**Inclusive Arts Vermont**

**Artist Talk with Aurora Berger**

**Featuring: Aurora Berger, Heidi Swevens, and Megan Bent**

**Heidi:** Hello and welcome my name is Heidi Swevens.

I am the Director of Community Partnerships at Inclusive Arts Vermont, and I am here with artist Aurora, Berger, and colleague, Megan Bent for this artist talk. For access purposes, I'm gonna do a verbal description of myself and surroundings. I have blue eyes and pale skin with short brown hair. And today I am wearing a plaid flannel, with orange and blues and maroons. Behind me are some blank walls, and that's a description of myself and surroundings. I use she/they pronouns, and I am so excited to be part of the exhibitions team with Inclusive Arts Vermont. [MASKED](https://www.inclusiveartsvermont.org/community/exhibitions/) is our current exhibition,

visual arts exhibition, featuring 22 Vermont artists with disabilities.

It has been traveling the state since January of 2022 and it will wrap up in Montpelier at the State House in April of 2023. Currently, it's on its way to Main Street Arts in Saxtons River, and there's more information about that on our website at www.inclusiveartsvermont.org, and that's all spelled out: I n c l u s i v e a r t s v e r m o n t, so enough about that.  I want to introduce, turn it over to Aurora so that she can do an introduction. And then we'll pass it on to Megan and get started with a conversation. Thanks so much for being here Aurora.

**Aurora:** Hi! My name is Aurora Berger. I use she/her pronouns and a quick visual description of myself and surroundings. I am a pale woman with pink hair. I almost just said blonde out of habit, but it is pink currently. I have dark rectangular glasses, I’m wearing a dark purple striped shirt, with some pinks and blues in it. I have a silver necklace that looks like a piece of ponderosa bark, and I am currently sitting in my classroom, with a very colorful, neurographic mural behind me, mostly made out of reds and pinks, and some blues and greens. And then off to the side are some bookshelves that are also pink

**Heidi:**Thanks, and Megan.

**Megan:** Hi! my name is Megan Bent. I use she/her pronouns. I recently joined the team at Inclusive Arts Vermont as the Digital Content Manager, and excited to be joining these artists' talks. A brief verbal description of myself is: I am a pale woman, with blue eyes and shoulder length, like brown and blondish hair. I’m sitting in my apartment, which has a brick wall in the back and white walls on each side, and behind me is a blue dresser with some plants on it.

**Heidi:** Wonderful. Thank you. So the first thing we want to do and we've been doing in many of these artist talks is sharing the piece of art that is in the *MASKED* exhibition. And we decided on the theme masked early days of the pandemic had no idea, really how it would unfold into a life of its own, with the idea of many people with disabilities, invisible and visible disabilities, there's still things that are hidden or shrouded, or people feel like they need to, you know keep from view from the world. So that was the intent of the theme was wide open to artists to respond in whatever way felt like it matched their artistic expression or their time in the moment. So for Aurora, the piece is titled *Fibrosis Covered in Tulle*. And if we're gonna go ahead and screen share that, Megan. And Aurora will describe it, and we'll go from there.

**Aurora:** Awesome, so this photograph is a self-portrait. It's in black and white. It's a photograph of me sitting on the floor cross-legged.

I have long blonde hair that is cascading over one shoulder. I'm clutching some tulle that's sort of been bundled up and is very layered and unruly looking, I guess. It has lots of interesting folds and layers of translucency and transparency. And it is covering parts of my body. You can see one of my legs. I have a birthmark on my lower leg. and you can see both of my arms sort of through the tulle, but a large part of my body is covered by it.

**Heidi:** Great. My first kind of prompt or question Aurora, is can you tell us a little bit more about this particular photograph? Not the image description, but if there's a story behind it or a process piece, or something that you'd want the, the audience to know about with regard to this.

**Aurora:** Absolutely so for like a brief moment, I got actually, not brief - For a moment I got really interested in the way that tulle, especially in a black and white photograph, looks a lot like scar tissue. And I was playing around with it in self-portraits and installation work in all kinds of different ways. And I'm actually still very interested in it but all of my tulle is in big boxes and a storage unit right now. So it's been on hold for a little bit. But I was, I had a little studio and I was taking these photos, and I was just sort of playing around with what it felt like to be in this sort of mass of, for lack of a better word, scar tissue. And I was thinking about the way that I have like this little piece of scar tissue that's inside one of my eyeballs. And that you can totally see like without any special equipment. There's just like a white streak going through my eye and I was thinking about that, and about the way that connective tissues are really fibrous, and are really prone to breakage in people with connective tissue disorders which I have.

And so thinking about all those things, and I was in grad school at the time, and I took this photo, and I printed it out really big, and I hung into my studio, and I got like 5 questions about whether or not it was like a wedding dress and about how, like a bunch of critiques about how I couldn't be making art with tulle, because from a feminist lens it was only ever going to be about weddings. And so I stopped making art with tulle for a while until I was in grad school. But that's the idea behind that photograph.

**Heidi:** Yeah. wow, Thank you. And maybe we can stop screen sharing so we can have Aurora's presence in as well. And I'm curious sorry the tulle is in storage, but I trust it will come out. And this is just sort of not an artistic piece but I'm curious, if for any particular reason, this matched the masked theme for you or how it relates to the theme of hidden and other things if you want to elaborate on that at all. Some artist just shared their work, and it, you know, in hindsight. Some of the themes in the meeting comes later, I think you know there's these evolving understanding. So I'm just curious from your perspective if there was a particular link to the masked theme, and if you want to say anything more about the theme, and you know invisible, and what's hidden around disability.

**Aurora:** Yeah absolutely. So there's actually, it's one of those photographs, and I guess this is true of a lot of my photographs where I take an a picture and I know that it resonates with me for some reason but I don't know what that full-like resonance is yet. And I think you're both photographers to some degree sitting in this call so this is probably like a very normal experience for people on this call, but I take, a lot of times I'll take a photo and I'm like I There's something about this picture that makes sense and I don't know what it is. And for this photograph in particular, it wasn't until after the whole like wedding dress debacle and then I moved back to Vermont, and I was, like, you know, living in a tiny apartment, a tiny room, literally in, like my parent's house, and like trying to deal with my life. And I started realizing all of the layers that, like that picture had for me. And there's absolutely a lot about you know masking who I am as a person. Kind of ironic that I'm doing this in my classroom, where I am very openly a queer person, but I am not very openly a disabled person. I've gone through a lot with the school district in terms of like what it means to be accessible to disabled people, and they were not very open to it.

So I have not been very openly disabled here, and on the other hand, I'm extremely openly gay and I have my ‘pray the gay to stay’ mug on my desk, and things like that, and my pride flag that is getting hung up over a whiteboard over there.  And so I find that to be really interesting, because in grad school I was really openly disabled, and I wasn't, super openly queer. I never really made a point about being you know queer and I never like said like, ‘Oh, no, I'm straight’ like I'm, but it never. It just never came up. It would only come up when people be like so like, ‘Why don't you have a boyfriend?’ Why, why would I? But it never came up and so the fact that the wedding dress thing was what kept coming up was like the first time that I had to like actively say to my professors. Like it's not about that because like I'm gay and that's just not part of my life like that heterosexual weird white dress narrative is just not there in my work. And like if you're reading into it that's your interpretation. But it's not, it's a self-portrait. So that's not what it's about. And so I think, yeah, the, the pieces come to have a lot of layers. And then one of the other things that really I really loved about the tulle is that it's both visible and not. And as an invisibly disabled person that's, you know my life and having a connective tissue disorder is really about like trying to figure out what your limits are, while like the rest of the world is like You're fine I don't know Why, you're saying you can't do that, like everybody else, has to do it. Why are you just like trying to get out of doing things.’ So

It also certainly has that layer as well. It probably has other layers that I will figure out at some other point in time.

**Heidi:** Yeah, I, I love the word layers, especially with the tulle and the wrapped in, the in the tangles, and I'm moving my hands around my head right now. Probably not so coordinatedly, but perfectly right for me right? And the, the way when I'm thinking about now is the way you are talking about how the tulle reminded you of scar tissue, and I think you know art has a life of its own in some ways. There's sort of where the artist comes from and the expression and then there's how people receive it, and that dialogue back and forth. So how the, the wedding dress interpretation has brought more layers and exploration for you as an artist? Yeah and, and the more layers that we will follow.

Side note on this piece it's one of the, so one of the access features for *MASKED* is it okay to do a side note? Maybe it'll be interesting. I don't know but one of the access features from *MASKED* is that we have something called tactile representations, and then tactile elements to engage with the art. And so the representations are actually done by the Vermont association for the blind, and visually impaired, and they are representations of the, the lines and the some of the textures, and shadows, within the images and there there's a printer that they have, and we work with them to do that.

This piece wasn't done with the tactile representation but there's a tactile element, so we have tulle that we've brought to the exhibition sites so that people can actually touch the tulle and engage with

It. And I don't know that I understood the connection to scar tissue.

If I'm just picking that up now but it'll be an interesting thing to be able to share with students as or participants as they touch the, the tulle and have that sensory engagement with this very visual piece of art that you know brings up more senses. So, so if any stories come I'll share them passing back. Yeah, I'm curious you know. So, so the masking that visible, the invisible disabilities just disability identity.

You know one of the things you know read the chapter that you shared, and I'm not gonna get the exact title right.

**Aurora:** I don't even know what it is.

**Heidi:** So for the, the audience Aurora, maybe tell about the chapter, so that even if we don't have the exact title of it we have a context.

**Aurora:** Yes, so I recently, wrote a chapter book and I guess I could be, you know very professional, and know the title of something that I've written which would require a lot more energy than. Okay, So the book is called *Redefining Disability*. It came out earlier this year from Brill Press. It is very expensive, which is unfortunate. but I wrote a chapter for it. It's called *Disability Aesthetics: A Crip Artistry Manifesto* and I really enjoyed writing it. I really enjoyed getting to have sort of an academic chance to think about what disability aesthetics means to me, and in a larger scale.

**Heidi:** So maybe would you mind sharing Aurora? What disability aesthetics means, and how it - I mean this is a long conversation, but you know how it connects to your art in your process, and some of what I've you know, made notes about to ask you to connect with you about come from what I read. And you know how I responded to that beautiful piece of writing.

**Aurora:** Yeah. definitely. So to me, disability aesthetics I mean it’s, it's a varying field right but it an aesthetic is like the - bare with me because it is now like 5 PM on a day that I've been pretty much subsided on coffee and eating nothing, but basically it’s, it's ideas that are concerned with like beauty and the principles that are around beauty. And so aesthetics of disability is really considering where disability falls within the ideas of beauty, and within the ideas of art and the ideas of artists, artistry and how we create art. And there's a lot of varied ways of looking at that between you know, disabled artists making art and then art about disabled people made by able-bodied artists. And just the way, even if you just think about like the way that we represent disabled people in popular culture.

Those are all like buildings blocks that form what sort of our social and cultural understanding of a disability aesthetic is.

**Heidi:** Yeah, and there were so many things in that, that I now I'm gonna sit with and reflect upon. But a couple of them come out that I wanna just bring to your attention, and it is after a work day 5 o’clock. So you're not gonna be tested I you know let's have this err of imperfection like we're humans. And if that works for you And and one of the things you talked about this is like top on my list is Imperfection. You know like this idea of I don't know if it's a disability aesthetic or framework. or you know the, the imperfection is you know part of the human experience so maybe if you want to speak to that as early to your art as it relates to your process. As really say anything that makes sense to you 5 o'clock on a random Tuesday.

**Aurora:** Yes. Oh, my gosh, yeah, imperfection is, is a I think it's a huge part of disability aesthetics. Honestly. I think it's a big part of when we think about disability we think of imperfect and I think that when you're trying to unpack something like aesthetics, you have to get into this idea of -Well, a cultural understanding of aesthetic is really just What do we think of when we think of beauty? What do we think of when we think of ugly? That's actually like our cultural understanding of aesthetics, because we all are part of that larger social-cultural experience.

So if like you, as you sit here thinking about this just go like, Well, what does beauty mean to me? like that's that is aesthetics for you

And so for us, as like a communal culture, thinking about imperfection is really important because we think about disabled people as incomplete or broken in some way. Just like sort of at a fundamental level where like okay, well, you're disabled means you there's something that's not working. And so when you're thinking about that from a art perspective a lot of times, it comes down to what are those imperfections in the art so like whether it's some like very old art me, very old, being like a 100 years when I say that, but like Otto Dix like you know painting his like disabled war veterans, and he's like, Okay, Well, this one's got you know a peg leg and this one's like visibly shaking. Those are like showing those imperfections. when you're thinking about something is visual, as art, or especially 2 D art, which is, you know, the, the majority of, of Western art, anyway.

You're really thinking about how to visually see something that is intangible is not necessarily visual like the invisible like disability.

And so a lot of times the way that we show that is, through imperfection.

And as an artist the way, that I've come up with that has best worked for me is to embrace those imperfections in my art, and let those imperfections be part of the like visual language that signals that the work is about disability in some way. So I do a lot of work that has kind of like wonky focus. Where maybe the thing that should be in focus isn't quite in focus and that's okay, I do a lot of work with cyanotype and cyanotype is by nature imperfect. I actually think perfect cyanotypes are kind of boring. I really like when there's something really bizarre going on with like a streak that you just didn't know was there until you expose the image. A lot of yeah a lot of my interest in photography comes from those imperfections and not the like perfectly posed, perfectly lit photograph.

**Heidi:** Yeah. I wonder if we wanna show, there's a cyanotype image. There's that was in the slide deck that we had in terms of preparation. If this is an okay time to do that and I think,  I think it's called *Clouded*.

**Aurora:** Yeah, it is. Yeah. perfect. So this cyanotype it is called *Clouded*. I will do a quick visual description it's a piece of paper.

This is actually a pretty large one. This is 24 by 32” I wanna say. And it is like this deep indigo blue. The entire image, which is sort of the visual signal of a cyanotype. And it's a photograph of my eyeball it's actually a macro photo, and it's of the eyeball that I was talking about earlier That has a stripe of scar tissue in it. And you can see all of the like blood vessels in my eye, and you can see this little white stripe going through my eye and some little reflections of my light boxes. And You can see this like it looks like glitter around my eye, but I am pretty sure it's just like eyeshadow from like 10 hours earlier, that just transferred. But just like I was talking about with the imperfections. You can see these brush strokes that are kind of right where my eyebrow should be. So it kind of makes sense it looks like you're looking at an eyebrow. But there's this streakiness where the white from the paper is showing through and there's also like very rough edges to the image where I did not coat the cyanotype paper correctly. And I would love to say that I like achieve that on purpose because I'm like really good at making edgy-looking photographs.

But the reality is that I am visually impaired and I'm working in a dark room with an invisible medium. So the reality is, I just am bad at coating cyanotype paper, and I really like the way that that looks.

**Heidi:** Yeah. Yeah, thank you for the description as well. And one of the things you were commenting on with regard to cyanotype was that there's sort of this chance and happenstance about the process itself, which is very muchwhat, what I heard in what you were what I read was so if i'm not getting this accurate please correct me. Part of the disability kind of skill set, or knowledge is to like what control go or let be some things, and just see what happens with the chance. And happenstance, which is inherent in the process with cyanotype . So is that accurate or -

**Aurora:** That is exactly right. Okay, yeah. So that’s, that's totally right. the same with the cyanotype. As I was saying, you know you are coating in a dark room, or, in my case, like literally just my dark bedroom with like a tarp on the floor, and kind of like praying that you don't get cyanotype all over the floor, which I did badly and now there's blue spots on my floor. But you're also when you expose the image you have to sort of allow for some just chance in the image making process. For one thing like it's it's kind of like mono printing right. Like you can't replicate a cyanotype exactly. They just never come out exactly the same even if you have the same, if you have the same perfectly coated paper, and the same negative that hasn't been exposed like maybe double printed your negative and you leave it out in the sun, and there's no clouds for like 30 min. like. There's just, it's almost impossible to completely replicate an image.

And so you have to just sort of take into account that clouds will come across the sky, or you know your image will have gotten kind of fried the last time you did it and you're not going to go reprint your negative. Or there'll be some brush strokes that just sort of you didn't notice that they were there, but they've appeared, and maybe you overexpose it or you underexpose it because you didn't take

into account the clouds. And so it really is about letting some of that control go and seeing what happens. And my favorite cyanotypes that I've ever made have all had some form of imperfection to them of just like they came out of the water bath and I was like ‘That wasn't what I was trying to do it it's really cool.’

**Heidi:** Yeah, Nice? Yeah. I was just thinking about sometimes, too, that there you are talking about the photograph. The fibrosis covered in tulle, how there was a resonance. But you, you know there wasn't maybe a why or a clear way to articulate what, what the feeling was. But it's kind of layered involved, and it sounds like the cyanotype that process and the chance and that like, I really like that, is, is part of the part of the, the fun maybe even

**Aurora:** It definitely is because if it was just a matter of putting two images together in Photoshop like I could do that. I could put any of my photos into Photoshop and turn them blue. But just like not what the cyanotype experience gives you and cyanotype I think is like so much more frustrating and so much more work. But the results are so much more interesting.

**Heidi:** Yeah. As an artist, you seem, you know, and I probably read this, so it's not meeting-wise or insightful, but just that you focus on process. That the, the products, you know, are not where you focus your time and attention, and with the weave of imperfection, and some of these other you know disability, identity aesthetics those frameworks there's one part where you were describing that you were tearing photographs, you know, as part of the process, and I'm wondering if you could share a little bit more about that and how it emerged, and you know how you find meaning in it.

**Aurora:** Yes, So for one thing, making art for me has never been so much about like a product that I could I don't know, sell or show for that matter, especially since I live in Vermont where there aren't very many opportunities to become a blue chip gallery you know artists. It's always been much more about just the process of making art.

And so because I'm a photographer that means it's about being out in the woods with my camera, or it's about being in a studio with my camera, and just being in that experience. Or like more recently I've been getting into watercolor for some apparent reason and that's about just like the experience of putting water in paint onto paper and like working it and seeing what develops and what I feel like I need. So it's very therapeutic.

The thing with the tearing the photographs originally came from I used to work in a print lab with large scale printers and my professor, that ran the print lab was like, whenever you have like, a huge print that just took 20 min to run and it cost you like $5 and came out wrong, you have to tear it up, because that is the only cathartic thing you can do with that print. And so I like just started tearing up photos. I'd be like. Well, that was a waste of $5 really glad that I just spent the last 45 min wasting $5. That was a great way to spend my night. Let me spend another $5 and hope this time it works. But I started tearing up all these prints from my undergrad thesis show that were my like trashed prints, and I sort of had like thrown them all on the floor. And then I looked down I was like. Actually, I really like that. So I picked up all my pieces and, like, put them back in my portfolio. And that is where tearing all of my art up came from. And then for a while it all just like lived on my studio floor in grad school, and people would be like I don't want to come in your studio. I don't want to like step on your photos. and I was like No, they're literally there to be stepped on. But people found that very uncomfortable so it was kind of handy. It kept people out of my studio.

**Heidi:** Well, that makes me think of social conditioning and social sort of ways that what we value, and how we think we should be even when we're told something maybe different, like try it out on step on photo and see what happens.

**Aurora:** Step on the photos of my naked body. It's fine.

**Heidi:** Alright, the detail of the naked body is a part I didn’t get until just now.

**Aurora:** They’re usually photos of my naked body. It makes it even more awkward for people. It’s great.

**Heidi:** Pushing the edges right?

**Aurora:** Exactly. That’s what grad school’s for.

**Heidi:** Yeah, it looks It might be obvious to the audience that we sort of agreed to just see where the conversation takes us. That reminds me about sort of the subjects of your art, and you know the naked body, but body, and you know. So maybe if you wanted to share a little bit more with the audience about kind of what inspires you and what you what you may, self-expression, self-portraits I think expansive self-portraits so a little bit more about that. But then you know kind of visually, and maybe we can, at some point after that description, bring up another image or two to share.

**Aurora:** Yeah. So yeah, extensive self-portraits is definitely a line I've used. Yes, I would categorize all of my work as self-portraiture, although a lot of it is not photographs of me. It's all photographs of things that make me who I am. So there's a series called *Homestead* that are photographs from the house that I was born in. There is a series about like farming in rural Vermont, which is about the place. I grew up. And there are quite a few series of photograph self-portraits that are more traditional self-portraits. They're photographs of me largely naked. I’m trying to take more clothed photos now that I teach in a public school because you need those unclothed ones to maybe not be the ones that the public are seeing anymore, at the moment at least. But yes, there, there's self-portraits and they're often different ways of thinking about the body in space and specifically my body in space.

**Heidi:** Great.I say great like I have to have a response so I'm with you. That's what it really means. I'm gonna translate that like I'm hearing you I'm engaged, and I'm super interested. And one of the other things that I will share a couple of images in just a minute a couple more and when we go live we'll post where people can find more of your work your Instagram, and all of that, because that's part of what we want to make available for, for folks. But the internalized ableism that was- I mean so here's a complete, you know my bias as a disabled artist as well like part of what my art initially helped me explore first with myself and then with others, was the devices that I had about my own being and body and productivity and value as essentially. So when you talk about self-portraiture and what has meaning to you, I can relate in some ways, even though we're very different humans, you know. But how the art kind of takes a person, or can take a person on a journey, and I wonder if you want to talk anymore, if you'd be open to talking anymore about the internalized ableism? And part of how, and maybe maybe I'm making this up, but if self-portraiture has been part of that journey of exploring ableism within you?

**Aurora:** It definitely, has. That was actually where it started was right around the time that I started identifying disabled was the same time that I started taking self-portraits and sort of the more intensive way that I do now. It was very much about examining who I was, and who I had, like who I existed as and what my body was capable of. And that has been really, a really good source of understanding for me what my body can and can't do through photographs, whether it's through like the physical taking of the photograph, or the like process of editing, and like really experiencing like what what is this photograph that I'm like working on. Like it's a photograph of me and I'm like understanding it from sort of a different viewpoint than being inside of it. And even just the experience of being like Oh, turns out, this is much harder for me to hike into the woods with my camera than it used to be. That is a good note to have. I should not do this.

Which is one of those you know, self limitations that sucks when you suddenly realize that you have a limitation that you didn't used to have But it also, you know, is the source of discovering that.

So I guess in some way it's cool.

**Heidi:** Yeah thank you for sharing a little bit more about that, I think ableism is one of those again. This is my opinion, do you mind if I share

**Aurora:** No, please do.

**Heidi**:I think it's a, a scary word, or it can be something that we sort of push against, because we don't want to have the isms inside of us, even though we do. And to really look closely at oneself.

And I sometimes tell the story of I was in Staples during the early pandemic as a social outing errand thing and there was this folder.

I might have said this before to you so, but it says ‘I gliterally can’t', and it's glittered in fuchsia, and fuchsia is not my color. But I have this folder and I've taken pictures because it to be able to say in an empowered place I can't and not have it linked to self-worth is, is kind of it's a moment you know like for me captured in this folder that you know I use glitter on a lot of things. But so just yeah, and I think that you know part of what I hope these talks can do is communicate with folks that you know people with and without disabilities, that this ableism is kind of in us and there's a way to get through it, and you know, the process is part of the journey as well if that

makes sense.

**Aurora:** Yeah, definitely. I love that. I feel like I need a fuchsia ‘glitterally can’t’ folder, fits my vibe slightly better.

**Heidi:** Yeah, and you know it's all these messages right you know you're in education settings and academia, and all these, the, the shoulds and aughts are unrealistic, and not always helpful I think. So

**Aurora:** Absolutely.

**Heidi:** Thanks for hearing my philosophy for a minute. Let's maybe bring up some more of your images. And does that?

**Aurora:**There you go. So this is a photograph. I believe this one's called *Cleft*. And I think it's called like 3 months In The Forest, or something like that. This is an example of my self-portraiture that is sort of re-contextualizing what it means to be a body in space. So this photograph is of a piece of cloth that's been nailed to a wall.

And it's very dirty. It's got a black and white photograph of my like *decolletage* on it, that’s like mostly just like my clavicle and my neck. And my neck is sort of like twisted to the side, and it's a very dramatic lighting, so it has very harsh shadows on it. But it's really

just like a very prominent photograph of my clavicle.

And this photograph has been printed on fabric and then left in the woods near my childhood and current home for three months.

I it's part of a project that I did four years ago now I guess that was a really big part of my graduate thesis. And basically, I had to come back to Vermont for three months for eye surgery, and then more eye surgery when the first one failed, and I was sort of stuck in the middle of like what is supposed to be you know you're like summer of getting all of your MFA work done. They're like, ‘Okay, you've got 5 semesters and one of them is your summer vacation.’ You're like, ‘Okay, great.’ And then I was like stuck in Vermont in a house no electricity. So I printed out all these photographs onto cotton, and I brought them home with me, and I put them in the woods all around my house in this place, where I like learned how to walk and exist, and be in my body. And I left them there for three months and I just kind of went back and visited them. And I'm not sure which the other image is in this set, but it might also be from that. And it was a really interesting experience.  Putting these sort of replicas of my body or like stand-ins for my body in a place, and just letting them decay and like letting bugs eat them and whatever happened, happened. And just sort of again letting go of some of that control. Letting go of like my ability to make aesthetic decisions anymore. It was really about letting chance happen, and letting whatever you know life threw at it happen. And I went back and visited the photos over time and I took, re-photographed them and they're on my website under a category called *Restoration.*

And then, when I went back to L.A., I displayed some of the cotton pieces like this that just nailed to a wall. But it was very much a experience of like being in a space and thinking about what that space was for me. And then, Megan, if you want to go to the other one.  Yeah, okay. I thought this might be the other one. So this photograph is also from the *Restoration* Series. This is called *Bleeding Out*, which is in reference to the trees, and not myself. But it's a photograph of another one of these cotton photographs. This one is quite large, I'm gonna say like 3 by 4 feet maybe. And it is nailed to 2 trees that are sort of standing parallel to each other going through the right half of the photograph - left half of the photograph. Again you'd think I can't teach art based on my inability to tell right and left apart. And they're in this just like very summery green Vermont forest. And then the places where the nails have been tapped into the trees, there’s this sort of like brownish it looks like the trees are bleeding. It's like sap dripping down the sides of the photograph and it didn't happen on any of the other photos I put out, it was just this one. I still don't really know what happened. I don't really think it was sap. I think it was like the rust from the nails, but it didn't happen on any other ones. I have no idea, it was bizarre and really cool.

The photograph is of me, it's of my back and I'm sort of sitting like all curled up in the fetal position. You can see like the top of my head and mostly like my spine and my hands gripping my shoulders. And yeah, this is one of those sort of In Situ moments, of being in the woods re-experiencing this you know nature reclaiming me thing. It's very lovely. I also couldn’t see anything while I was taking the photos, because I had just had eye surgery. so it's like, I hope this comes out well.

**Heidi:** So speaking of chance, right?

**Aurora:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah, that’s what autofocus is for.

**Heidi:** And, and then later, you know deleting, if yeah, at least, that's my experience.

**Aurora:** Exactly.

**Heidi:** So, and you know I think that that that process focus that there's the timelessness and the joy, and there, you know, like there's a, a feeling of being in a process that's really different than having an expectation of an outcome. And that surprise that can come with like what you were saying is didn't happen to the other photos that were nailed to to trees, but look here, and you know what can be offered.

**Aurora:** Yeah, definitely. And there were a lot of pictures I put up. I think I think I put 17 of them up in like various places in the woods, and none of them like had the same results. Some of them, like I had immersed two of them in water, and the way that like this, the dirt in the water, and, like the rocks like completely different. I had a ton of them nailed to trees this is the only one that that happened to. So it's really fascinating to see the way that like the different images some of them like basically looked like I hadn’t done anything. They just like still look like they were like commercially processed photos and some of them were like that probably did not come off of a printer.

**Heidi:** Huh. I the, the poet in me wonders about you know how that's very similar to people, you know, hanging on trees in the woods, which fantasy for me, like I love the trees in the woods, but how we're all different and we have different experiences, even in…

Aurora, we’re we're kind of getting to it. I mean I could talk for much longer. but we're getting near the end. I'm curious if there's anything about your art - so what does art mean to you that if you had to I mean - I'm not gonna say one word, which is sometimes what I do because that seems silly. But to sort of consider what does art mean, you know, for Aurora Berger today in this moment?

**Aurora:** I think for me, art is about, I think that art is a tool for processing and that's true for people looking at it and for people making it. And I think that sometimes that processing is about the making of things, and like just putting feelings on paper, or even just ignoring feelings by putting things on paper while you like squish down the other feelings that you're ignoring. But it's still processing, even if you're trying not to process. And then for other people it's about looking at art and finding pieces of yourself that you didn't know you needed to work on. And I think really all of our understanding of art comes down to that. It's just about figuring out what it is that we need, and finding a way to get that.

**Heidi:** Hmm. Thank you and that, that bridging, the connection between inner and outer artists and viewer connector that there's a way that it connects through a process of creativity, I think for me. Yeah, once it's created it sort of has a life of its own and multiple lives and layers, and you know all those things.

**Aurora:** Yeah, it definitely does. And I know I see that, I didn't really even say this at the beginning, but like I teach K - 8 art, which is hence this silly thing behind me and the silly classroom I'm sitting in full of rainbows. But that's what I see every day in art class right? Is like these kids come in and they find something in themselves. And maybe that's something is that they just like really need to roll around on the floor, and it’s not what I have planned, but they find something.

**Heidi:** It so interesting I was going to ask about sort of - aurora's, artist and writer, photographer, writer, and then also educator and you know you're writing and you art seem to be educating, and you're also a teacher. So you just sort of intuitively went to that for, for me, and I pass it on and I notice it in others and I can create a space where people can - youth, kids can create and find their own processes. Yeah, probably outside the bounds, too, like rolling on the floor may not be suitable in every single classroom. but maybe it's just that creative process yeah, or an itchy foot or whatever I don’t know.

**Aurora:** Exactly. And sometimes it's just like, okay, clearly, you just really need more recess, and this is not recess. You can do something else right now. Make a different choice, please. But I, I see that like clearly, you need to be out of your chair at moving. This is not the best place for you to be doing it, unfortunately.

But, but you know, like this I, my philosophy, when it comes to like art education is really that like this is a place for kids to have their own studio. Maybe they have a studio at home with tons of supplies, and they get to make whatever they would like to make whenever they would like to make it, and maybe they have no art supplies at all at home. And so I don't want those kids with no art supplies at home to not get the opportunity to play around with and experiment and make mistakes and make messes just because they don't have that opportunity in their household. And so, while we do plenty of you know projects that are, you know you need to actually sit and listen to directions. There's also a lot of opportunity for play and experimentation and choice and making those, making the art that they would like to make and making that count.

And I think it has been really successful with kids that people would be like I, you know ‘They hate art.’ And then they come into the art room, and they have a great time because they're able to choose what they would like to be doing and they are engaged because they made the choice and that's been really lovely.

**Heidi:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I have this big smile on my face. Thank you so much for your time, Aurora. Before we wrap up, we want to invite Megan back in. And Megan, thank you for being with us. behind the scenes. Is there anything you want to add to the conversation?

Questions before we say bye for now and take this live in a, in a couple of weeks?

**Megan:** I just wanna share my thanks for being here. I'm a big fan of Aurora's art, and it's always wonderful to get to listen to Aurora speak about it. And just something that really resonated for me was the whole idea of like critiquing perfectionism and embracing imperfections, or the idea of imperfections as beautiful through art. So thank you for sharing that.

**Aurora:** Of course. I also love talking to both of you. It’s been a while. Well, not that long. I was going to, I think this is the first time I've done an Inclusive Arts Vermont talk, not in some weird public place.

**Heidi:** Yeah, and, and we appreciate your perspective and your time and your care. And if you want to give a shout-out to where people can find you on this. So it'll go on the Youtube place we can do that and, and then we can. It’ll be live as well. But these are all the logistics that I wanna make sure get covered, but they're not necessarily first on my list.

**Aurora:** So that, that's fair. they're clearly not even on my list because I forgot to tell people who I what I actually do or like where to find me. But I am on the interwebs [auroraberger.com](http://auroraberger.com) pretty easy. I'm also on Instagram [@auroraberger](https://www.instagram.com/auroraberger/), as long as I can manage to pull off being a public school teacher with nudes on their Instagram account. And so follow me before I have to go private and, and I'm also on Twitter but I don't think I've used that account in a very long time so follow me there and look at my silence. I also have a bunch of writing on my website, and I will gladly send people the chapter about disability aesthetics if they would like to read it. However, I cannot post it publicly on my website, because that is copyright infringement. But I have a pdf of it, and you may have it if you would like. So shoot me an email if you would like to read that.

And that, I think, is all of my links.

**Heidi:** Thank you so much.And Yeah. wishing the best and we'll be in touch very soon.Yay. thanks everybody for being with us tonight.