

UNLV Podcast: Ep 09 - Sustainability / Interview with Joshua Wolf Shenk

Malika Powell: When people think of UNLV, a variety of topics may come to mind, be it sports, new development, diversity, and another presidential debate, but what about all the other amazing things the school has to offer? Hopefully today's episode will shine light on some of the other things that make UNLV a force to be reckoned with. From UNLV, I am your host, Malika Powell.

[00:00:30] In our first segment, my partner, Jennifer Celese and I sat down with leaders of the Sustainability Council to talk about our impact on the planet, and ways we can work on our sustainability. Even Las Vegas, the booming entertainment capital of the world, is making changes to be more environmentally friendly.

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Jennifer Celese:

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We are a city in the middle of a desert. All the produce we get is brought in from elsewhere. We have limited water and limited resources, but just like the majority of people in the world, we're worried about global warming, and working on being a sustainable city. The UNLV Sustainability Council is also doing what it can to lower our carbon footprint. The mission of the council is to advance sustainable practices on campus through education, research, activities, development, and operations to make social, environmental and economic sustainability integral to the culture of UNLV. One of the leaders of the Sustainability Council is Monica Garcia.

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Monica:

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I'm the assistant sustainability coordinator at UNLV, and so my job has really been to help launch various sustainability programming. We launched the Sustainability Council last year, August of 2015, but it's not just exclusive to environment sustainability. We also have a social sustainability team and an economic sustainability team. We did that again to increase the chance of getting people involved. The ultimate goal really will be for one day for us to have a department here at UNLV.

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We actually are working on an initiative to create a department of sustainability, but of course it takes time, but that really is the big goal; because as a council, there is only so much that we can do. By having a department, it would truly help us get to that next level, and then also be competitive with our peer institutions. Many of peer institutions have offices of sustainability, and are Top Tier. It's really great, because it does follow into the Top Tier Initiative.

[00:03:00] As a result of wanting to create more ways for people to get involved, we created a student sustainability council; because we realized too that we needed to have a space for students that cared about sustainability to have their own organization as well. That's a brand new student org this semester, fall of 2016. They've been doing really great.

Jennifer Celese: To really get the lowdown on the UNLV sustainability council, we had a round table with Monica Garcia and two students from the student sustainability council.

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Cielo Gumawan: Hi, I'm Cielo Gumawan. I have started since the summer of the Student Sustainability Council. I'm also the newsletter/outreach co-coordinator.

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Joseph Berg: Hi, my name is Joseph Berg. I'm getting my graduate certificate in solar and renewable energy, and I'm the treasurer of the Student Sustainability Council.
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Monica: What do you think the public's responsibility is to their environmental impact?

Cielo Gumawan: Just being responsible and really thinking about what you're doing. Don't just be blind to the pollution, and don't be just so careless, because it ultimately does come back to us. For me, I'm an Engineering major, but I'm really looking into sustainable design, because I want to figure out how we can live harmoniously with the environment. The U.S. is very economically driven, so they think about more, and more, and more products, products, products. Things that stuff our lives that aren't necessarily like we need it. It's just making life comfortable or making it easier, but it's not very thinking about the big picture. It's not very meaningful.
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Malika Powell: Since we live in, yeah, such a capital business driven society, what can businesses do to try to be a little more environmentally friendly? Can capitalism and sustainability coexist?

Cielo Gumawan: Recently, I went to a sustainability leadership event for the convention industry. It was at this company called GES. Basically, they changed their mindset about how they're going to do things. GES is a trade show manufacturer. Basically, they make products, like the furniture for conventions. Like chairs, tables, exhibits, and they are thinking about like, "How can we be more sustainable? How can we recycle? How can we reuse? How can we donate items that we just don't need anymore?"
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[00:05:30] The most inspiring things that I saw there, was the CEO saying that, "You know, a lot of these big cities like New York, Chicago, Detroit, we're known for our entertainment industry and tourism. They have tourism too, but they're getting ahead of us or they're growing as cities by being more environmentally sustainable." In order to advance to further, you cannot stay in the same place. You have to think about, "What's going to make us better? What is going to make us sustainable?" By thinking about the environment and actually caring like GES does, it really puts them at the head of their industry.

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[00:06:30] They're looked up as an example, not just for the tourism industry, but for the sustainability community. Like this is what a real company's doing. They're not losing money, they're, in fact, gaining popularity from that, and getting more partners. Getting more business. This is what we can really maximize on. It's really possible. Las Vegas I didn't know, but the Caesar's Foundation, local communities in the downtown area are really involved in sustainability.

Jennifer Celese: How do you feel Las Vegas as a whole is doing with sustainability? What are they doing now that you know of that's leading them towards a more environmentally sustainable practice?

[00:07:00] Cielo Gumawan: Vegas doesn't translate fully the efforts that it is doing. When I was a student at UNLV, I had prior to taking my building and construction, sustainable building and construction class, I had this assumption that casinos just threw away their trash and didn't compost or at least donate food. Really, the truth is, is that they do recycle. They do do it behind the scenes. It's almost like they don't want tourists to get troubled by the fact of maybe they would have to separate it so they do single stream. They actually do separate all the trash, all the recycling.

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[00:08:00] That's great to know that they are doing their part. Again, it's not as well-known across the city or even perhaps across the world. Another thing is, our water conservation efforts here are quite amazing. In reality, 100% of our water does get recycled, so anything that goes down the drain will get recycled. Of course, with evaporation or what not, some water does get lost in the equation, but, again, it is being sent to get recycled which is great.

I think we are definitely trying to do our part, but again, I think the main issue here is not translating that to people who live here or even people that come here to visit. Even now it's great to see the bike share program. It started downtown. That's something exciting that eventually we'll we will eventually have one here at UNLV.

[00:08:30] Vegas as a whole will be very different 15, 10, 15 years from now. I think that's a great thing to remember, is, and this is, I grew up here, so sometimes I would get very upset. I thought, "This is ... what are we doing? What are we doing for the planet?" We are doing a lot, and I think that Vegas is still very new and so therefore, there's so much potential though. There's so much potential for moving to become a city maybe like Portland or something to where we can make it our own.

I just don't like get discouraged. I think that there's a lot of great people in our community working toward a better city. Of course, things don't happen over night, but I think it's definitely headed in a good direction.

[00:09:30] Nevada specifically, I think we need to implement more clean energy, and again lobby for that. Especially since we have so many solar panels companies, we can really thrive on that. There's also, UNLV, we're trying to implement recycling program, it's just that we're actually we're getting a net loss if we do it. I think if Nevada invests more in recycling or renewable energy laws, that will really get businesses going.

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Jennifer Celese:

How do you think UNLV is doing with sustainability?

Cielo Gumawan:

You know, UNLV actually has done a lot. It's just very behind the scenes. Again, that's another big goal, that if we were to have a department, it would start that conversation, give more presence on what UNLV has already done, is doing, and hopes to accomplish. From an operational standpoint, UNLV has done a lot for energy conservation, a lot for water conservation. I do know that any new building that gets constructed or retrofitted, is build to lead standards. The building may not pursue the certification, just because of price constraints, but they will build it to those standards.

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Jennifer Celese:

What exactly is lead certification?

Cielo Gumawan:

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Lead certification, it is a certification for buildings to rate how sustainable they are. The rating that goes from bronze, silver to gold to platinum. At UNLV right now, we have two buildings that are lead certified, which is Greenspun and our science and engineering building. One really great thing about the new Hotel College, is that part of the donation was for that building to receive lead certification. It's really amazing to see donors taking that extra step to allow UNLV to get more presence when it comes to that.

[00:11:30] Then, of course, if you think of other areas of sustainability, we do offer so much for minority students. I think as an institution for social sustainability, we do have really great programs. Again, I think it really comes down to UNLV doing a better job at telling the story.

Jennifer Celese: Do you believe that environmental sustainability and social sustainability are interconnected?

Cielo Gumawan: [00:12:00] Definitely. Most definitely. Social sustainability can so many things, from offering programs to minority groups, or low income students to health. Even when it comes to the environment, a lot of any deficiencies, let's say in communities, could have harmful effects on your health. I mean, just look at the example of the tap water incident in Michigan. That became a health issue apart from an environment issue. That is definitely, they definitely interconnect.

[00:12:30] The three pillars of sustainability are it's people, planet, profit. People with health. Planet, obviously, environmental sustainability. Then profit meaning economics. Just to give you an example of an economic argument would be switching over to reusable bottle, will save you money in the long run by no longer having that extra expense every day.

[00:13:00] In addition to that, you also have some health benefits to it, because there is so much in the plastic that does leach into your water. Therefore, it becomes a health issue too. A lot of times, people don't know what's in their bottled water. Bottled water reports are much harder to come across. The companies are not obligated to disclose any contaminants that may have been in that water.

Joseph Berg: [00:13:30] I think some of these big companies just need to adopt a corporate policy or structure that promotes sustainability. It's a trickle down effect and they start educating their employees and maybe even offering incentives to be more sustainable. Can really have a lot of effects on these companies. That's one thing they can do.

Cielo Gumawan: [00:14:00] It's a mindset they just have to change. They have to realized, it's part of the future. If you want to advance, then you can do so. It's not losing money, it's actually profiting off of something that's really good for us.

Joseph Berg: I think we, as people, just need to get involved and then get our voice to be heard. A lot of people want more renewable stuff, and clean energy, but they just don't know how to go about it. If everyone kind of organizes together and lets proper officials know that that's what we want ... that's what the people want ... that's a good way to do it.
[00:14:30] Then just monitoring what you do on a daily basis. Just try to be less wasteful.

Cielo Gumawan: Yeah, as students, just being involved. We joined the Student Sustainability Council and collectively we can be a voice in the community saying what we want. I know other businesses locally have lobbied for sustainability efforts, and they were successful. That's why they are thriving today with their sustainability implementation in their businesses.
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[00:15:30] Just being more knowledgeable about what the politics are, and lobbying. Yeah, signing the petition, joining organizations that really align with what you want to attack. Being a student, we can be heard signing petitions or campaigning. Like we want to implement more programs in our school, so we have an agenda. For say, this semester, it'd be water. We're going to implement programs related to that, or events. Being more organized and getting involved really makes a difference.

Jennifer Celese: If you're interested in learning more about the sustainability council, you can follow them on Instagram @UNLVSSC or on Twitter @UNLV_SSC.
[00:16:00] If you have any questions or would like to join, you can email them at ssc@unlv.edu. Thanks for listening. This was Jennifer Celese and Molika Powell.

[00:16:14] Malika Powell: An international center for creative writers and scholars, the Black Mountain Institute at UNLV is a cultural hotbed of activity for those seeking more out of the arts and literally culture. In our next interview, Genevieve Grippo sits down with executive director Joshua Wolf Shenk to talk about what exactly happens at the BMI, and how they are using young voices in Vegas to make a difference in the community. We're sitting here with Joshua Wolf Shenk today. He is the executive director at the Black Mountain Institute. Thank you for joining us today.
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Joshua W.: Yeah, it's good to be here.

Malika Powell: I heard that it is the 10 year anniversary of BMI, so congratulations on that.

Joshua W.: [00:17:00] Thank you. Yeah, it's our 10th anniversary year. The first big Black Mountain Institute event was a lecture by Tony Morrison in the Spring of 2006, so we're celebrating all year and we're also ... We're celebrating in this new, with a new name. We're the Beverly Rogers, Carol C. Harter Black Mountain Institute. Named for our founder and our primary donor.

Malika Powell: Very nice. I'm sure you get asked this question all of the time, but what exactly is it that BMI does?

Joshua W.: What are you?

Malika Powell: Exactly.

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Joshua W.: Black Mountain Institute is a outward facing center that's hosted sponsored by UNLV. We're not an academic department. Most of our listeners I think are people who are UNLV students, faculty. That's who we're talking to here, right?

Malika Powell: Yes.

Joshua W.: [00:18:00] Yeah, so we're very unusual within UNLV, because we don't have regular professors. We don't have students who are getting degrees. We are a center that has a ... we're a mission driven center, and our mission is to connect literary writers, and the literary imagination to public life. What does that mean? What it means is that the questions that are occupying us all about healthcare, about public lands, about violence, about love, that are ordinarily the province of scientists and scholars and celebrities and loudmouths; people who sort of go into the public square and declaim on these subjects and shape public opinion on them. Some of them have a lot of useful things to say, and some of them really ought to shut up.

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[00:19:00] We're saying that in that conversation needs to come the literary writers. The poets, the novelists, the essayists, to not just speak of the affairs of the heart, and these sort of private concerns it's often considered to be the province of literature. Faulkner talked about heart in opposition to itself as being the heart of the literary enterprise, but it's also what language is necessarily political. It's about action, it's about ideas, it's about how we think. We're trying to bridge that gap, and we're trying to do it in a way that really cultivates literary community on campus and in Las Vegas.

[00:19:30] We're bringing authors from all around the world here. World class authors who speak to packed houses. All the world capitals are coming to Las Vegas, addressing our communities, meeting with our students, leading workshops, and really getting to know us in this place that has so many bright intellectual people, hungry readers, people with unusual experiences, but where we have been off the map of that sort of high cultural stuff for some time.

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[00:20:30] One of the reasons we've been so successful is that we're providing a home for people who read and think in Las Vegas that they didn't know they had. Then indeed, 15 or 20 years ago, was really scarce here. We're kind of the home team for the literary crowd in Las Vegas, but with this bigger aim of trying to really say something to the world about the value of literature. Not being this private kind of dreamy act that a lot of people associate with reading, but something that really affects who you are as a citizen of the world.

Malika Powell: That's not really a mission that you can say, "Okay, we did it. We're done now. What's next." That's something that's ongoing that really goes on forever.

Joshua W.:
[00:21:00] Yeah. A couple years ago, BMI was a recipient of what we think is the second largest gift to a literary institution in the history of culture. A 30 million dollar pledge from the Rogers Foundation. There is this kind of, and some people will say, you guys are all set. My response is that, you haven't seen anything. We're really just getting started, and that's how Beverly Rogers thinks about this gift. That it's, she's kick starting us into a level where we can be doing the kinds of programs that command support from the university, from the community here, and also from foundations and individuals all around the world.

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That's our ambition, and we have a really unusual and lucky starting pool of capital from the Rogers Foundation, but we're ... The applicable cliché is that the sky is really the limit. We will never be done, but we know what we want to do in the next three to five years, and we're going to start there.

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Malika Powell: Growing up in Las Vegas, I always kind of felt that there was a very small cultural center to the city. What would you say about that, and how is BMI changing that?

Joshua W.: Yeah. I'd love to hear more about your experience. What were the things you were interested in that you were looking around for when you were growing up here?

Malika Powell: Well, of course, when you're growing up, you don't really visit the strip too often, or downtown, but I do think there's an aspect of culture down there in the arts district, of course. That's probably the most obvious example.

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Joshua W.:

I think that Las Vegas, there is a huge entertainment culture here, and it tends to be, it tends toward the kind of thing that will be an amusement. After these highly stimulating experiences that people have on the casino floor, or partying here. They tend not to be things that are deeply challenging intellectually or culturally avant-garde. They're also things that people are paying massive ticket prices for, and you don't ... That economy tends to be something that you have a pretty good sense of what you're going to get if go to see Jerry Seinfeld, which I have nothing against. I was psyched to see him at Caesar's this winter, and would gladly see him again.

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BMI is doing stuff that's surprising and strange. Sometimes, if you're a big reader, you've certainly heard of the authors we bring to campus in many respects, but a lot of times it's an author who's just published her first book. We have a record of hosting people a year or two or three before they become huge stars in the literary world.

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In the spring, we're partnering with The Believer magazine, which is a really fantastic cultural literary magazine, and we're going to put on a whole weekend festival. It's going to be a whole cavalcade of big cultural stars, and just really distinct experiences. We're trying to create kind of feeling in the room where, yeah, you're looking up at the stage, it's something that's being said to you or being kind of shown to you, but you're also looking around the room and feeling connected to the people who've assembled. Whether it's 80 people or 1000 people, we want to really cultivate that feeling that you're part of something. Afterwards you can ask a question or come to the reception and get to know the people who've been there, and follow that where it leads.

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Malika Powell:

Do you think that for the people in the audiences at these events there's a lot of 'aha' moments? Kind of those eye opening, "I remember when this happened, I saw everything different?"

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Joshua W.:

It's what we're going for. The lowest bar to clear when you're doing an event is if people if they feel okay about it, and they don't regret that they've come. They say, oh that's nice. The next thing you're going for is like, some excitement. As you say, an 'aha' feeling, but what you're really going for in the end is the kind of experience that you never forget. The kind of thing that's so special that when you run into someone two years later, "Wow you were there too? That was special."

[00:25:30] The other thing we want to do at BMI, and this relates to KUNV, is that we want to create these really special experiences for people. Then we also want to find a way to put them into media by radio, by magazines, by books, so that people who are not in Las Vegas can experience them too. People who aren't, maybe who even weren't alive.

[00:26:00] Does The Last Waltz mean anything to you? The concert film? I'm so old and bald, I know. 1976 the band, which was Bob Dylan's, had been Bob Dylan's band, was one of the leading bands in the world at the time. They did their farewell show, and Ringo Star was there, and Eric Clapton was there, and Van Morrison, Joni Mitchell. It was filmed by Martin Scorsese, and it's like one of the great rock concert documentaries of all time. It just had it's 40th anniversary.

[00:26:30] I was five years old. You guys weren't alive when that film was made, but when that concert happened, but you can watch the movie. I'm interested in, for people in Las Vegas what I'm saying is, because you actually can be the crowd in the show. You're the ones in the Winterland Ballroom that night when this legendary thing is happening,

[00:27:00] but we also want to make the equivalent of those documentaries. In part because, a big part of our mission is to connect Las Vegas to culture all around the world. We're not expecting gazillions of people to come and descend for our events. We're not going to be putting on the equivalent of Coachella's. We want to do things that are targeted and imminent and produce issues of magazines and radio documentaries, and one of a kind printed material that captures that essence too.

[00:27:30] Do you guys know The Moth? The storytelling show? Moth radio hour. I was heavily involved with The Moth. I was on the board and was one of the founders of The Moth Radio Hour. That's the model of The Moth that you can go to a Moth show, it's not even that much money, you got to plan ahead and get tickets and you can be 1 of 100 people or 200 people. Sometimes the rooms are bigger than that. You can experience something that is just ... make your your little hair follicles kind of rise, it's so exciting to be in that room. Then you can also listen to the podcast. Millions of people download that podcast every week.

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Malika Powell: When you put on these events, when BMI does, how do you determine what's important for the angle for that to be? How do you determine who the hosts are going to be? How do you even determine what people want to hear?

Joshua W.: [00:28:30] That's a great question, and that's my job. My title is executive director, but I think about what I do as curating. The art of curating is making those selections, and it's a dance between the stuff that I'm most excited about, and the things that I'm feeling and hearing excitement about from other people. I'd love to hear from you anyone who's listening to this, what are you into? What are you reading?

[00:29:00] When I showed up at my last job before this, I asked the students, "Who are you excited by?" The name that kept coming up was Neil Gaiman. I had never heard of Neil Gaiman. He's one of the top writers of fantasy and science fiction in the world. We ended up getting him to campus a year later. I'm looking for those kinds of things.

[00:29:30] We also, we have multiple sources of input, because our MFA students curate a series called the Emerging Writers Program. In that case, we turn it over to them. I'm looking, really looking to develop relationships with students and faculty here, so I can really have those lines of input. Also people in the community, people on our board, people I meet at KMPR or at the Desert Research Institute, I have my ears open for what people are turned on by.

Malika Powell: This is a lot about the community here at UNLV as well. I mean, you are looking for the voice of the students, of the faculty, to really be a part of what you produce at BMI.

Joshua W.: [00:30:00] Definitely. That's something I really want people to understand, is that, because we're associated with the creative writing program, and we do have a world class creative writing program here, it's a radical misperception to think, "Oh, that's what ... BMI is the English department. BMI is the creative writing program." We're definitely we're right next door to them and across campus from here. That is a part of our core community, but we really are here for anyone who is interested in books or ideas. Life of the mind, people who are interested in performing in arts and visual arts.

[00:30:30] This really does touch every field of academic culture. There's great literature on business and law. There's virtually any interest intersects with the life of culture and literature, and therefore intersects with BMI and it's mission.

Malika Powell: There's over, we've got to be a thousand different ways that you can learn something, really. What do you think is the best way to learn?

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Joshua W.:

That's a great question. I mean, I think from me, the best way to learn is through intimate contact. That may be face to face, or it may be through the kind of work that creates that feeling of intimacy. Right now, in the Barrack Museum there's a show of photographs that's all sort of exploring themes of petroleum culture from petroleum production to the shapes of cities as they're made by highways.

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When I stand before one of those images, I really feel spoken to. I haven't met the photographer, but I feel like I am learning from him. I feel that when I read a sentence in a book that's especially clear. Of course, I feel that when I'm able to actually be in conversation with people directly, like you, and when I stand on stage hosting some of these events.

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I think that's that feeling of being spoken to. Not being talked at, not being lectured, but being addressed where you are, and on the terms that you can learn. It's not about representing the information, it's about finding a way to get that information into the heart.

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Malika Powell:

Yeah, delivering those important and impactful emotional messages in a way that suddenly makes sense to people.

Joshua W.:

Yes.

Malika Powell:

Exactly. How does BMI do that?

Joshua W.:

We do it through conversations, we do it through ... Most recently, we did it last week we had six writers on stage. There were 500 people in the room. It was standing room only. We had asked these writers who include Nobel Laureate and a graduate of our program from last year, who's published a couple of books, and everyone in between. One of the authors was Cheryl Strayed who's best selling author of the memoir Wild, which was recently made into a big movie. We asked them to prepare an original piece. Something that had never been published or read before. It would have it's debut that night on the question of how do writers speak to the world around them?

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We elaborated for about a paragraph. We said, "You know, the idea of political writing is kind of a little bit of a contradiction in terms, because the moment you start telling people what to do and how to think, it kills that spark." So how do writers speak to their times, and speak to the things that matter? We left that as an open prompt and they each took it and wrote an original piece to read, and it was, to go

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back to my answer to your last question, it was extremely intimate.

[00:34:30] In other cases we get different people together and we put them on stage and we ask them to talk to each other. I'm very interested in performance and the way that spectacle can ... I'm interest and we spend so much time looking at screens now, and looking at media in one way or another. I'm interested in that feeling that can be ... I'm interested in facilitating that feeling that we get when we're IRL. In real life. I think that also connects with this quality of intimacy that we're going for.

Malika Powell: Do you think it's because you've had that feeling so many times, that it's something you want to share?

Joshua W.:
[00:35:00] It's more like how rare it is, and how life defining it is. The moments, and many of them are moments with friends, with my child, but my moments of cultural engagement have been so ... that's such a vague and abstract phase. Being in The Moth, I was in a room with 150 people when a poet named Anthony Griffith told a story about losing his daughter to cancer.

[00:35:30] I had actually heard him tell that story once before. I had heard it. I had heard a recording of it because he did it at a very small Moth show in Aspen. He came and he did this story again, and the moment it started, it's such a special story and if you Google Anthony Griffith The Moth, you can watch it on YouTube. Encountering it in any way, whether as a video or an audio, or even if someone were to retell you the story, it's impossible not to be pitched at the edge of your seat. He is so alive and surprising in the way he tells the story. There's a moment when he gets ferociously angry and he's ... but he's not acting it, he's actually feeling that anger on the stage. The moment he started telling the story, I just looked around. I was like, "We are here, we are alive. There are about 200 of us. This is never going to happen again."

[00:36:00] I felt that way when I was 17 and I was in the second row of an Elvis Costello show. It's like these things I feel sometimes that an art installations. You know often you have that feeling privately when you read a book. It's like, suddenly time slows down, you feel physically different when you have that kind of encounter. That's what I'm excited about. It's extremely rare. I mean, the high bar. It's like, but that's what you have to go for.

[00:37:00] No writer puts themselves through the agony of writing because their great dream is that maybe they're going to have a couple of readers. We want to do what Shakespeare did. We know we're going to fail, but that's what we're going for. As a curator, I'm going for these moments that are transcendent. I sort of look at the moments of experience in my own life that approach that. That becomes the sort of guiding star. The moments when I'm most alive. In the moments where I feel the most clear about what I'm here to do in this lifetime.

Malika Powell: For you and for other writers I'm sure, you're thinking so deeply, so intellectually about all of these different issues. Do you ever feel like you can just turn it off and like, eat a hamburger?

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Joshua W.: I eat hamburgers a couple times a week. Yeah, I do have a sort of frothy mind and learning how to be in the world in a mundane way has been a lifetime of work. I'm a lot better at it in my mid 40s than I was 10 years ago. Age has a way of humbling you and having a small child has a way of humbling you.

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I'm excited actually, to be here in part, because there is a very young energy to the center. Being in a university and having that kind of got a constant feeling of renewal of enthusiasm and excitement. To be around young writers who are not jaded and who are full of hope and life and yearning. That plugs into what all artists are really after, and what you can lose sight of if you kind of ... you can age out of that. One of the things I really love about being in a university environment is that it's ... I'm sure it's still possible. You can sort of retreat and your eyes can glaze over and you can not see the life and energy around you. If you just open your eyes, it's right there. Open your ears.

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I've always thought the coolest people, the coolest old people, are teachers. Carol Harter is our founder. She's in her 70s. She's retired. She walks her dog in the beach in San Diego every day. She does things that a retired person does, but she there's a quality of life and sort of dancing in her eyes. It just comes from relentless exposure to young people. Not just young in age, it's a youth of spirit.

[00:40:00]

Malika Powell: It's really a symbiotic relationship.

Joshua W.:

For sure. Yeah, for sure. Yeah, I have much more to gain from the students than they from me. I hope they feel the same way. I mean, that's one mark of a good relationship is that each side thinks they're getting the better part of the bargain. I definitely I feel like I have a lot to give, and I'm hungry to give it. I get a ton out of this job.

Malika Powell:

How do students become a part of BMI?

[00:40:30]
Joshua W.:

My name is Joshua Wolf Shenk. If you Google it, you'll come up with my UNLV webpage. You can email me. I'll give you my email too. It's joshua.shenk@unlv.edu or come by and introduce yourself. We have a great staff of people. We're in the Rogers Literature and Law building. It's a little bit. It's not hard to find, but it's not like it doesn't smack you in the face. Let us know what you're into. Join our mailing list at the Black Mountain Institute website, and you'll get. We do 8 or 10 events a year. Show up and just make yourself known.

[00:41:00]

We're at the stage of our development as a community where it's as easy as that. People who want to be involved can be, and can really not just be the recipient of what we do, but can help to shape it.

[00:41:30]
Malika Powell:

Always hungry for more and young voices right?

Joshua W.:

Yeah, for sure. We're learning who we're going to be as we engage with the community at all levels. The kind of community leaders in Las Vegas. Students here we've talked about. There's also I'm constantly asking my friends in New York and around the world, "What needs to be done for literary arts and for life of the mind, and for media, and how can we make a contribution?" Because again, that's our mission is not just to be a local center, although we have a huge feeling of mandate to serve the community here. We want to wrap that up in this thing that is known around the world, and that helps defy the Las Vegas stereotype, and show people that there's a big city here and a lot of life that goes way beyond the kinds of things you ordinarily associate with Las Vegas.

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[00:42:30]

[00:43:00]

This is a crazy good place to do it, because one of the most diverse cities in the world. One of the most diverse campuses in the world. 40 million people coming through here every year. We're right on the periphery of the relationship between the city and nature, in this really stark and dramatic way. We want to draw on the energy of the city for this sort of feeling of discovery.

Malika Powell:

You're in the perfect place for that. Definitely.

Joshua W.:

Yeah, it's a good place. It's a place where people are super creative and forward-looking. It's not like, "Hey well, how have we done this for hundreds of years?" The feeling around this campus and town is like, "What are we going to do next? How are we going to make something that's cool and meaningful? We've got to build it."

[00:43:30]

Malika Powell:

There are very important things happening over at the Black Mountain Institute here on the campus of UNLV. Josh, thank you so much for joining us today.

[00:44:00]

Joshua W.:

Well, thank you. This was terrific.