

Allan deSouza, Berkeley Book Chats, January 30, 2019

- Announcer: From the Townsend Center for the Humanities at UC Berkeley.
- Timothy Hampton: Welcome to Berkeley Book Chats. I'm Timothy Hampton, director of the Townsend center for the humanities. Berkeley Book Chats showcase a faculty member engaged in a public conversation about a recently completed work. This popular series highlights the richness of Berkeley's academic community. Today's conversation features Allan deSouza of the Department of Art Practice discussing his book, *How Art Can Be Thought: A Handbook for Change*. He is joined by Anne Walsh of Art Practice.
- Anne Walsh: Good noon. I figured out I could say that today. I'm going to introduce Allan and then Allan is going to read a little bit and then we'll talk with each other and with you today. So, I'm Anne Walsh, I'm an associate professor in Art practice. I'm realizing this is the first time that you and I have ever sat across from a table and had a public conversation. We've had published written conversations. We've had a number of other ways of interacting, but never quite like this before.
- Allan deSouza: Right. And, we've been colleagues for a really long time.
- Anne Walsh: I was just about to get to that. I have no, no, please, I feel so honored, as an academic colleague, as a fellow artist, to be introducing Allan today. We met 25 years ago, in Los Angeles as fellow lecturers in the studio art department at UC Irvine. And we have worked together as editors of the Los Angeles base, extra contemporary art quarterly and we have been in dialogue about our work, our families, and our teaching worlds ever since.
- Anne Walsh: So long time. We have a very short time to talk today, so I'm going to try to be brief. I want to just share a little bit about Allan. He's just old enough to remember the celebrations of the so-called Kenya colonies independence from Britain in 1962, three, 63, a moment that figures, both quite literally and then I think, frequently, metaphorically in his work. He moved to London from Nairobi at age seven, and then was educated in the UK at Goldsmiths College and the Bath Academy of art.
- Anne Walsh: And then later in the United, in the Whitney independent study program. And in the master's program in photography at UCLA. He's been here at Berkeley since 2012. Is that right? And the chair of our department for the last four years.
- Allan deSouza: Four years.
- Anne Walsh: Thank you for that. As a visual artist, which really includes, his work in photography, photo text, performance, sound and video, his work often engages issues of migration diaspora and colonial histories. He can be quite comic and beautiful in his reexamination of historically fraught meanings of geography, culture and personal and community identity. The most recent exhibition that Allan had, here in the bay area, which was portions of which were here in this room and then later at USF is called ... and hopefully a book to be?

Allan deSouza: At least essays. Yes.

Anne Walsh: It's called through the black country or the sources of the Thames around the great shires of lower England and down the Severn river to the Atlantic Ocean, which reenacts and appends iconic colonial narratives of discovery in Africa. Some of you may have seen a version of that in here. His work has been featured at museums and galleries worldwide, including the Phillips collection in DC, Yerba Buena in San Francisco, the ICP in New York, the Pompidou Center in Paris, the museum for African Art in New York, Moderna Museet in Stockholm, and Talwar gallery, which represents him in New York and New Delhi.

Anne Walsh: So, now this Allan's book, which appeared from Duke University Press in October, 2018, it's quite un-hyperbolically the book that I've been waiting for as a teacher. It is essentially, it is primarily a glossary of so-called contested terms, really interrogating the language, which is, so often, so casually used, particularly for those of us who teach art in the situation of the art critique.

Anne Walsh: And, that expansive glossary, is framed by an introduction for essays, concerning art pedagogy. And then a wonderful final chapter using the painter Roscoe and the language typically use to describe Rothko's work, and to honor it as a case in point of everything else that the book has interrogated. So, that's what this is, and I'm going to ask Allan now to read some excerpts from it and then we'll talk about why those excerpts and what's happening in them and then we'll open it up.

Allan deSouza: Okay. Thank you so much, Anne. So the pressure, not learning to be fun from 10, but also to be beautiful and comic.

Anne Walsh: Yeah, you'd have to do both things.

Allan deSouza: So I'm actually going to talk about colonization.

Anne Walsh: So funny, so beautiful.

Allan deSouza: And I'm going to read a section from the introduction, just the last part of the introduction. As a kind of overview, and as a kind of conceptual, and I guess linguistic ground, for why this book. Anne mentioned that, you know, I'm from Kenya, and just sort of old enough to be born with when Kenya was still a colony. And in some ways that really does inform so much of my work, both artwork, and writing.

Allan deSouza: And writing, I consider as art works. I do consider the book as an art project. But it's took then, colonization and colonialism from, simply being thought of as rooted in the particular time period. I had to consider that perhaps we live in a post colony, a global post colony. And again, to use the term, post, not in terms of time, but that the colonies have become, independent in name, but it have become financially even more dependent, to sort of other global forces.

Allan deSouza: And so, I'm trying to situate the language of art and even though the book is primarily directed at MFA Students, it is really for anyone who looks at art, to be able to translate how we look at art, translate it into language so that we can actually communicate the experience we have of engaging with art. But language is, I guess shockingly restricted. How can we translate our bodily feelings and responses into words and then be able to share that with other people.

Allan deSouza: And that sort of lack of language, is what I'm also embedding within, sort of broader notion of colonialism. Okay, so let me read. So two aspects of colonization that I will continually reference is control of a history, and it's exertions upon the body. And, looking at history in terms of time and memory, and the body, particularly in terms of effect and mobility. Colonization aspires to determine history, controlling how time, and the past, operated in order to produce future narratives.

Allan deSouza: It does so in part by creating a rupture from the past as well as within the present. A cut from any sense of historical continuity. It's capacity to wheel these cuts is not only as an outside force but, one that is fully embodied psychically and physically acting upon and from within the body, forming how each one of us is organized, how and what we know, how we feel, think and act in, and with the world.

Allan deSouza: That is intimately producing any sense of who we are, in relation to our history and to the bodies and histories of others. Intrinsic to who we are, are practices of both remembering and forgetting, writing about the closed plantation system of the Americas. They do our ugly so, our clients have two cultures develop, that are integral to modernism. And here, I'm speaking specifically of European modernism.

Allan deSouza: One is a culture of actively forgetting, the other is one of remembering actively. This remembering's undertaken a great risk against the strictures, impediments, and punishments imposed on remembering one's languages, one's histories, one's humanity and the violence that has been perpetrated against those. Forgetting is also not as simple or likely undertaken Eurasia, since it too is activist in its demands for returns to imagine pasts.

Allan deSouza: Not only brutal in its eradications, forgetting can entertain or rather infotain, eventually producing for example, the plantation has heritage tourist destination for the industry jargon of authentic recreation's of willing participation of happy cared for slaves singing in the fields. At least all reminds us that landscape, a supposedly neutral genre of nature observation, is highly implicated in this practice of forgetting, emphasizing the conventional splendor of the Caribbean landscape over the lives and death grounds of slaves and eviscerated landscaping that is integral to how contemporary tourists imagine themselves in that landscape and how the imagining is enacted for them.

Allan deSouza: In this resort equivalent of Terra nullius empty land. The only natives are there to provide Luxe, Calme et Volupté, to quote a title of Henri Matisse's painting. The will to forget, and the will to remember. How and what does one remember, if a predominant modernism produces a culture of forgetting. Anne mentioned my last chapter, on Rothko, really, again, examined closely what it is to look at not abstract painting from the period of sort of high modernism. And what is it that remember and the rhetoric around abstraction. What does that cause us to also forget?

Allan deSouza: How does art function is Island forgetting within sees of turmoil, as "comfortable armchair" to keep Henri Matisse in mind, in the rooms of the living and the caverns of the dying. Let me just give you the full quote from Matisse. And here I'm quoting from him. "What I dream of is an art of balance of purity and serenity. Devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter. And not that could be for every mental worker, for the businessman as well as the man of letters. For example, a soothing, calming influence in the mind. Something like a good arm chair, which provides relaxation from physical fatigue.

- Allan deSouza: And that's Matisse from notes of a painter. So we have the sort of template of art as a place for escape. And that's often been the rhetoric of a particularly around abstraction. So escape can also be about forgetting. Well, Matisse himself was almost obsessively driven and hardly the epitome of an armchair painter. I drag him up since his work has come to stand for not quite an escape, but a point of view and experiences, an experience that rises above the troubles of the world. Arising that marks central aspiration for western modernism.
- Allan deSouza: The critic Peter Schjeldahl, a shadow who writes for the New Yorker, epitomizes this aspiration at exactly the moment of crisis. As a south to the mowing down of revelers along the Nice waterfront in July, 2016. And I quote from Schjeldahl, "To share in the delicate truth that rigorous art can be at one with routinely Melton pleasures. You look at, show or send a picture by Matisse, people have been doing that often, these awful recent days."
- Allan deSouza: Similarly, in a review of a Matisse exhibition in 1992, Hilton Kramer writes, "It has the effect of making one feel a lot better about the century in which we live. A terrible century in so many ways. Yet one in which we can nonetheless feel an immense sense of pride if beside it's unremitting record of suffering, bloodshed, and tragedy, it can also boast of an achievement as sublime as Matisse's."
- Allan deSouza: Curiously, this rebalancing of the scales of beauty, this Kramer, mourning Matisse, though he's mourning, it's symptomatic of a more generalized Melancholia for a world that never was. He concludes, and I quote, "When we exit this exhibition and returned to the sordid cultural landscape of this last decade of the century, it is hard to believe that we shall ever again witness anything like it now or in this foreseeable future."
- Allan deSouza: In these examples of forgetting. Sorry, in these examples, forgetting his purposeful and elevating with beauty as the engine whisking us away from the tragedies of the world. The will to forget and escape are understandable, but we might also measure privilege by the degree to which we can forget, ignore or be whisked away from the tragedies of others, including the privilege of being able to think of them as other.
- Allan deSouza: Artists such as Glenn Ligon, Carrie Mae Weems, Betty Saw and Kara Walker to name only of the few of the more well known, might be considered as doing the work of remembering, in this instance of slavery and the plantation system. A different tactic of remembering is pursued by the artists, Simone Leigh, as well as creating counter representations. Lee Works directly with and upon the body of the viewer transforming galleries and museums into healing spaces for the traumatic memories that have been generationally inscribed onto black and brown bodies.
- Allan deSouza: And that are re-experienced than the onslaught of ongoing racism and sexism. Lee turns the gallery into a site of self and communal actualization to activate viewers to new forms of representation. And I think that's important that it's not only the artists who provides new forms of representation, but that viewers of themselves are activated to enact forms of representation.
- Allan deSouza: A more demanding, destabilizing way to think of these artists is that they play resounding roles in re-purposing postmodernist forms and languages against the modernist project of forgetting. Rather than framing such artists as a gender to a central narrative. How might we rethink that central narrative of modernism when we replace what has been purposefully removed and forgotten?

Allan deSouza: And rather than policing the political effectiveness of black artists in and accepted by white institutions, we might, to use the vernacular of the plantation, considered that the work of remembering and replacement needs to be done as much in the big house as in the slave's quarters at least until the institutional architectures and locations of memory work have been rebuilt. The other main considerations, I will consider through colonization who'll be on control over mobility and access of how emotions, languages and ideas circulate of which bodies have mobility and institutional access including two ideas and through which artistic practices and vocabularies these extended and simultaneously without.

Allan deSouza: Throughout the book, I will return to these questions of memory and forgetting. Of language, mobility, and access and what implications they have for looking at and understanding art for pedagogy, and for social relations and disconnections developed around art. In doing this, I'm not prescribing what a decolonizing culture and its forms can or will be. Since, then such prescriptions should be suspect, as returns to an applications of colonizing authority.

Allan deSouza: My aim then is not to prescribe what art can be, but to work towards language to describe what it does and does not do, how it does that and what it can do. Language being the prime means to articulate what those possibilities might be. Decolonizing culture and the modes of art political inquiry that I'm proposing cannot exist in isolation or with any claim to autonomy. They are entwined with, and can only be experienced, understood and enacted as decolonizing through arts institutions, practices, discourses, and participants.

Allan deSouza: Like any other object or event, art, political work becomes politicized for the culture, agents, institutions, and systems that reproduce and produce it through which it operates, and which in turn produces. By turning to the political, and I can see that what the political means and how it functions are always contested in temporal and pulling from different sources. My interest is in placing a spectrum of ideas and practices and service of the idealism that many arts students have and continue to have in more subdued for them as artists, and we can debate that subdued form.

Allan deSouza: It's an idealism that desire is more from art than being a commodity, that grounds art politically and socially while re-purposing aesthetic and formal invention that pursues art as complex since intersections between individual and collective interests. It is an idealism that continues to inspire me, yet it is an idealism that currently lacks an adequate language to articulate, investigate, and interrogate its interests, desires, demands, methods, and outcomes. Okay. So, that's my starting points.

Anne Walsh: Okay. I kind of want you to read more, but-

Allan deSouza: I mean, I can read more, I guess in response to a particular questions or discussions.

Anne Walsh: Sure. Thank you for reading that. I'm really struck by the end, the last thing that you say there, that the project is fundamentally in the service of the idealism of the student artists that you work with. I'd love you to say a little bit more about that idealism.

Allan deSouza: Yeah, I mean art school and, you know, an art department within the university. Are sort of ... difficult places to teach. And I think those are productive difficulties. I think students when they enter into our programs, are idealistic

both in terms of wanting to change the world, and students will say that, an artist will say that. And, I say it's artists do that and more subdued forms because I think artists are embarrassed to say that, but they want to change the world.

Allan deSouza: And it's interesting that that particular phrase or wanting to change the world has been taken over by the business arts. And so that's now the slogan of I think SF State, of the MBA program. And we see billboards around San Francisco, which stayed at, you know, change the world from here and it's advertising the MBA program. But so there is an idealism both to change the world but also to maximize their potential as individuals.

Allan deSouza: And then to come into an art program where that might be shutdown, I think. And students sometimes feel that they're being indoctrinated into certain ways of seeing, and if they come from any point of difference, we can debate that sort of phrasing that language as well around difference, of how they see themselves in relation to both the individual professors. But also to the department.

Allan deSouza: And how that difference is supported and brought into being. That idealism I think can be squashed, in lots of ways that might be invisible. And you know, never be stated overtly. And, I think, one of the pleasures for me of being in the department is having colleagues like you as well who are so attuned to that, and really try to empower students. And so, the difficulty for us as faculty is how do we do that, and not, we're not just teaching what we think we know, but we're trying to bring out what students themselves know and, what they can know, I think in the future.

Allan deSouza: So, it is trying to support students for what they themselves can be, more than what we tell them.

Anne Walsh: I see a couple people nodding in the room in response to your saying what you just said about, our students sensing that there is some constriction.

Allan deSouza: The conventional way of teaching art is that we teach students to be the artists that we are.

Anne Walsh: Right.

Allan deSouza: You know, what we know to, we teach them how to make the kind of work that we know how to make-

Anne Walsh: Which is also a kind of generational inheritance that we're passing on from our teachers, teachers, teachers, teachers.

Allan deSouza: Yeah. We've been taught that certain ways are the right ways to do things. Certain knowledge is the right knowledge, you know. and I find with my teaching, and you know, this is difficult for me as a teacher also knowing that actually would have to do is sort of is actually balancing to what extent do I let go of all the things that I think I know and allow for the knowledge of the students to come into play.

Anne Walsh: Right. And that you think they ought to know.

Allan deSouza: Yeah, yeah. We want to give them tools and knowledge, but we also want to give them the tools of criticality, so they can weigh what is it that we think we're telling them. I think that's exciting difficulty I think of an art program.

Anne Walsh: Can I ask you a question about a term that I notice is not present in the lexicon in the glossary, which is perhaps it's so embedded everywhere that it doesn't need to be here, but it's the very term global.

Allan deSouza: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Anne Walsh: Which I think of as a pretty, or if it isn't a contested term, it needs to be more so.

Allan deSouza: Oh, I should mention ... and I sort of alluded to that about two thirds of the book consists of a glossary of terms that are most commonly used in conversations about art. So global, this is ironic that Anne's asking me the question because she's currently teaching a course on global perspectives of contemporary art.

Anne Walsh: Well, in 20, in 30 minutes, I am.

Allan deSouza: So, we want to help locate our students within a sense of the local, like what does it mean to be in Berkeley? But how's that impacted by global forces and, how those global forces both, enabling, in a sense of internationalism. Like how do students situate themselves in the world in order to be able to function in multiple locations. And also I guess activate their own histories from being from multiple locations.

Allan deSouza: But also how do they grapple with the flip forces of globalization, which might be, to produce a kind of something that's much more homogenous, that might be very restrictive. I think it's to empower students to work with, global possibilities, but also globalization's forces of constraints and limitations. You know, and one example of that is a globalization encourages the mobility of goods and material, but limits the mobility of people.

Anne Walsh: People.

Allan deSouza: But, you must have your own thoughts about that.

Anne Walsh: Well, I realized just as I asked it, that my own desire to trouble the term global, which I would admit is influenced by something that Shuddha said when he was visiting, Shuddha Sengupta was visiting as part of the rocks media, collective in the fall, talking about how the term global is already itself a kind of, expression of corporate imperialism.

Allan deSouza: Well, Gayatri Spivak uses the term planetarity.

Anne Walsh: Planetarity, yeah.

Allan deSouza: Which also I think brings into, foregrounds a sense of the sort of environmentalism too. The planet itself is a kind of limited resource.

Anne Walsh: Right, right.

Allan deSouza: And I think that her phrasing and her expansion on that phrasing I think is really useful as well.

Anne Walsh: But as I was asking you that, I have to admit that I was also tripping on my own anxiety about being big housey. You know, that, that term global, that if I'm

going to get anxious about it with students, that I'm also possibly, again, shutting down some idealism that I can't recognize the value of.

Allan deSouza: Yeah. No, I think, we have to obviously talk about global in terms of internationalism and, conviviality like, you know, what can that mean to also feel sense of belonging in different parts of the world and what is it that makes us feel that we don't belong even in our own homes. And I guess one of the other things with students, and everyone that this predominant sense of come from multiple locations or having multiple histories is that, it's a form of limitation that one doesn't belong anywhere.

Allan deSouza: And so, you know, there's always the descriptions of feeling out of place and not belonging. And I'm really interested, if we have histories for multiple locations, how do we use those to generate multiple possibilities? So it can actually be about, you know, what is the value of multiple histories? Of multiple locations of belonging. What kinds of internationalism do we embody actually, and how do we then enact those into the world?

Allan deSouza: Yeah, so some more possibilities.

Anne Walsh: It's time to open it up to the room. We were so happy to know if there are any questions or responses to anything.

Allan deSouza: So, it's sort of barely touched or not.

Anne Walsh: I know we've barely, barely, barely, barely broken the surface.

Speaker 5: So, when you were talking about for example, the nations that are being colonized and there's this history that has been removed and, how they're maybe trying to recreate a new version. I am from a country that hasn't been colonized and I've noticed that there's this tendency to deport nostalgia basically. Because the current situation is not maybe desired. And so people tend to go back in history and feel like the previous glory is like what we wanted. And there's always this tendency for nostalgia and like the feeling of, it's like this nostalgia is not helping for the production of new things basically.

Speaker 5: It's like reproduction of the old things. It's always happening even in art. So there's nothing new necessarily happening in is always there were production of old things. And I wonder if in the nation that has been colonized, if you see this tendency of nostalgia is happening or if there's any room for creativity, is it still there? Because there has been this gap where there's basically a rule for, you know, because that has some, basically culture removed. So there's room for more creativity.

Allan deSouza: I guess the first point, I'm sort of curious, like, which countries have not been kind of colonized. I am also careful that we, you know, I did mention too that we need to guard against these sort of fantasies of past moments, like recreating, a kind of utopia, which is dystopian for majority of population probably, based on the fantasy of a past. So guarding against certain kinds of nationalism, and also to examine, well, who's interests does nationalism serve.

Allan deSouza: You know, so even coming from a colony of seeing a kind of independence movement which is often built around nationalism and the creation of a new nation, but then to also guard against that being fossilized and solidified, to then emulate the former colonizers as well. So, you know, to guard against this nostalgia for something that never was and serves an interest of a minority.



Speaker 5: That answers the question. Because we're live recording it.

Allan deSouza: It's recording.

Anne Walsh: It's for posterity.

Speaker 6: Just a real quick question. Thank you for your book and thank you for your talk. I'm just curious if you could describe to me. I'm always have this big question between theory and practice, especially with people who write. And I was wondering if you could tell me what this MFA program is doing particularly in regards to like some of the theories that you have about how art can be thought. So like what this program has, or like what you hope for or even idealistically.

Allan deSouza: This is coming from a current MFA students. I think, I want to speak for the faculty and the department. I think we are idealistic for the program. Which does mean that we have to make it alongside the students who are currently in it. Oh, okay. I'm going to advertise the program. We pay full tuition, that's a big deal. And I just got an email from our department managers saying, we have funding, we're going to give stipends to every one of our grads every semester.

Allan deSouza: That's the first you're hearing of that. So, education should be free across the board. And until we have that, like I think that's the biggest challenge we're working against. And, we need to work towards that. Education is a right, it's not a luxury, it's not a privilege. And I think that that's our sort of ground zero of idealism for the program. And so we want to, I guess in terms of art, we don't have a house style.

Allan deSouza: We're not trying to make you into certain kinds of artists. We take a broad range of students, some who don't come from art backgrounds, they come from other disciplines, because we are interested in the possibilities of what forms art can take in the future and which we don't yet know. And what it's going to be has to come from the students because we as faculty don't know that yet.

Allan deSouza: And I think that's our idealism, and that's what we try to put into practice.

Speaker 7: Hi there, and thank you so much for the conversation, it's really exciting to hear. I love that ... What I'm taking, I haven't seen the book yet, but I love this deconstruction of language and its relationship to our S thought. And I wanted to kind of go back out into this kind of way theory meets practice. Just for a tiny bit of context, I'm an installation sculptor, turned conceptual artists, turned social practice business entrepreneur.

Speaker 7: And what I'm really struck by is this idea of globalism and how business has really kind of taken it under itself. And it's also now grabbing on to idealism. And what's exciting to me about that in a way, is it the arts, which law exist mostly outside of language. How can we use that as a tool to really disrupt at scale and use social practice art to shift business systems? Because that train goes both ways.

Speaker 7: And so this is to me, what's so really exciting, and I love that you're taking that apart from the language point. And I think what I've been experiencing from within the conceptual art in social practice side, is that it's also existing outside of language and we're not quite able to describe it. And so, I'm just very happy that you've continued taking there and hopeful and idealistic.

Allan deSouza: So, we are preparing students to be artists. And we don't know, as I said, we don't know what form that's going to be. And so, we're assuming that in the broadest scope possible, of what an artist can be. And obviously, a large section of that is working within our industries. Whether it's commercial galleries, you know, and so on, and so within the realm of the market. And so we have to prepare students to be able to function, competitively within the market, otherwise we do them a disservice.

Allan deSouza: But we also have to ... we want to be able to prepare them for other ways of working which are not market dependent. And so, I think we try and do both things. So as a writer, I also have the ambition that everything can come into language.

Anne Walsh: I do too.

Allan deSouza: Yeah. and what we are grappling with, and this comes in our critiques, which is, the core of an MFA program, that gets played out in very practical ways. Like, how do we create language to address any kind of work that we were being presented with. And so that sort of coming to language, is always a kind of future making. Like we never get there, we never have the adequate language. So it's always an aspiration. So, which also means that always trying, you know, it's never past moment. But that's also linked to the idealism of wanting to be able to describe art.

Anne Walsh: There's two people back there.

Speaker 8: So just following on from what you just said on the previous question as well. So you began by saying, how do we, the problem of translating art that's to say visual art into language, and you're apparently concerned about, the restrictiveness of the language that we use to translate visual arts so that we can, well, I believe you were saying so that we can communicate about it.

Speaker 8: I mean, here's the issue. Here's the problem. Why translate it at all. I think that would just prompt you to say a little bit more clearly. They'll be more specific, and you can just did, because one recourse could be don't try and translate it into language, a visual artist is a visual art and it can be socially efficacious. Reach out to however one wants to reach out to visually and that's what the artist is trying to do.

Speaker 8: I mean, maybe the theory practice question from the MFA student could relate to that too but and why theorize? That's just practice.

Allan deSouza: Okay.

Speaker 8: But you clearly channel your idealism through this translation of visual art in the language and what exactly are you aiming at and why would you, I assume you wouldn't entertain as a potential solution, stop trying. That's the one.

Allan deSouza: Okay.

Anne Walsh: Great question.

Allan deSouza: Yeah, that's a great question. I guess our practices are themselves forms of language in a sort of broader sense. You know, so artists, and I try and break this down, of why I'm looking at these questions of language and also the languages

that we inherit as artists. And, by language, I mean the sort of the practices of making, how do we images function. And if there's no inherited language, then we wouldn't know how to look at images. They'd become nonsensical to us. So we can, we can never actually engage with something that's entirely new.

Allan deSouza: If we don't have a Picasso entry points into it, we don't have ways than I'm making sense of it. It has an impact upon us, but we don't know what that impact is. So, that's really what I mean by translation. So, and the example I give in the book is Looking at Roscoe Paintings and I specifically chose abstract painting, which is often spoken off as being beyond language. And so what does it mean to look an abstract painting?

Allan deSouza: And I'm supposed to have feelings. I'm supposed to respond emotionally. But, I don't know what those emotions are, unless I can translate them for myself. I don't know what I'm feeling unless those emotions come into words as well. And so it's that active translation for myself before I can even begin. If someone says, "Tell me what you're feeling," in front of a Roscoe painting, then what do I tell that person?

Allan deSouza: You know, how can we talk about artists culture? How can we develop culture if we don't bring language to scrutinize the inherited languages as well as the ways that each artist is actually changing that inherited language.

Rodney Reed: Rodney Reed from UC San Diego. Thank you very much for this discussion. And I'd like to return to the question of forgetting. And it brings to mind, at least for me, one form of forgetting is to view art as transcendence. And I'm thinking of an earlier moment back in 1987, when Douglas Crimp and others brought out the special issue of October, which was responding from an activist point of view to the question of art and arts purpose, and they were much of their rage.

Rodney Reed: And that was not all that was going on, but their rage had to do with how art critics in the art world, the established art world, were saying, "Oh, the HIV aids crisis with all this suffering and all these deaths, what a wonderful moment for creating beautiful, formerly, interesting eternal art. So, it's an insensitive form of forgetting, not the past, but literally the present, and kind of eternal perspective of art that transcends its moment and so on and so forth.

Rodney Reed: That was a moment of national emergency, was an emergency for different communities. We are now living in another emergency. It's political, but it's not simply that. And there is, speaking of global forces, there's of course you can think of, right wing populism and so on and so forth, but that's also pushing many, many residents and citizens, including artists into new forms of activism.

Rodney Reed: So I want to ask you a question, how in terms of student idealism and how that's a challenge and an opportunity for you as a teacher and as a program, does this new push toward activism and public art. How have you been dealing with it or what are your thoughts about it? And that's an art that's winding out. That's my question.

Allan deSouza: Okay.

Anne Walsh: It has to be our last one because I have to go to class.

Allan deSouza: Yeah. What we try, and do as a department is make it clear that we're open to however students want to work, whatever they want to engage with. And it's been, that's been critical on the Berkeley campus. The sort of, you know, the

extreme right wing. I've targeted Berkeley. And so, it's something that's really impacts all our students. And I think, art students especially, who do feel particularly targeted.

Allan deSouza: They often, they'd made being ... to make to feel that they don't belong anywhere. Sometimes an art department, for all kinds of reasons might be the first place they feel they can belong with their ... they're not made to feel weird. Their sexuality, race, gender, their histories, their physical abilities, they're not in question. And obviously, we as a department have to work to make that happen in terms of that acceptance too.

Allan deSouza: So we don't have a house style. We try, and respond to whatever students are interested in and in terms of their activism actors too, we give them histories exactly like the ones you've spoken about, these have been precedents. These are what you can look at, in terms of research to help you engage with the present.

Anne Walsh: Can I just add that, I mean, our curriculum has directly evolved to reflect a much more expansive idea of what arts purposes are and forums are. So, I personally have to go teach my class.

Timothy Hampton: We hope you enjoyed this Berkeley Book Chat and we encourage you to join us in person or be a podcast for future programs in the series.