

### Transcript of Conversation with Anne Healy

**LG:** Hello, thank you for joining us. My name is Lila Gould and I am a second-year Graduate student at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. This recording was done in correlation with the exhibition, *Anne Healy: Logic of Intuition* opening at the Hessel Museum of Art between April 4th through May 24th 2026. During this conversation, Anne and I sit down and discuss her definition of public art and theatre, how she used photography to document her impermanent sculptures and to conclude, we discuss the site-specific sculpture, *A Parthian Shot* (1978), that was made for Bard's campus in the group exhibition *A Sense of a Region*. Thank you and enjoy!

**LG:** Thank you for joining us Anne!

**AH:** Thank you. I'm excited to be here. It's beautiful! Beautiful campus, beautiful museum.

**LG:** Well, we are so happy you are joining us today. Can you walk us through how you define public art and its relation to theatre?

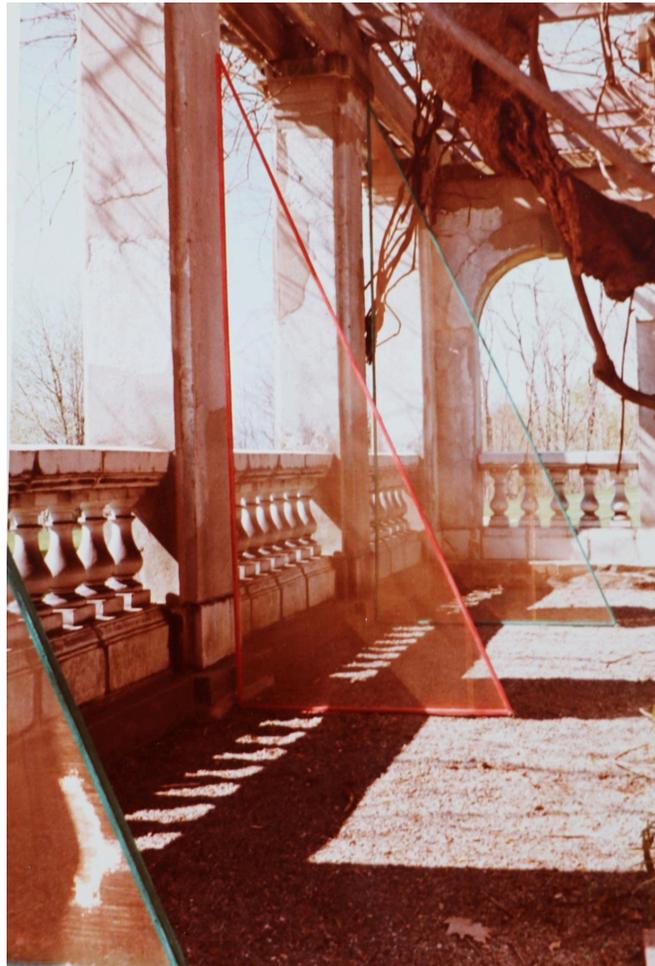
**AH:** I think the public art is a form of theater not because it's public art, but because it's made and done on the street and the audience is there with you all the time passing by or standing with you... making comments having giggle fit or just interested too. So you bring the audience and the actor (the artist) in close communication even closer than in a theater because there's always the distance between the stage and the audience. But with art that is in the public, because you're in the public, there's no distance, so you're right there with it. I've heard that the definition of public art is because it is made with public money which is also true. But I think my definition is closer to what actually happens—the stage of the set, the audience is there, the actor is ready (the artist) and the play begins.

**LG:** Beautiful! That is something I've really noticed and I've been attracted to your practice is how you talk about the public and engagement. Specifically, I really see that with your site specific works and all the different capacities that they've taken with sailcloth and different mediums. Would you mind talking a little bit about your practice and site specificity for us?

**AH:** Well, yes, you don't always have the opportunity of being in a space that is particularly specific to what you want to do. But if you're very lucky, you can find a space, you can find the space. It's not a commission given to you by somebody. You select the space, because in that space you're not only find the physical characteristics that you're interested in, but you also find spiritual or yeah, spiritual characteristics that prompt you when you're in that space it may be bringing it back a memory, maybe having a laugh because you remembered— also a memory—

you remembered something that happened in a space like this with the this space remind you of, that is ideal. However, most public art as I said, the spaces are selected for you and you have to work within that and you do the best you can but try to find some of those spiritual connections that you remember in the space.

**LG:** Absolutely, that's really great too! Something that was really fun to discover when I began to talk to you and see your work in person through photographs... I was really excited to see images of *A Parthian Shot* (1978) that were taken on Bard's campus at Blithewood Garden. And I was curious if you could talk to us about the materiality.



Anne Healy, *A Parthian Shot* (1978). Courtesy of the artist.

**AH:** Well, *A Parthian Shot* was offered to me by Bard College in 1978, that space. I had walked into space and I just fell in love with it. There are actually two kinds of colonnades facing each other against an empty across an empty workspace basically. When I did the piece there was a huge concrete planter that was in the middle of that walk space so you had to walk around that, which I found very interesting. The colonnade is ending or beginning with arches. And when I

would stand in the walk space, near the big pot, I could look either way and I would see the same thing. So, what I wanted to do was to bisect or dissect the column, the arch space at the end of the colonnade with triangles of very thin, molding, wood molding that I painted different colors and that also were different sizes. So they started with the small and that angle cut into the next triangle, that cut into the biggest one towards the end, that cut into the arch. Anyway visually, that's how it worked for me.

I think on the material that I used, I didn't want to use anything that was definite. So, I used brass wire screening that had a glow because it was brass and it also patinated and it was set in these right angles that were made by the wood molding painted into different colors. I love that piece. I named it *A Parthian Shot* because when the army, a Parthia in Greece (Greccian times), the Calvary had a maneuver that they would pretend to be forging ahead on horses, and they would make an abrupt turn and come charging back at the opposite army. So they fainted a retreat, and then turned into a charge and that's how the piece felt to me. Because of the way it all turned out. I was very pleased with it, I love the piece. I've shown it in slides, at various occasions of lectures and things like that, and none of these people ever saw the piece, but everybody really got it. And that really has always made me feel wonderful.

**LG:** Yeah I think that, that piece too, the different photos I've seen of it— I've seen black and white and I've seen color prints, you still see— it's like an optical illusion almost. The material is really striking! And seeing it in succession with the others too. It does something visually and it really responds well to the space.

**AH:** Well, you know the material. The color picks up, but it's also dependent on the light that's coming into the colonnade so sometimes part of it will be in shadow and the other part will be lit and when the brass wire screening is lit, it flares in this yellow, and when it's not lit, it dulls down and then of course because it patinated overtimes so that made it dark so you had a lot of things going on with very very minimum materials.

**LG:** Right. Would you mind discussing a little bit about how you documented all of your sculptures and what time of day and why? Why was taking a lot of pictures at different angles seemed really important to the work?

**AH:** Well, I realized early on that no one was going to see my work like I did. I could have you know very interesting photographers take pictures but then they're very rarely what I wanted. So, I decided to do my own photography. And I like photography anyway. I especially like black-and-white photography to tell you the truth and at that point you know in the early 70s, there were not a lot of color prints. I mean, I really did a lot of black-and-white work. With the pieces, even the very colorful pieces, I also did color because I would go back not that often, at different times of day and different kinds of days, you know very bright and sunny cloudy. Once

in a while I do rain, but not very often. Because I could see how the piece changed and I wanted to have other people see how it changed according to the light quality. And you know photographers have other interests. This was my interest and I have to be a photographer! So I gave it the time and the thought and also luck! You know a lot of photography is based on luck. You happen to be there at the right moment, at the right day. And it works! So that is why I decided to do my own photography.

**LG:** What do you like so much about black and white photography? Is it the shadows?

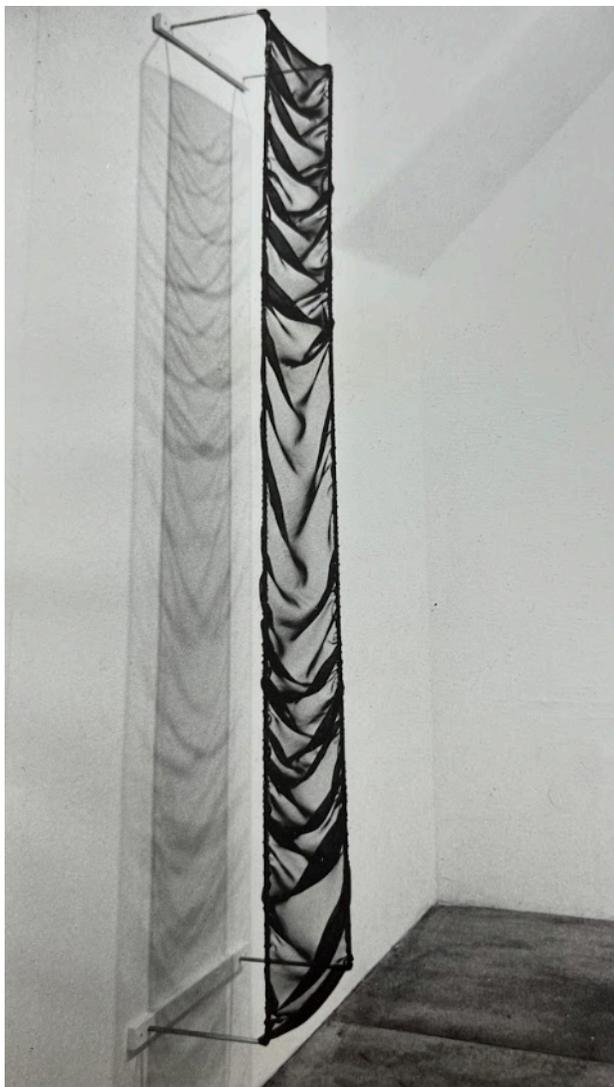
**AH:** Yeah, it's the shadow. You don't get shadows in color photography. I mean you do, but it's not as striking. You know I'm a big Noir fan, Film Noir, and I grew up watching those movies and noir is all about shadows and darkness and that's why it is called "Noir". And that interests me and it still does and I could find it in the black and white photography, but I couldn't find it in the color photography. I mean color has other qualities that are very important. And equally important and I did a lot of color work, I mean my work is color. It is really based on color and light and shadow.

But I just always liked the black and white because it is much more dramatic and that's what I was always going for, drama.

**LG:** Yeah. I love that about your works too. I think that it really translates well into the indoor pieces too of your practice.

**AH:** Yeah, yeah.

**LG:** Like *Motet* and *Georgia* and *Premise*, which is not in the show unfortunately, but that sort of being the beginning of your work with shadow, having chiffon with aluminum rods on the top and bottom. But having this relationship to the wall too, with light casting a shadow.



Anne Healy. *Premise* (circa 1970s). Courtesy of the artist

**AH:** Yeah! Because you have the actual piece and then you have the shadow piece on the wall behind it which is just as valid and interesting as the cloth piece. That was something I really started to work on from the beginning, it was always about that. And sometimes I would put lights in pieces. I did a piece called the *White Goddess*, which has a light in it that you don't see, but it makes this beautiful medley of light and shadow on the white fabric. And it does kind of look like it's walking in a strange way.

**LG:** Right and how you play with scale so beautifully, too. Something that is really beautiful and an important part of your practice and how you want people to experience it and take it in.

**AH:** Yeah! And that's another thing about public art. You can direct people to experience the work in the way you want them to. Not always, but I did a piece in Philadelphia in the 1970s

also, where I put up white screening panels, it was fabric anyway. And I had big yellow x's on them. And I put it up at the entrance of the Philadelphia Academy of Art, where they had these huge, beautiful columns. At first steps, then you had to go through the columns, and then you entered through a tiny little door going into the museum. So what I did was put up barriers between the columns, so you had to squeeze in at the end of the colonnade, on either end, and then squeeze in to go into this tiny door. Which I was referencing, when they destroyed buildings in Manhattan in the 70s, which they did a fair amount, they would put up these big x's on a piece of fabric. The fabric I was using was more like a mesh, so you could sort of see through it which made it transparent but you also saw shapes, you saw people but they were not as distinct as what you would normally see. So the whole piece had an air of frustration and being enclosed by something you did not particularly want to be enclosed by. And also being reduced to this tiny little door that you had to enter for this big, big building. And I could direct people how to experience the piece, they had to go along the ends. Of course, some of the students decided to squeeze through the barriers, one or two, and luckily the piece held up.



Anne Healy. *Transparent Detour* (1976). Courtesy of the artist.

**LG:** Yeah. I remember you, when we looked through photos, you would look through the ones where students would be going in between them. Because that was an interesting encounter that they had.

**AH:** Yes, it was very interesting. I did not think anyone would do that! They also had planters up there.

**LG:** Yeah. And it being both a museum and school was quite fascinating. And all of the steps leading up to the piece and it also has this dual purpose of being an entrance to a museum and school but also being a place where people can hang out.

**AH:** I removed a lot of the hangout, because it was not available to them anymore. But I think the students enjoyed it, and I enjoyed doing it.

**LG:** I'm curious just to wrap up a little bit, to think about your work at UC Berkeley?

**AH:** When I went out to Berkeley, I developed a class called *Class Specific Sculpture* and I took the concept to the Head of Grounds, this older man, who loved the grounds of Berkeley. He was in charge them, and my Dean had told me that we had to get his permission to do anything because what I was going to have done, was students would select sites on campus that they found not only physical attributes that they liked, but also had a feeling of memory excitement and other emotions that the site enveloped in them. And I went to see this man and he loved the idea! He loved it! And he had you know the Dean was the deed, but this guy had much more power and once he got behind it, you know I wrote it up in and I sent it into whatever the courses there I mean, this is my first semester there! And because he "okayed it", they "okayed it". So it became a course in the Department of Art Practice and it was not just for art students, it was open for the general student body. So I would have students majoring in English, lots of architecture students, sciences, a real cross section of the student body. What I would have them do, what the requirements of the class were, they had to first select a site, and then the class would all together see each site and they had to tell us why they selected this site. Then they were expected to do a construction drawing showing how whatever they were going to make would be made, how it would be installed, and hardware and I mean everything! Then, they had to do another drawing, which was the beauty spot, how they saw the piece in its best definition in that space. They could use any medium they wanted. Then they also had to make a model, a three dimensional model. Then when the models and the drawings and everything, you know, we had discussed them in class and looked at them in class. I had a presentation day from 12-1pm, supposedly it would always run over, until at least 1:30pm. I would invite the Head of Grounds, who changed, I mean that first man retired after the first couple of years, he was a wonderful guy! And an architecture professor... so three people who would comment about what was being

presented to them. So the students had to stand up and present their work. How they felt about it, why they did this, how they were going to construct it and take feedback from these various people and defend the work basically. But also, because the grounds were there, they were getting help from the grounds people. “Ok! You can use this site... we might plant something here... what do you need?” The grounds people provided shovels, anything they needed to make the piece work in the ground. Also they had a lot of suggestions for these kids! I mean they were kids— of what would work, “you can’t do this because that’s not going to work there!” The presentations were a big part of what I was doing in the class. It gave them the confidence of their own decisions and that's what it was all about.

**LG:** Beautiful! Thank you for sharing. Your work in general and your practice as an educator, and how you engage with students of all ages and different capacities and different backgrounds too is really important and a big part of who you are and what we discussed. So I really appreciate it.

**AH:** Well thank you! And thank you for doing this.

**LG:** Thanks for being here with me Anne.

**AH:** You are very welcome!