creative growth, there's a little more rooms. there's some separate rooms, but definitely within that, there's the ceramic studio in both locations. like we're different from creative growth in several ways. But we have two different studios that we work from and there's about 50 artists in each studio, but each one has their own kiln and they do their own paintings and drawings and so they keep those things separate. At one of them there's the textile room, and that's all kept separate too.

Jennifer: And is it similar in that all the people that run the sessions are trained artists themselves.

Paige: Yes, they are. And the big difference is that our gallery. It used to be attached for 30 years, there was a gallery out in Claremont called First Street gallery which was part of Tierra del Sol and that's when they very first started their arts program. But now, for a year and a half since I started I've just been here for a year and a half, we have a gallery that's in the heart of Chinatown in Los Angeles and so we chose to, I should say the CEO chose to, move the gallery here so that we can be part of the contemporary art world so I'm on a street that has other galleries up and down the Walking Street and it's a historical part of LA contemporary art and so our gallery is not attached to a studio like most of the studios are. So of course there's ups and downs to that. We don't have that super creative energy being created. So when somebody comes to visit the gallery they're not able to see the studio in the same time, but it's also pretty cool because the art is separate from the studio and so this is just it's a contemporary art gallery. And so when people walk into the gallery it's not about who's making the art it's about the work. And so it's, you know, if somebody walks in, it's not a place for disabled people that make work it's actually a gallery and we happen to be showing that work so that's the difference and there's ups and downs to both.

Jennifer: Yeah, I guess being on a street surrounded by these other galleries is a pretty special place to be where you know people can wander into one contemporary gallery and another and that kind of normalizes I guess the kind of work that you show because people are just seeing as though a street as though it's a street of contemporary spaces together.

Paige: 100%. I am 100% behind promoting the artist as contemporary artists, which is what they are. And so being on the street is a huge bonus for that. And it's not I mean, it's just treated like a regular any other contemporary gallery where most progressive studios there's a gallery attached to that. So that is all part of it

Jennifer: So it's a little bit different. But it works for you.

Paige: Absolutely, it's working very well. The gallery is getting a lot of attention and the artists are doing really well and so it's working well. I think that it's also a little bit unusual because it's a little bit expensive to have a separate gallery but we're figuring all that out.

Jennifer: Yeah, definitely. So Sarah if we come back to creative growth, if we think about a typical day for the artists coming in and kind of what happens in the space, could you talk us through a typical day in the life of a creative growth artist.

Sarah: Sure. Well the artists arrive you know sometimes between 8:30 and 9:30, you know until they get sort of they put their stuff away and get settled, you know, there are sort of designated - they're not classes but certain areas like there's a morning class and then an afternoon class or area that they go to, so then there's a long work period. There are some breaks in between and then there's lunch. Sometimes during lunch, we'll have artist talks and that's not something that's actually, particularly open to the public, but it's really for the artists and the staff, which is really nice. It's nice to sort of have that support and that will be either sort of in like the lunch break room or in the gallery. And then there will be the afternoon class and typically artists around three o'clock start going home.

Jennifer: I love the fact that you mentioned the art talks there because I've seen those on your Instagram page and you know it's normally one or maybe two artists and they've got their work up and they're talking through it and it's really wonderful because you have, you know, interpreters there so if people need the interpreters as well like we have today, the interpreters are there so that everyone in the studio can participate if they want to participate.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, it's been a really great program that has even sort of continued a bit online which is nice to know.

Jennifer: And on screen at the moment we can see Sher-ron Freeman, who I spoke to recently online which was wonderful, with her tree in the background and Sher-ron is one of the eight artists that's in my current online exhibition evolving echoing entities, which I hope everyone has checked out. And so, could you tell us a little bit about Sher-ron, and you know I featured her work, not her 3d based work but her drawings that kind of feature flower like kind of shapes

and symbols in them with her telling me that her favorite ones were the white ones recently. So could you tell us a little bit about Sher-ron's practice.

Sarah: Sure. Yeah, it's funny that she likes the white ones, I feel like it's kind of cheesy to say but you know sometimes there will be correlations between an artist sort of artwork or a direct correlation with their personality and their artwork and I do feel like Sher-ron is sort of is one of those artists, you know. She is very sweet and bright and uninhibited in a way like she's not wild but she's not shy, you know, so there's something about like, you know her paintings. Her drawings are a little more constrained but her paintings are sort of like wild and layered and lots of colors and very bright and, you know, kind of sunshiny and that's very much sort of as you know through your conversation, who she is. And then, yeah and then she's working on one of her baskets in that image which are really great, because it's the same thing she just uses like all of these different textures and notions and all these strange things she loves keys and like fabric doilies and stuff that she'll attach and she's used like the base of a basket to sort of sew all these things together and they really build up, but she has also created her own structures which I think are really amazing too.

Jennifer: And like that basket when I was talking to her, there's like buttons on there keys thing she found around the studio, pom poms - like it's a mass of all these different things intertwined together.

Sarah: It's not like all neat and contained you know like there will be like big blobs of things that are connected that are hanging off. It's amazing.

Jennifer: Definitely. So if we move on to things that happen outside of the gallery so creative growth is one of the longest running studios in the world, and it's had some very famous artists come out of the studio, one of which is Judith Scott, who we can see here at the Venice Biennale. Could you tell us a maybe a little bit about Judith and about why it's important for creative growth to have these external events going on and how you see that impacting the artist and their career.

Sarah: Sure. Yeah, well that's really interesting you know, in the year 2000, the Board of Directors made a strategic decision to, you know, start bringing the artists and creative growth into the contemporary art realm, so that was a clear decision because there had been a lot of attention, especially from a lot of like established local artists who were really into creative growth and the artwork and there were some artists that had these really incredible practices. So in the year 2000 they hired Tom de Maria to come and start taking the artwork to fairs pushing it into galleries and he did a really incredible job, sort of propelling the careers of Judith Scott, Dan Miller, William Scott, and also with the staff that was working at creative growth at the time. And there were a lot of sort of key gallerists and curators and, you know,

influencers and artists and celebrities that really helped creative growth along the way. Just sort of gain all of this notoriety.

Jennifer: So Judith Scott is one of these artists?

Sarah: Yes. She died in 2005, but her artwork was starting to be exhibited I think 2001 was the first sort of major exhibition and it very quickly took off. So a lot of her success actually happened posthumously so that is one of the artists and there have been books and films and, you know, photographs of these amazing things about her processes and career which has been quite amazing.

Jennifer: And another such artist, that was also featured in the Venice Biennale is Dan Miller who is still alive today, could you tell us a little bit about Dan and the fact that Dan you know we now see his work again his work was at frieze in New York and was in the Venice Biennale. He's shown at different galleries across America could you tell us a little bit about Dan and his process.

Sarah: Sure. Yeah, Dan is definitely an artist with assistance. He's very internally motivated and you know he has, you know his drawings and paintings, this is a piece of his right here but you know it's all related to words and symbols that he's sort of growing over and over again. And it's interesting this is like one of the artists where, you know, typically we don't talk about our artists diagnoses, or we're not allowed to. But, you know, there are certain cases in which like their diagnoses can really inform their process. And so he's one of the artists in which we do sort of say like, you know, he's on the autism spectrum, and we do talk about his work but he has been at creative growth for a long time and also achieved a lot of success really early on, and you know he has, I think it was in 2008, that MoMA acquired a few drawings of his and you know put his work in this exhibition alongside these amazing artists. And so yeah to this day he still works

Jennifer: He's incredibly sought after now.

Sarah: It is. I know it's really pretty amazing. It's exciting. You know, he is very successful and it is really great. We haven't been able to work with him at all during COVID except his caretaker allows these like small scrolls because they don't have a lot of space in the house. And he's been doing these really beautiful drawings which we might be releasing soon so i think you know he's doing well but we definitely sort of miss working with him but yeah his work is highly sought after, but you know somebody said recently that, you know, considering his success they were surprised, not that his prices are low by any means but they were like, wow, I'm surprised that his work isn't selling for more.

Jennifer: I don't want it to go any higher I want to buy one. Haha I mean I do and I don't ha

Sarah: Yeah, but it's great and you know his artwork is very contemporary it really holds up and I was talking to a collector recently, who has been buying Dan's artwork for a while, for many years and has been a big supporter of creative growth and, and he still said to me, you know, wow this piece is really a great masterpiece and, you know, it really holds up against a lot of Contemporary Art like it was a new idea, you know, and that's something that we come across all the time, that it is an uphill battle in some ways, definitely.

Jennifer: Someone's asked an interesting question that I'll pose to both of you. It says, How do you see the art and some speculation on why certain artists become so well known across the world and others get nowhere?

Sarah: That's the big question right. I mean it is speculation in a way, but it's also, I mean Paige you know from being in the field for many years, you learn, you know who your different audiences are and who the constituencies are. We test things out on art fairs and people who are inquiring about the work by sending images so you start to learn sort of what the demand is or what the tastes are.

Paige: I mean, I have a couple different ways of testing those things too and right now Instagram is an awesome way to post something and you see what kind of response you get. We also upstairs from our gallery have a little sliver of an office upstairs and I always put things out there just to try it out to see and so when someone comes into the gallery and they're the type of people that's hanging out and enjoying the show, then I'll say go upstairs and check out what we have upstairs too and that's all just to see, to test what I've chosen because I'm going into a studio and there's 100 artists and so I'm trying to decide who is ready for a solo show. And who are we going to invest in and pay for frames and pay for marketing and so there's little tests that I do to test the market, but really you know it's hard to know, it's very hard to answer that question. I mean everybody would love to know the answer to that question.

Jennifer: Yeah. And Paige I guess the show that you're doing now Jackie, that you've got a work of behind you. Her little sculptures that she did you started those off, you know maybe like a year or so ago, didn't you and they kind of just flew out.

Paige: Yes, I mean, even before I worked at Tierra del Sol, I had my own gallery called the good luck gallery and I was selling Jackie's work through the good luck and I have a bunch of her work. And so this is the first time that I'm showing her 2d work as well as the 3d work but yeah she's had a successful run.

Jennifer: Great. So I'll move on to Paige now if that's all right. But one final question for you, Sarah that's popped up, do the artists come to the studio with support workers, and if so, how do they work with the artists?

Sarah: Artists don't come with their own support people. We have some support staff at creative growth who will support them and work with them at the studio.

Jennifer: So on to Paige from Tierra del Sol. So here is the beautiful gallery. So Paige do you want to tell us a bit about your role there and how long you've been there and a bit about what you did before and how it kind of interlinks together?

Paige: Sure. So, I have been working at running the Tierra Del Sol gallery for just a year and a half. And like I think I said earlier they've had an arts program for 30 years at Tierra del Sol but, as well as creative growth, Tierra del Sol foundation started in 1970s, in the early 1970s, 1971, and that was just like creative growth. We're both in California and it was parents that did not want to put their children that had disabilities into an institution. And so they teamed up together and they bought some land and that's how Tierra del Sol foundation started in 1971. It wasn't until 30 years ago that they started the actual arts studio program, but that's been around for 30 years now and so I am very new to the program. But even before I started working at Tierra del Sol, like I said I had my own gallery and I was working with their artists before, so I was representing their artists, through the gallery before that. So when I had to close my gallery after five years, Tierra del Sol came and took over my lease, and hired me to be their gallery director and so that's when the gallery moved into Chinatown and where we're at now. Another different thing about us and creative growth is that Tierra del Sol, also we help adults get through college and we help them find jobs and we help them volunteer out in the community. And then we also have the arts program so we have several different things that people can choose from and we actually Tierra del Sol Foundation has about 700 people that we work with. So it's a quite a large foundation and the arts program has 100 artists.

Jennifer: Amazing.

Paige: So, yeah, I mean I'm the gallery director I'm the curator, I actually do all of the PR and the outreach that comes out of the gallery. And there's different things happening at the studios, like the location is separate so it's a really big cool teamwork. I absolutely love my new jobs. It's so nice because when I was running my own gallery, it was just me making all my decisions and it becomes a very difficult thing to do and so now I have this whole team of people that I can like call and ask questions. And I do have to drive out to the studios and look at the work, and look at stacks of work and some of the artists have been there for 30 years and they've never had a show, away from the studio so I'm going out there just looking through work sometimes in storage, sometimes it's like out on the shelves. And so, I'm constantly

looking for who's ready to have a show and say let's bring that work in and invest in them and see what happens with the market and see what you know. And it's been going really well, it's a really new thing - it's an unusual thing for the progressive studios, but it's been going really well.

Jennifer: So I guess if we come back to you saying that you used to have the good luck gallery and you used to work with some of the artists, here's one such artists Helen Rae, and I know jill popped in the chat that she'd like you to talk about Helen Rae and how you promote but also protect her practice. So, here is, I love this photo because she just is beaming at her solo show, so could you tell us a bit about Helen?

Paige: So Helen is the first person I did when I had my own gallery. This is how I met Tierra del Sol and how they met me. I was going to do a group show with Tierra del Sol at my old gallery, and the more I was looking at everybody's work, I saw these amazing fashion drawings, and then I found out that it was Helen Rae and that she was in her mid 70s. so I decided when I heard that she had never had a solo show, we brought her work into the good luck gallery. This was her first solo show at a commercial space and we framed the work, put it on the wall and it sold out that evening. So, anyway we did this amazing show and from there The good luck gallery was able to take her to the outsider art fair. And from there, you know, the beautiful magic that can happen at an art fair is that you know collectors come by and bought her work but also white columns Matthew Higgs came by and saw her work and gave her a solo show. So that took her to a whole another level in New York. And so those are the magical moments when you're working in a gallery when something like that happens, but that's Helen Rae and she's still working away she's now. I believe like almost 80 years old sorry I can't remember right now. She must be in her early 80s. But there she is, she got selected for gallery Magazine as one of the up and coming artists and it was hilarious because I just sent in her work, and said hey this woman you know makes this work and gave them some background but they didn't realize that she was in her 80s. It was all these young people that they had selected and then here was Helen Rae, and they showed up to take photographs and they were like, wow, I wasn't expecting.

Jennifer: I love that it was so unexpected to people that is she is this older lady and, you know, she is a deaf artist but she creates these incredible pieces, based on these, you know fashion images you might see In vogue or something and then does her own interpretation and adds these extravagant backgrounds and

Paige: And they're just contemporary looking - it looks like she just graduated with her MFA, they're absolutely phenomenal, and she's been she's been with the program since the day that they started so she has actually been working on her work for 30 years and yeah so it's awesome to work with her.

Sarah: Are these portraits sort of what she's always done at Tierra del Sol or not?

Paige: For quite a while like since I've been working with her it has been all, you know her inspiration is definitely fashion magazines. But before that, when she showed up, she had never done fine artwork before. So that's 30 years ago and Rebecca Hamm who's here today and she manages both of the studios at Tierra. She actually helped Helen, learn how to draw, and just literally from start Helen is almost non-verbal, and she knows a little bit of sign language. And so, Rebecca had to set up like still life in front of her and show her how to draw that and then show her, you know like, it just completely from scratch. And so it's evolved over 30 years like any artist would, but she literally started from scratch.

Jennifer: And Paige you mentioned that you know you've taken Helen's work to the art fairs, amongst other people's work to the art fairs as well. So, in your opinion, why do you think the art fairs are beneficial for studios to participate in them, especially somewhere like the outsider art fair that takes place in New York and Paris. Why do you think that is beneficial to your artists?

Paige: Whoa, like I said what happened to Helen I mean that's the dream but it's exposure, it's meeting new people. I actually love art fairs. I'm like a super Art Fair weirdo I know a lot of people don't like doing them, but I love them because not only are you meeting collectors that you would never meet you are meeting curators you're meeting museum people you're meeting press and then you're also meeting other gallery owners, you know, and when is there a time where there's 50, you know 100 people all with the same passion, you know, as they call it outsider art we don't really say that that often anymore but you know we all have this amazing passion for this so when is there another time that we're all going to be able to meet each other and mingle and, you know, like Sarah said earlier, we all got to know each other that way. And so I think that that's super important and it's just a matter of exposure for artists. I really love that creative growth and I hope that Tierra del Sol that we do this more moving forward is that that we take our artists and we put them into contemporary art fairs as well, that it's not just the outsider art fair. And a lot of times, the art fairs don't accept our artists because they don't have MFA's, they are just working out of the studio. You know we're nonprofits, things like that. And so, that's all changing though. I mean, first of all, they're going to be desperate for people anyway because of COVID. Girls let's get in there.

Jennifer: The other thing I guess with contemporary art fairs, and I guess Sarah gets this as well is that they're so expensive to have a booth, I mean if we wanted to take a booth in like frieze. And have you know a group of artists from studios and frieze it's so expensive to have a stand to profile these people and I don't see them offering discounts to, you know, supported studios or anything like that so it's difficult to get into that market and I know Sarah creative

growth does things like art Paris and those sorts of things. So how do you find going into contemporary art fairs, as a supportive studio working with artists with disabilities?

Sarah: It's pretty great. I mean the reception is really pretty good I mean it's nice to be in that context where people don't know what to expect from creative growth, they don't even know who creative growth is, and people gravitate to the artwork because of the aesthetics and the artistic value versus sort of oh this is a studio here, and you know at the outsider art fair anybody knows, basically what to expect – there's studios and then there's dealers. So contemporary art fairs are really great. And it is opening up, and I think that the reception has been really great and we found that, yes, there is an investment in order to get in, but it does pay off, you know, either from sales or in those relationships longer term that you form at those fairs.

Paige: And also, I know creative growth and also Tierra del Sol had some artists represented there through another gallery but there's the smaller fairs like Felix, Felix fair was a fair in in Los Angeles, that is down the street from frieze. So you, it's not as expensive, still of course art fairs are risky business but I've always loved them and I've always had pretty good success with them and sometimes even when you walk away and you feel like you didn't have sales, there are you know contacts that you've made that you wouldn't have made before.

Jennifer: That is so true - it is a lot about the networking and the contacts and what might you know formulate down the line, and Paige you did a comic based fair didn't you - didn't you take Evan's work that we can see on the screen now to some form of a comic fair?

Paige: I did, it was called designer con and that was an experiment that didn't work great. But it was fun because we have a lot of people that do a lot of things here, there's a lot of work that I think fits into that low Bro, I don't know. Does everybody know what low brow is, like kind of like, maybe comic based work and Evan actually did well at that fair and he sat with me in the booth and chatted everybody up coming in and was like, I want to sell this, I want you to buy it, like it was so much fun, and I absolutely loved it and he ended up meeting a bunch of people and he sold work. But so yeah I am open to experimenting and finding out people, you know, like there's different niches of art that's being made that might not fit into this program, but that there's other outlets for their work

Jennifer: so I guess what you do like with Evan's exhibition in your space, you got him to come in and give a talk to an audience and you do that with lots of your shows where you get people to come in and give a talk or give a curators tour or something.

Paige: It's a deal. It depends on you know who the artist is. Some artists love talking about their work and some artists like Hugo do not like to talk about their work. This is Hugo,

checking out his own work loving his own work, like totally wowed by it but yeah Evan did a talk and he just knocked it out of the ballpark. Everybody in here absolutely loved it, people after the talk came and bought more of the work. He just loves talking about his work and plus he has stories behind every single one of his characters. So, yeah, that's something that I am absolutely missing. I can't wait to get back to having our openings and celebrating with the artist and I just miss that so much. It's been a long time since we've been able to do that but it's a huge part of our program like creative growth. I mean having openings and inviting everybody in and celebrating with the artist and then hopefully if the artist likes to talk about their work then of course I want them to come in and chat it up.

Jennifer: Yeah, definitely. And, someone's asked, and this would probably relate to both of you. How much does the character or attitude of the artist matter for their success? And I guess if I think of someone like you know someone like Judith Scott, who didn't really speak. You know it, she did have I mean I've seen photos of her and I've read about in a book that she as people got to know her, she became more sassy and she wore more hats and she wore more pearls around the neck and she seemed to love that attention and love, and then started like dressing up for people. So do you want to both say whether you feel like the character and attitude matters for the success of the artist?

Paige: I just had the first time my last show. The family brought the artist during COVID so we had like a private meeting here and he was not really excited about this show, and we sold a bunch of the work and it did really well and then you know his mom explained that you know his, his daily routine was broken up by driving into the city and coming and checking it out. It doesn't really matter, if the art is awesome, the art is awesome and you know it was the first time that I've had an artist come in and be like, not that excited about it, that's new for me. But it didn't matter I mean we still sold a bunch of his work and I still plan on continuing to promote it and I think it's amazing. So, I don't take it personally. And he just back to making art, you know, and that's what's the most important thing for him making the art

Jennifer: so I guess you know you're seeing it as incredible art and you want to share it with the world and for him the most important thing to him is just going into the studio and creating the artwork and the process I guess of making the artwork.

Sarah: Absolutely. Yeah that's part of our job really is to build a narrative, if there isn't really a narrative, you know, and I think that I agree with Paige that it doesn't always matter. You know, the aesthetics, it is what it is, not everybody has to be in credit, not every artist has to be very charismatic and get those sales, you know, but again like ever, like there are contexts and certain times when, you know, collectors and people who are just interested in the organization and the artists like they do want to know who the artist is and what they're about so if the artist

is comfortable and willing, by all means, I think that's a great opportunity for them. But, you know, in terms of sales. Not necessarily. Yeah.

Jennifer: So Paige I have just bought up John Maull on the screen now. I love this photo and love the abundance of color behind him and John is another artist that's in my current online exhibition so could you tell us a little bit about John and you recently did a solo show for him at your gallery?

Paige: Yes, he had his very first solo show one year from this month. January 2020.

Jennifer: it doesn't feel like it was that long ago!

Paige: He has been part of Tierra del Sol for 15 years, and that was his first solo show here and it was an absolute, well he knocked it out of the ballpark. It was super successful - not very many people had heard of him people walked in and they bought it off the walls which is super exciting and fun. And then we took him to the Outsider Art Fair last year 2020, and gave him a whole wall and we sold out of everything there and now he's getting asked to do different shows like how you asked him, but, he is not completely non-verbal but he doesn't communicate like you and I. And so I did get to talk to his family about his inspiration and his mother was an artist and encouraged him to make art and she took care of him like he lived with her until she passed, and they had a hill in the back of their yard that was full of shrubs and flowers and trees and stuff and so the family when they came to see the show they said this inspiration is ever since he was a child. You know he's been doing these drawings of these trees and flowers however you see them and it's his sense of layering and color, and just absolutely beautiful. And there's just so much movement going on in there when you see them they're just gorgeous.

Jennifer: The kind of colour combinations that he uses are just beautiful like you can see there like the purples and the pinks and the way they blend together it's just mesmerizing.

Paige: Right. And then like I said he's been there for 15 years, he also has a series where they're much more subtle and you know browns and oranges and maybe fall kind of colors, and he's really getting away with things that if you were going to art school like if you told somebody you're going to put orange and blue on the screen it's just going to clash and I don't know how he gets away with it, and absolutely amazing to see his work it's super exciting. I see a long career for John.

Jennifer: someone's asked about how the artists come to the studios in the first place. You know, when I talked to a studio, the other day they said that they had to come with a portfolio to the studio and the studio would go through the portfolio and make a decision about whether they could be part of the studio or not, is that the same with creative growth and Tierra del Sol?

Sarah: no. Most of our artists come, you know are part of the regional center and they belong to the regional center like they're being supported by the state and so it's caseworkers who happen to know about our program or families who want to bring their adult children to the program who happened to know about it and there's no art test or skills or talent reading or anything and that's part of it, you know it takes to be an artist a long time to certify their artistic voice and that is fine. They have just as much access to all the quality materials and everything, as everybody else and some find their voices quicker than others but there's no sort of selections.

Jennifer: so you don't then say like after two years you might be like well you haven't really come very far so off you potter?

Sarah: no, absolutely not. Yeah, no, and in fact that's the case with Judith Scott I think you know it was for two years she was doing some drawings which were kind of interesting, we have some, you know, which were great and it wasn't until there was a visiting artist doing a fiber workshop that she started and she sort of gravitated towards like the yarn and the structures and started that but she sat for two years, and that was fine.

Jennifer: Paige What about Tierra del Sol?

Paige: it's the same as creative growth. Anybody can come and just like Helen, re learn from scratch, and I love the story that Judith, Judith sat at creative growth for two years before she started doing her art, I absolutely love that. but it's the same we don't. I heard you talking Jennifer to that program director the other day and I was surprised to hear that they said after two years they might, you know, say goodbye, and we don't do that. Thankfully my gosh I mean look at what you would miss out on.

Jennifer: I know that is true but I think that's it's true of quite a lot of European studios and I think it depends on how you're funded. I guess as to, you know, where the funding comes from as to whether that is something that you do or not because I know a couple of other studios that have a similar setup. So I guess in that respect, like when artists come to your studios, and both of you. How is that funded like does the government pay towards them, do their families pay? How does it work?

Paige: At Tierra del Sol it's a combination It's, yes, mostly government funded. And then there's also, you know, there's fundraisers, there is donations which we're super into especially now. yeah i think that there's also grants. I mean, you know, there's somebody I don't do that that somebody else here does, so they spend their time applying for grants, so it's a combination of things, all of the above comes together.

Sarah: Same we have three funding streams. The Regional Center for their clients. We're a licensed state program, and creative growth is a 501 c three nonprofit organization so we can accept contributions. So we also have a development team that you know raises individual and corporate and foundation grants and stuff like that and then art sales is also another pretty large source of income.

Jennifer: Yeah, definitely. So Paige we're looking at Karen now, and her ceramic, and I guess this is just showcasing the different art forms that Tierra can do and then you go off into the studio to kind of select different artists for the show so when you go into the studio, are the facilitators kind of recommending people to you or are you going in blind and going okay, which one should I look at?

Paige: I definitely ask if anybody sees somebody that works in the studios, you know, are you recognizing somebody that's really passionate and has the depth of the work and is ready then I definitely want them to let us know, and then also I go in and I just browse around and check out the walls and you know, say hi and see what's going on. It's all of the above and plus, you know, just over time you know who's who and who's working and who's leading up to it like the woman that you just showed that's doing the ceramics she's fairly new, but look at that ceramic like she's been there for less than two years and I'm like, She's awesome. Like, but you know we're doing COVID right now but she's somebody that doesn't have enough work to do a solo show but I'm asking them to hold her work and set it aside because until is ready for a solo show.

Jennifer: And this is huge. This ceramic. Wow. It's a miracle that came out of the kiln in one piece.

Paige: She's just wonderful. You know I'm just so excited to be there I don't know, it's cool, I like her.

Jennifer: And this picture of Marlene - is this remote working? so is this her working from home.

Paige: Yes, so this image is Marlena. This is this was taken during COVID, and she is an extremely prolific artist and she does 2d work and 3d work and she works everyday. She's got her own Instagram page, and we she's somebody that I brought into the gallery just a little bit and we're figuring out how to do a solo with her so it takes a little bit of time to figure out, you know, what's the best thing for her and her career and so we're at that stage with her work. I'm super interested in her work and I think she's definitely ready for a solo.

Jennifer: Great. So I guess with both of you being the gallery directors for your organizations and looking at how the world is currently with the virus. What sort of direction, are you going in, so I know you've been doing gallery walkthroughs, Paige I love your walkthroughs with you talking over the top of them. Is there any other things that you're thinking about doing, whilst we're still kind of closed, or do you have other things in the pipeline?

Paige: Sarah go ahead

Sarah: Yeah, well we did have a show in the gallery that we also did a walk through of, you know we pretty quickly pivoted to more of an online presence so we put more artwork on our site for people to see and to purchase and we started doing viewing rooms which has been really great because they sort of took the place of a solo show in the gallery even though we don't do solo shows in our gallery but it's a time when we can really focus on each artist, and people can learn about their process and themselves as people and their artwork, and that's been really that's been a great way to sort of draw people in and keep the energy going for artists. And, you know, social media, while everybody's, you know, taking advantage of the time for social media presence. It's a tricky time but starting with Nicole this summer who did her installation. There is another artist that's coming in, starting next week actually. He will be doing a similar sort of well not similar actually but you know again this sort of multimedia potentially performance based, you know he gets the entire gallery to create and produce something that people will be able to see from the windows and we will also film it and sort of learn more about him. He's a new artist to creative growth. He is young he has a lot of energy and he's really interesting so we're just sort of, we want to keep that creativity flowing and, you know, letting people know about our artists and what's happening because they haven't stopped

Jennifer: Yes, like your viewing room for Monica Valentine was just beautiful and people got to learn so much more about her and her practice. Right, not that she just does these pin sculptures, but also that she does these textile works and maybe people didn't realize that she did both things. So that was a really beautiful.

Sarah: Yeah, it's a good opportunity. I mean in some ways more information is coming across to people than they were getting even when they would come to creative growth. So, there are some silver linings.

Paige: We decided to continue doing installations and then we're just open by appointment. Things aren't looking very good for COVID in LA so we just cut it back so there's only two people can come per appointment, and I basically open the door, me or the gallery manager Pete, opens the door and then we go outside and we just let them cruise around and check out the show I stand at the door front and so we are super super careful and but we have decided

to continue doing the shows and actually framing the work and hanging them and everything and then we do the gallery walkthrough and again, like everybody else. I mean, social media has just been everybody's lifeline. It's been wonderful because collectors are on there, and they're still buying things on there so you know, it's nice I mean for us the sales have slowed down a little bit. I know creative growth, Sarah has worked her magic

Jennifer: we all need a bit of Sarah in our lives.

Paige: Yes, but it's good we decided to continue installing and doing it by appointment.

Jennifer: Yeah, and I think like you said if it's just two people coming in you know they're not touching anything that walking around the space and like you said if you're still making sales from it, then it makes sense and also art is so important to people's health and well being that if you can allow someone to come in and improve their mental health by seeing a bit of art and bringing a bit of joy to them then at times like this I think that's essential. I am annoyed that all the galleries in England are closed. They've been closed for quite, I mean the ones in Manchester near me have been closed a long time so I missing it. I like seeing the art behind the us all on the walls, it makes me happy.

Paige: I know in Los Angeles, I'm treating this like a retail store so we just have to have it down 25% and so we're allowed to be open, and also we've got two doors so we keep the air flowing everyone's got a mask on, the ceilings 18 feet tall. I feel safe and if any of that changes then we will, you know, it'll just go online, but right now we're gonna continue to do what we're doing.

Jennifer: Yeah. So I guess to start to wrap things up, I mean someone's just asked what is the biggest challenge for each of your organizations in 2021, would anyone like to suggest what they think is their biggest challenge?

Paige: It's hard to say what's going to happen in 2021. I mean I didn't think that we were going to be in lockdown for this long so who knows how long this is going to go for but I mean, it's just a matter of keeping our artists in front of people's eyes, and just encouraging the work and exposing the work and exposing Tierra del Sol and I mean, what's the challenge - it's reaching people and everybody's on Instagram, you know, so how do you get people to look at your work and, and actually purchase it and things like that but to answer the question. Basically, I don't know.

Sarah: Yeah, a couple of things. I think a big challenge will be sort of the artists I mean, I'm working with the assumption that in the year 2021, we will be able to reopen the studio and gallery to full capacity, but it will sort of be reintegrating the artists and the staff back into the

building and sort of, you know, getting that energy flow again that took decades to build. So you know it will be interesting to see how that progresses and what that's like and will everybody jump in and come right back to making you know the same kind of artwork or have the same process as they did before, like we just don't even know what the artwork is going to be looking like. So, you know, that's certainly one concern. And then, you know, money is always a concern, as long as people keep buying the artwork, and they start donating more money to the organization, you know, we'll be good and we'll be able to open to full capacity again which would be nice. And then there's the question about how the art world is going to bounce back and in what ways and in all of these areas, everything is going to be different. It just will have changed after the pandemic. And so there are a lot of unknowns what our exhibitions are going to look like - are they still interested in showing our artists like you know everybody has their different programming needs and the programming you know for a lot of galleries and institutions was delayed or postponed and so we don't know what's gonna happen, not just this next year but for several years.

Paige: I think it's also because our artists are having to work from home and they're in all different situations, some of them live in group homes, some of them live with their parents. Some of them have no space to make art, some of them don't have the capacity to make art because of their situation at home and they're used to making an a group atmosphere so there's that. And I know all programs are just doing the best that they can and doing one on one, just helping people as much as we can and figuring out what each person needs, but that is really a, you know, something that, that we're going to continue to work on and figure out and get better at is basically helping our artists make work at home as long as this lockdown continues.

Jennifer: So, I guess I wanted to end with a question that I was asked today which really made me think. So, answers as quickly as you can as they come up in your head. Why do you do what you do? like what drives you to work in this field that we work in?

Paige: I did not expect to work with people with disabilities I got into the art world because I love self taught art, I love folk art, I love outsider art, whatever you want to call it, but I didn't even know that this field even existed. I was just attracted to the rawness of the work and somebody that hadn't been told what's right and wrong and you can tell because there's a freedom and there's a confidence in their work. And so this was the work that I've been attracted to forever and it just so happens that I absolutely love my job and I love working with under-represented people. And it just fires me up to get their work out there and so it's just a passion. I've always loved art though and I really think it's so important, like you said, Jennifer right now, art brings more people joy in their apartments, it's like art really does make a huge difference so that I think that, you know, it's an inner passion for sure.

Sarah: Yeah, I also didn't intend to work with people with disabilities. My background is in performing arts, I was a performing artist and then went into arts administration and worked with artists. And so I think, you know, when I went to creative growth that first time it was a combination of both seeing the creative process of the artists there and being totally intrigued and overwhelmed and blown away and impressed. Both, you know, by their sort of creative process but also the artwork that they were making was just like really incredible. I still do. I mean you know, when we go to contemporary art fairs or other galleries you know I'm, I'm always like, oh, I like our artists work better. Just to be honest, I do I really, I really think that our artists work is really incredible and, and also it was so refreshing to work with artists with disabilities you know after working with artists and organizations that don't have disabilities you know there's like Paige said there's a kind of a freedom there's a lack of ego and sort of navel gazing that can happen sometimes with artists who are trained and who are constantly responding and you know who are thinking about what's going to sell, what's not going to sell, who should they make artwork for, you know, so it's just nice to be in this very liberated environment and, you know, really honestly the organization is so great to work in because everybody, the artists and the staff are just we are who we are, it's very liberating and it's just a wonderful place to be.

Jennifer: And that's a lovely way to finish. So I want to thank everyone for listening today. Thank you to Paige and Sarah. Thank you so much. Thanks to the interpreters Alex and Siobhan. Thank you to the Arts Council in England that has allowed me some funding to do my online exhibitions and talks and all that's left to say is the link to my online exhibition is in the chat box if anyone wanted to link to it. And I was going to bring up the links to you both on here so creative growth and Tierra del Sol links are on the screen as well for everyone that doesn't know anything about them you can find out much more on their websites, and have a wonderful evening, morning, afternoon, wherever everyone is, and thank you very much.