

Emilija: So, I'm joined today by Matthew Evans and Shinobu Akimoto, the co-directors of the *Residency for Artists on Hiatus*. This residency is unlike others, in the way that it's virtual and it's for artists that are currently not making any art. The goal of the residency is not for artists to get back into their practice, but, on the contrary, to engage in non-art activities and report on them throughout the process. Thank you for joining me today! So, we have a pretty wide range of audience that listens to this podcast. So, for the listeners that are perhaps not familiar with artist residencies, can you explain quickly what they are?

Matthew: Residencies in general, I think are super popular right now, almost like art Airbnb's or something. Artists will go to a location usually for the purpose of a new environment, trying to work on a project while they are there. They tend to be all over the world. There's more famous ones than other ones. There's a Banff Centre in Canada for example, as a more famous one. Sometimes they pay you, or they have a room and board for you. Other times you have to pay that yourself and approve funding to go. So, there's different bottles of running them. There's lots of artist residencies these days.

E: Right. So then, talking about your residency more specifically, you guys are really different. First of all, you are encouraging artists to not do art. What was the motivation behind this unconventional idea?

Shinobu: It's funny. Many think that we encourage artists or our residents, not to make art for some reasons. But it's really not the case. We just provide the space, our virtual residency, for the artists who aren't making art. period. Or who haven't been or who decided to stop it for the duration. So, we are not encouraging them to stop or not make art. But then the only thing is, you can't make art, if you'd like to be with us, if you'd like to participate in our residency. So that's one thing that we, because people seem to think that we are trying to stop them. There's also in the contract, if you decide to resume your art practice or some unexpected thing comes up and you would like to go for it and make art, then they can withdraw from our residency without penalty. They have to tell us. They can't secretly make art and then still be a resident.

E: I saw that on the website. Then I guess maybe, a more appropriate question would be, you saw, I guess, this sort of gap, or this audience of artists that perhaps were not making any art currently. Why did you think it was an interesting idea to provide a residency or to provide this opportunity for them?

M: So, our residency is a virtual residency that happens only on the internet for artists that aren't currently making or presenting artwork. I think that idea sort of came from the fact that we had been working off and on for quite a while and we were kind of in a lull and we had been abroad and came back to Canada and wanted to get our careers going again or come up with a new idea. We were like: "What should we do?" We were just on a hiatus and we thought let's just have a residency for artists on hiatus. Then the more we thought about it, it became less and less of a kind of one liner jokey idea and it opened up all these other questions about professionalism and where does art start and stop, because it's a really unique domain.

S: It is a residency, virtual residency for artists not making art. the residents are selected through an international open call, so it's truly international. Usually we put a call in *E-flux*, a pretty kind

of sort of established mailing list. Then once you are selected, you are given a page, your own page, within our website, where you would report on about your non-art activity, on hiatus activity every so often. The residency can run anywhere from 6 months to a year. At the end of the residency, your term, you are asked to file a report. We do pay a tiny, small amount of residency fee in exchange for participation.

M: The more we thought about it the more we thought it was a funny idea. The art world has become so institutionalized anyway. Everyone has an MFA, everybody is going to these various artist residencies. It's really difficult I think for younger artists to kind of find your way. So, we thought maybe we should start our own institution. We should put on this institution jacket and perform this idea of an institution as a space to explore these kinds of questions. It was also a way to hack into the art world.

S: Because we ourselves were having some difficulties keeping going as mid-career artists. We get rejections or other life circumstances happen or personally for me, I've got enough gallery shows and then I didn't know where to go after that. Things like that. Should we quit then? Should we say that's enough and move on to different things? How are we going to keep engaged in the art practice? And this came up. To go onto the next phase, we are going to skip the trajectory of applying to galleries or talking to curators locally or domestically. We decided to look outside our own community. This is where this idea for virtual residency, and international calls and all that, came.

M: We get to connect with artists from around the world, it was a way to put people together so you can meet someone from Slovenia and she can be in touch with the guy from Mexico. We can all talk about this condition of existing in the arts.

S: Yes. Kind of have a world through this cultivation of a global community, kind of thing.

E: Yeah. So, if I'm understanding it correctly, it sounds like you were almost trying to normalize these ebbs and flows that artists have when they are going through their practice?

M: Yeah. I think it's really normal.

E: I think actually, this reminds me a lot of a past episode that I had on the podcast, with a doctor from Dalhousie University. We talked about how they incorporated art classes that their medical students were required to take or humanities classes that their medical students were required to take. And we talked about how it was important for them and for the development of their career and the development of them being able to relate to their future patients, to have these sort of hobbies, or these other activities on the side. It kind of reminds me a little bit of what your residency I guess is doing.

M: Doctors could use it. I work with doctors.

E: I think we should also touch a little bit on the virtual aspect of this residency. I know there was a *Canadian Art* magazine that I read not too long ago. There was an article that talked about the benefit aspects of artists going away to residencies. You can leave your life behind and your

responsibilities, for a couple of weeks to a couple of months and you can concentrate solely on your art. So why did you decide not to go down that route and make it virtual instead?

M: Mostly because of funding. It's expensive to set up an actual space. When we first put the call out, everywhere wanted to come to Montreal and make a project. They didn't really read the call. There was that aspect to it. But I also believe that the internet is so everywhere and nowhere at once, it's kind of sufficiently outside traditional art viewing spaces, but there is tons of creativity that goes on the internet. Everybody's got a cellphone with a camera, everybody's got an Instagram account. Everyone is making content to be consumed and stuff. We thought the internet was really, for this project, it echoed for me anyways, this non-residency residency. This equally everywhere and nowhere. It's not-spaceness spaceness of the internet.

S: The paradox, right? Is it a good thing or a bad thing? It really sort of messes it up. It messes up the definitions or perceptions that we have had about art or about making things. So that kind of duality or nuance that we thought the internet would work. That's what you meant to say, right? This is a residency but at the same time it's not a residency. They are artists, but they are not. That kind of thing we thought the internet world would fit.

E: It's interesting that you bring out that paradox because I was trying to think of sort of the motivation that the artist would have in applying to the residency. Maybe you can shed some light on this. Would artists typically see this as something they would add, a line on their CV? Do they usually take it as a way to step back from their practice? Maybe to define a new hobby?

S: It's really interesting because the reasons are so varied. This is the number one thing, we are biased, but we are fascinated by the project our self, because of the residents, the range of residents, reasonings, backgrounds, age, nationalities, everything. This is something we didn't just expect when we started, right? Some people do come here to question the same questions that we kind of are presenting, but others truly want to do other things than art. some of them are really fed up with production, so they really want to have a break. Others do it as a project of its own. Going back to your initial question, would they put it on their CV or not, we discovered one of the residents did put it on her CV, right? This was when she was curated in a group show by Hans Hoffers, after the residency.

M: There she is. We read her CV on the website and she listed her residency as part of her CV.

S: That was very sweet. Another thing I want to add to this was, when we were interviewed by Amish Morrell for *C Magazine* in Canada, her number one question was, is participating in the *Residency for Artists on Hiatus* an admission of defeat as an artist. It's a really interesting question, because like you were saying, I can't make art anymore, so I'm doing this. So that question has been kind of dealt with totally different ways by different residents. To really discover all of these things, you have to go through the fight, because you know, there's so many different people and so many different approaches. They talk about their notions of defeat or they find it interesting to be with us, in their final reports.

M: There was another artist, she wasn't posting so much anymore, and we thought maybe she's lost interest in the project. When I asked her: "It's okay if you want to drop out or are you still

enthusiastic?” She was like: “No, no. I really want to be in.” She actually extended her residency like an extra six months at the end.

S: That’s a different person you are talking about.

M: It’s a different person. Another person came back for her second time. She was an honorary resident the second year, because she wanted to be on it so much. I don’t really know why people want to be on it, but they want to be on it.

E: That’s funny. Can you share maybe some more specific examples of the non-art activities that past residents have done?

M: Oh yeah, there’s so many great ones.

E: Yeah. I just want to share with the listeners, your website is amazing to look at, because all of the residents have their diary entries there and it’s amazing to look at.

S: My favorite one is someone from the UK who decided to train himself to run a 100-kilometer marathon in Hong Kong. He would report on his trainings. Which pace he ran this time. It’s really fascinating. In the end he does make it. He did run a 100 km marathon, right?

M: There was a collective from Brooklyn who just wanted to meditate online. They lived in different places and they would meet online and meditate together. To me it sounded like an art project, really, but they said that it wasn’t. They’ve been really great. Another favorite of mine, last term we had a woman and her family, she was American, but she had been living in Austria. She and her family, her husband and her little girl, moved across Europe to the coast of Portugal and they started this sustainable farm. They literally were living out of the trunk of their car at the beginning of the residency and by the end they had bought this little plot of land and grown all these vegetables and established this little farm on the coast of Portugal. It was really amazing to watch.

S: She was very happy to again as part of the *Residency for Artists On Hiatus*. She didn’t even have to do that. The project itself is really amazing but then for some reasons she appreciated to have that forum. It was interesting.

E: Yeah. Maybe this goes back a little bit towards the motivation question of why artists would sign up, but it sounds like maybe some artists need that sort of structure, or that push or that deadline to report on their actions, in order to actually carry through with some of these goals or dreams that they’ve had of things they want to do.

M: Maybe. They set their own personal: “I have to report now because I am part of this project. I have an obligation.”

S: Others have no activities per say. They were really almost like depressed about their no-production or not participating in the art world and they didn’t know what to do. Like we said earlier, should I quit? They use this time and space to really question that for herself or himself. Those people were also really interesting. They didn’t have anything.

M: The one that we mentioned earlier that went on to be in that show, but when she was our resident, she was going to get her driver's license and move into a new apartment, and then she was applying for MBA programs at one point. So, we thought she was just going to leave arts and go into business school. We found out after she changed her mind.

S: She went back to arts, and then she had pretty good shows. That was really good to learn too. Another person that we were talking about, who came back as an honorary resident, she finally, officially quit making art, or being an artist. She sent us this official letter with an official seal, that she was resigning from art. Those are again quite interesting.

E: You are going to hate me for this question, because I know I know it's different from every resident, but do you find most of them do come back to art?

S: We really don't know.

M: We are not really sure, because some of them are better at keeping in touch than others. Others we just haven't heard from again, once they left.

E: Oh yeah, that's true. I didn't think about that part. You have to make them report for life.

S: At the same time when they contact us we try to promote them on the *Residents for Artists On Hiatus* website, that actually this ex-residents are having a show here and there and doing this and that. It's interesting the paradox.

M: We tell them all to stay in touch with those things: "If you have something coming up let us know and we will try and promote it for them."

S: We do do that. Right? Some of the ex-residents are doing very well.

E: It's a really, really fascinating idea and talking about that paradox again, scrolling through your application process on the website it caught me off guard when I saw that the artists had to submit their art portfolio to be reviewed for this residency where they wouldn't be making any art. Maybe you can talk a little bit more about that. It seems a little bit funny and bizarre.

M: I think when we decided we were going to use this idea of a residency or an institution as a kind of arena or framework for this project, we have a contract that we send as well. But we just looked at it all from the *Canada Council*. It's part of the performance of being a resident. We have a criteria, it's essentially the same as *Canada Council*. You've have to had shows or be recognized by your peers as having some kind of an art career beforehand. But really most of the people we pick, we just think about their project. We look at their images, but it's not a big deciding factor.

S: Some think that's really going to be a factor and have to really prepare their portfolio, but then we don't say that. If you want to send us your past images, limit it to 10 or stuff like that, but you can just send us a website or something like that.

M: The other thing too, I didn't think about this when we first started the project, but every time it puts us in this weird bind because we actually have to say no to people. Being rejected from a

residency where you're not even expected to make any art, that must be not a good thing. But if we could afford to have everybody we would.

S: But we just can't. Logistically it's impossible.

M: The decisions are hard, every time we do them.

S: It is hard.

E: I'm wondering, just thinking about this now, because you were talking about the difficult part of having this residency, that perhaps you didn't anticipate at the beginning, are there any other aspects or events that have happened that perhaps you didn't anticipate from the beginning?

S: Oh completely. Like, our residents actually meeting at an art fair. One person works for an art institution. It figures, we are all artists. One person worked for a pretty well-known prestigious art institution somewhere and then the other person was going there to participate in it, not as an artist, but as a journalist. He kept saying: "No, this is not an art practice at all." We would have this dialogue: "Are you participating in that art fair as an artist?" And he's like: "No, no. I'm just going there to report on it." We can't stop them. They met at this art fair as residents and stuff like that, which we never expected.

M: That was really nice. I feel like we should give a shout out to Tehching Hsieh, because he's been so generous.

S: We started this project at the Venice Biennale. We went there and handed out the flyers for artists to quit making art, join us at Venice Biennale, right? That was during that time at Venice Biennale that we heard from Tehching Hsieh. We contacted him if he would join us as our Board of Directors, our Advisory Board, no obligation. He did say yes. Since then, he's been really generous about us using his name as our Advisory Board. Last biennale, we had a chance to meet him at the biennale. That was another biennale, where he was representing Taiwan. He invited us to come to the reception. That was a part that was really exciting. So, Tehching Hsieh is still officially our Advisory Board.

E: Awesome. So, are there applications currently open or are they going to open sometime in the future?

M: Now we are working on a publication.

E: Cool. What's all that about?

S: It's called *Annual Report*, because we are an institution and we should have an annual report.

M: So, that's on the first two years. We have some applications out but we'd like to do it in conjunction with another institution. We think it would be really great if a very major art institution would support us, meaning endorsing artists not making art. That's our ultimate goal. On the one hand we feel like three years was enough, but because we still keep getting inquiries about when is the next application. There are many people that are interested in this concept. So, if we can do it, of course, and then for the first incarnation we would like to do it with the help of a major art institution, because that totally makes sense right? These people are helping artists

not making art, not just us but the major institutions. That's our goal. So, this year we have sent quite a few proposals to these institutions. Again, we are not listing them, but it would be fantastic.

M: Otherwise it's sort of up in the air. I think Shinobu has other projects she would like to do and I have other projects. Maybe we take a hiatus on the hiatus.

E: That's hilarious. A hiatus on the hiatus. It sounds like you two were on a hiatus when you started the project. Are you both back to making art?

M: Yeah. This has kept us pretty busy actually. It's kept Shinobu really busy. She does a lot of the heavy lifting.

S: It's funny people think it's just a project and you are sitting in front of a computer and send an email or something like that, but man, speaking of being an institution. I can see, a lot of people complain about the work load if you are working for an art institution. It's like that. This has taken up a lot of our time. But I do want kind of want to move on to my own projects. I know you would like to play music.

E: So, it's been great talking to you two. Is there anything final you'd like to add that perhaps I didn't cover? I know it's impossible to cover everything in half an hour.

M: Going through for this catalogue that we are making and reviewing everybody's residence over the past three different terms and becoming aware of just how much material is there. I would encourage anybody to go and actually scroll through the site, there's tons of anecdotes and different things.

S: It's really inspiring. And it's also, I'd like to move that pension. We've been doing this for quite some time, so I think a lot of people might know what we talked about already. But I would like to stress that we are making the publication and we really are hoping to launch that next year. We're going to visit your cities, your towns, to launch. If you are interested in having us launch the book or talk about this, please contact us.

E: That sounds really fun. If people want to get in touch with you where can they do that?

M: Just through the site I think is the easiest: info@residencyforartistsonhiatus.org

S: If you went to the site it tells you everything, I think.

E: I would definitely encourage anybody that's listening to check out the website. I found it was, you get invested in their stories. Like you start reading an entry, and you're like: "Oh, I wonder if they went out and ran the next day too." Or: "I wonder if they did end up running those 100 kilometers." You end up getting invested in their story. It's really interesting to look through all of the accounts on there.

M: Thanks.

E: Well, it's been awesome chatting with you guys.

M: Great. Thanks for inviting us on.