

Stephen Vitiello interviewed by Kristin Poor and Glenn Wharton, December 5, 2019

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Kristin Poor: This is December 5, 2019. My name is Kristin Poor and I'm here with Glenn Wharton and Stephen Vitiello. Today we are going to discuss Joan Jonas for the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base. Stephen, thank you so much for being with us today.

Stephen Vitiello: My pleasure. Nice to be.

Kristin Poor: Let's start with how you met Joan. Could you tell us about that? When was that?

Stephen Vitiello: I'm going to guess it was 1988, 1989. I worked at Electronic Arts Intermix from 1988 till about 2000, and I was director of distribution there. When I first worked at EAI, we were in the West Village and then soon moved to SoHo, and that SoHo space on Broadway was across the street from the lofts where Joan, Nam June Paik, Tricia Brown, Burt Barr lived. So many people were right across the street. It's a long time ago, but thinking back to around that time of 1988, 1989 especially as they say, when we moved to SoHo, a lot of the artists would just come through, and somewhere early on I would've connected with Joan. She was an artist that we distributed.

Stephen Vitiello: An important artist, although I think in many ways the recognition for her work grew later, even if a lot of the work that we distributed was from many years earlier. So over the years for any number of reasons, I would've worked with her on distribution, archiving, later I worked with her as a collaborator, as a composer, but at that time I would have been there to serve her and serve the needs of her work.

Kristin Poor: So, you started with working with her at EAI?

Stephen Vitiello: Yeah, and I mean in the sense that we had a hundred and twenty artists or so. So in terms of working with her on that level, it would have just been if either she was bringing in material for distribution or we had questions about distribution. EAI I think is special in that it's a so-called distributor, but you probably know it's closer to a gallery in many ways in terms of representing the artists, representing where their work could go, helping educate educators and curators on ... Whether someone would come to us and say, "I'm doing a show on early feminist video, what do

you recommend.” Or, “I’m particularly interested in Joan Jonas.” More often than not when we were working there was an engagement rather than just, “We are a distributor, you want *Vertical Roll* and *Volcano Saga* for the state.” More often than not there was a discussion; we were part of that discussion.

Stephen Vitiello:

And also because Joan was coming out of that era of early video art, formats that were obsolete, or I mean are now obsolete. Also, when I started working they were obsolete. Any distribution of early work that had to go into distribution, it was dealt with. We had to bring up issues of preservation, conservation, archival formats. And that was always— and it will be—ongoing because a videotape by Joan from 1972 might have been remastered to a format that was already obsolete that had to be remastered again. So my job at EAI was partially negotiating rentals and sales, partially advising curators and teachers, partially dealing with the archival issues that were ever present.

Kristin Poor:

When you say advising, that was in regard to content or helping them learn about new works or artists or what other capacities?

Stephen Vitiello:

Both. Yeah, I mean I think it was really being kind of, not always, but often being kind of curatorial advisors to curators or to collectors or to, as I say, teachers. If somebody knew that they were interested in the work of Joan Jonas, but they needed an entry point when she had, I can't remember ten, fifteen pieces or John Baldessari who might've had thirty-five pieces or Bruce Nauman. Early on we had Joan's non-edited video pieces, and at that point the histories and the kind of attention to film versus video were so distinct at EAI, very much represented the video art work. Later some of those artists, especially the Castelli-Sonnabend people who had film work that was no longer in distribution, some of those boundaries changed.

Stephen Vitiello:

So, my memory is Joan Jonas was one, Bruce Nauman was another, it was artists where the film had always been filmed and distributed separately. But EAI got the rights to also transfer the films to tape at a point where the artists were understanding that the distribution for 16 mm or Super 8 was slim. I mean there's still Filmmakers Co-op and some important people championing it—my allergies are terrible so my pronunciation's worse—but supporting those legacies. But the potential to distribute a Super 8 or 16 mm film by Joan or Nauman or others was far weaker than it had been. I think artists were changing their standards and saying that we can now have those works—and “we” being EAI when I worked there but I still seem to say “we”.

Glenn Wharton: Stephen, that's very interesting. It's making me think about the work that I did with Joan when I was working at MoMA. I'm wondering if you could characterize what it was like to work with her in terms of her engagement, her concern about technologies, formats, and so on.

Stephen Vitiello: I mean there was an aspect of being somewhat removed. I mean some of the people, I think of at EAI who I think are the most important people in the history of art and technology seem to know the least about the technologies. And she was a master of what could be done or why work with the format of video. But she was not somebody who talked models or this format. If you've talked to Steina and Woody Vasulka, they're talking about, "Well that version of 3M tape in 1971 was obviously problematic." Joan wasn't that person. We'd go to her for permission, and generally she would give it. My sense is she'd probably want to inspect it, but she was fairly easy about putting trust in us.

Glenn Wharton: That's a good thing with artists.

Stephen Vitiello: I think so too. I think so too. As long as they're realistic. I mean, we had a lot of issues at the time I remember with artists who would be angry about the quality of the tapes that were being distributed, and I'd have to say, or Lori Zippay would say, or somebody would say to them like, "You do remember this was made under these conditions with this format, with this... It's only going to get so much better."

Glenn Wharton: What were your concerns then, if she wasn't super hands-on with the technology? Do you remember working with her about any concerns that she did have about installing her ...?

Stephen Vitiello: Yeah, I mean there's a couple of things I remember. One was just as with many of those artists being sure that we were working from the right source material. If we were doing preservation, especially. My memory is that there was a film version of a *Vertical Roll* for example, and a video version. And I believe the film was shot off monitor but had a life as a film too. There were artists who labeled tapes masters and that could be source material. So part of it was making sure we were working with the right material. Part of it was the actual transfers were done, but there was very rarely money or even a clear ethics on what to do once a tape was transferred.

Stephen Vitiello: For example, did you clean up black levels or white levels? Did you do any audio correction? The noise that was inherent in a microphone in 1971, do you dare touch that? Generally we

didn't. But sometimes I wondered if a time-based corrector or some kind of color correction might, with the artist's permission, might be a good thing.

Glenn Wharton:

Did she ever weigh in on that from your memory?

Stephen Vitiello:

No, no. And one memory that I'm just blanking and I have to go back to an email. I've just ... I emailed Lori Zippay at EAI to remember this, but one of my favorite moments was coming to Joan, and I had found a color version of one of her work, so reel-to-reel. I transferred it, and I came into the editing room at EAI, and I think Seth Price was editing and Joan and Antoni Muntadas were in the room, and I told Joan, "Hey, I found this copy of a color version of this performance. And I transferred it." And she said, "No you didn't." And I said, "Yes, I did." And she said, "No, that never existed. No one ever shot that work in color." And I had to say, "But I did." And we ended up having this kind of great conversation about archival memory and the things that you remember happening, but maybe actually happened differently. The things that you don't remember, but maybe they actually happened.

Stephen Vitiello:

Later I guess Seth edited that piece for her, and she did a color edition of it. I'm spacing on the piece, there's a woman in a swing. I could check the email in a moment. But in any case, I guess that story, just to say that she was excited when it was there, but she also for her—like I'm saying, this is twenty-five years back for me and this was, at that point, probably twenty-five years back for her. There's a fuzzy line of what happened or how it happened. She certainly wasn't one of the artists who was over our shoulder, who was intensive, who was checking quality control. In general, she just wanted to know what's happening and then did it and did it happen.

Glenn Wharton:

Did you work with her on actually installing some of the video components?

Stephen Vitiello:

No, never. No. In some ways, because EAI generally had the non-installation versions of the pieces. We had single-channel, and even if you think back to when I was first at EAI, there was a shift later in the art world where people were projecting single-channel works as installation. I think a lot of that had to do with the economy and the way that galleries were framing it. At that point, Bill Viola was the only artist who had regulations that if you showed one of his single-channel pieces on a loop, there had to be a schedule. So if it was a fifty-six minute piece, there was four minutes of black, and it was shown at the beginning of

an hour. So even if it was shown in a gallery, it kind of was presented as a screening.

Stephen Vitiello:

But yeah, no in terms of installations exhibitions, we were generally sending out the single-channel works. Me personally, Nam June Paik was the only artist where I got involved with traveling to help set up some installations, sort of as an assistant. But for Joan it was more negotiating. Someone at this museum needs this work, making sure that the format was there, the license was set up and then sending it off to be presented.

Kristin Poor:

Do you remember working with Dorine Mignot when she was putting together the exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam?

Stephen Vitiello:

I do. I will say it's a complicated memory, and my memory is that things didn't go well. I was even noticing that we're not ... Joan Jones did sign my copy. It says, "To Stephen, affectionately, Joan," but we're not actually credited in the catalogue at all. Not wanting to draw on the negative—and I really don't fully remember it—but my memory is that the Stedelijk wasn't ... They didn't accept the copies that we did the transfers of, and we spent an enormous amount of work and time doing that. This is my memory and not meaning to ... But I do remember that we put a lot of time into preservation and preparing archival copies for them. But my memory is that they weren't happy. So but I do remember that was a thing. There was like a big Joan show, and we were getting all of her tapes and going back to the best copies and transferring them.

Glenn Wharton:

Did you get involved at all in any of the technical considerations for showing the work? What kind of monitors or ...?

Stephen Vitiello:

I don't think so. I honestly don't think so. If I do—and this is very well possible that I'm forgetting—but in general unless the artists gave us information ... My sense is Joan would have been in touch more with Dorine directly. In 1994 I guess it could have been projection. It was probably early-ish for projection. But also a problem that we were running into with other artists at the time—even going back to 1970s videos, Vito [Acconci's] *The Red Tapes* was a work for a projection system in 1977 so projections existed—but thinking of the mid-1990s, if there were projectors it would have been 3DM. But part of the question was always should it be a monitor? Because that was what the work was created for on that scale.

Stephen Vitiello: We did have some archival shows—and I don't remember if this is one of them—where work was projected, and any problems with the technology, with the tape, with edge damage, with dropout was all that much more amplified once you projected it. I do remember having some angry curators saying, obviously, “This work looks terrible.” I think that this was an NTSC tape that we transferred to PAL that was made to be shown on a monitor of the size of the artists had. And now you're making it eight times as big, you're going to exaggerate or amplify any problems. But I'm just sort of guesstimating how it would have went with the Stedelijk.

Kristin Poor: There were some projections on screens during that exhibition and also a few it looks like on the wall. There's a lot of different, just looking at the installation view, there seems to be a lot of different sizes too for those projections.

Stephen Vitiello: Sure, sure. Yeah, in all of my years at EAI, I don't think that's the kind of thing we ever would have dealt with. It might've been that someone kind of came to us who wasn't in touch with the artist and said, can it be presented, projected? And I might call Martha Rosler or whoever and say, “Is this okay?” But generally those kinds of discussions were more between the artist and the curator.

Glenn Wharton: So then the curator would be in touch with you or ... Yeah, what communications look like if, let's just use the Stedelijk as an example or another example of where Joan might've been speaking to the curator. Would it be the curator or would it be a technical person at that museum that would then communicate with you?

Stephen Vitiello: I think it could have been either. My memory from the Stedelijk show was that all ... I just remember a lot of emails with Dorine directly. But if she had asked me anything about exhibition design, I would have said, “You should speak to Joan.” Or if she wasn't, or if I would've received a question. But in that case they would've spoken outside of ... you know, above our heads. I mean Lori Zippay was director, but I don't think there's anyone ... It wouldn't have gone to someone else at EAI. I don't think.

Glenn Wharton: So it sounds like you don't have any strong memories or maybe there wasn't any communication between you and Joan about technical considerations or aesthetic or choreographic concerns.

Stephen Vitiello: Unfortunately, no. All of my memory ... It feels like it's a good strong guess that it really was ... Like our job was to get the tapes that were requested, and to get them good quality or the

best possible quality on the format requested, and to negotiate sale prices or rental agreements. I believe that the intent, I think at the time was for them to buy the tapes. But it was I guess twenty-five years ago. I don't remember more, but yeah, I think really that would've been it. We would have just ... It was probably a lot of single-channel tapes so there would have been a lot to get together, but it wouldn't have been about the way a gallery might get involved with exhibition. I think that is also a dividing line between where a lot of what we did wasn't that.

Glenn Wharton:

Fair enough. One of the reasons why we wanted to interview you was because we're really not talking to that many technical people. People we're talking to are curators or performers or videographers and so on. So we thought it might be helpful to people in the future that will be users of the Joan Jonas Knowledge Base who might be more technical and might be in a position of doing format transfers or making kind of technical decisions. Do you have any thoughts for people in the future that might come along with either analogue media or even digitized media that may need to migrate to new formats or make other kind of technical decisions?

Stephen Vitiello:

Sure. An interesting thing I think was that we were seen as some of the pioneers of preservation at the time. I think Amy Calvin, when she was at The Kitchen, did a preservation program even maybe even before EAI or around the same time of the Video Data Bank. But a lot of us were learning by the skin of our teeth. But it wasn't people who were classically either trained in archiving or technicians, but a lot of the people at least who were having to do with the responsibility of which tape, how should they get transferred to what format ... It was people who needed to make the work accessible. So a lot of the learning was done just as much as you could: calling people, making phone calls, figuring out what were the facilities.

Stephen Vitiello:

I think at that point we probably worked with people in New York and then at times the Bay Area Video Coalition in San Francisco. There were conferences, but so many of the people involved with aspects of preservation were not ... In a field like painting, they would've come through a different academic background. They would understand the material of paint and brush, and this was very different. For a couple of years after EAI I was an archivist at The Kitchen, and I didn't have archive training the way someone would go going through a library science degree.

Stephen Vitiello:

But what I could do is look at the tape and look at the grain or the glitch. I could figure out, "Oh, that looks like 1972 or that

looks like 1975.” Or recognize ... I knew so many of the artists’ work that I could also tell if it was ... likely who it was and even guess, how many generations of loss it was. A lot of what I did at both jobs was just look at work all the time. Part of it was having a network of people to ask questions to.

Stephen Vitiello:

Since I left New York in 2004, I've been teaching and functioning as an artist, so I've left a lot of that behind. But at the time, I mean the recommendations which still make sense to me always were, never get rid of your original, transfer up to the best copy possible, whatever the format is. There was always argument about what is the ... Is it Beta SP, is it one inch, or is it Digital Beta? And then have multiple copies in archival storage, have permission if it's not your work to migrate it and keep track of some sort of timeline so that tapes don't disintegrate, and also so that the format that they're on, there's a machine to transfer it before the machines die out, and you can get it to the next medium. I guess, the one other thing is that at the time was if it was an analogue format, put it to an analogue format. This was arguable that I still believe this, like with audio for example. Digitize at the highest rate, but you probably will be able to digitize better, possibly, later. But having an analogue copy, that was something that we did as well.

Glenn Wharton:

I would say the principles still hold up. It's interesting because I came into the field later as a sculpture conservator. I was asked to be a time-based media conservator. I was the first time-based media conservator in the country, and that was in 2005 at MoMA. I didn't have the technical background. I had to learn very quickly, but I relied on people like you that have been doing it for years. At the time people were being trained in audio visual preservation, but it was more in the preservation world, not in the art conservation world. This academic year in 2019, the first training program was created for time-based media conservation.

Stephen Vitiello:

Where is it?

Glenn Wharton:

New York.

Stephen Vitiello:

Makes sense. Got it.

Glenn Wharton:

So it's interesting to hear your take on the field back in those days.

Stephen Vitiello:

Sure. I just did a talk at the Tate Modern a couple of weeks ago and I saw Pip Laurenson. She was someone I remembered from



that era, but who I think is now, I'm sure a colleague of yours and—

Glenn Wharton:

A close friend and colleague.

Stephen Vitiello:

Yeah, makes sense. She would carry that expertise also from an academic background as well as knowing the field. But yeah, almost all of us were just doing like, “I got to figure out how to make this happen, so call me a preservation person.”

Glenn Wharton:

Well, that's very interesting. It's a little bit, aside from your relationship with Joan Jonas, but I think it can help some people to understand what was going on back then and your relations to artists and sort of how it all worked.

Kristin Poor:

Stephen, would you tell us about the work you did that was related to Joan's piece *Lines in the Sand*?

Stephen Vitiello:

Sure, so Joan had had an earlier version of that work where Paul Miller, also known as DJ Spooky, had done part as score and live mixing for her somewhere in Europe. I can't remember. Maybe Venice or Vienna, I feel like it was a “V”. In any case, she came to me and said she was preparing a new version of *Lines in the Sand*—it was a theatrical piece—could I do sound for it and partially creating new material, partially working with material that Spooky had either created or appropriated or accumulated, collected, and I said yes. There was a run at The Kitchen, and then it went ... I think this is right in terms of the time sequence and went to the Tate Modern. I believe at The Kitchen it was over two weeks, and I'm guessing it was 2005, 2006.

Stephen Vitiello:

But it was interesting as collaborations go. Collaborations can mean so many things, and I've done an enormous amount of collaborations. Sometimes collaboration is equal parts, sometimes it's ... Often I find when there's a visual element, I'm more often at the service of the person. With Joan, I was very much at the service of Joan Jonas. She had this theatrical work that was developed but also developing. So I was part of rehearsals. We would go through things, and Joan is sort of unique as people I've collaborated with because she gave me very, very little information except “yes” or “no”.

Stephen Vitiello:

Some people will say, “Well, can you make it a little stranger?” Or “Oh, I like that album track that you did. Could you do something like that without the drums?”, or “I love that Brian Eno record, could you, something?” But Joan would basically just say “no”, and I played her something, and she'd say “no”.

There's somebody I was reading an interview with, said something the same, very similar recently, but in any case, she would just say "no". And day after day and then finally I played her something and she'd say "yes", and she'd smile, and you'd get that like glow of light. I feel like I'd walk away blushing and going, "Oh, I got it."

Stephen Vitiello:

But like the other times I wanted to kill her, because I just didn't know. I think with a lesser artist I would've walked away. But it was approximately an hour-long performance work. When the audience came in, we were already on stage, or at least we being some of the performers, myself as the live sound person. I was on the side along with the video person. Sound was going as the audience came in, performers were on stage, more almost statuesque and just there. It was a very ... Once the piece was finished and set for The Kitchen, set for the Tate Modern, there was absolute cues down to the footstep to hit, and you didn't mess up those cues.

Stephen Vitiello:

It was a beautiful piece. And with Joan doing this gorgeous dance I think with the broom and music from Cape Breton. I guess I said she wouldn't give me clues about the work of my own. She wouldn't give me cues about or clues about the work I was creating, but she was very involved in the procreative materials. So like the music from Cape Breton, she would either specify or we would listen to things together. But it was very much, she was directing that journey strongly.

Stephen Vitiello:

Sound was definitely important to her. I mean I think she used sound so well in so many of her video pieces, her choice of whether it was taking a track by the band, the residents and doing a crazy dance to it or the beautiful music of Cape Breton and *I Want to Live in the Country* or some of her other single-channel work. She always used it very well and very determinately. But just for me as a composer it was tricky but it was worth the challenge.

Kristin Poor:

Do you have any other memories of the rehearsal process either in terms of how Joan worked with you or the other performers?

Stephen Vitiello:

It was this thing ...I mean it was partially scripted and partially improvised. She was very much a director. She had performers who she trusted, a video person who she trusted. In some ways I felt like we were like, I don't know, it's like watching someone create a collage and sort of move something and move something until they're happy with the finish and everything is clicking together. My memory is that it wasn't, "We're going to do the choreography, and then we're going to do the sound or

we're going to get the sound or the choreography." Everything was being done together, and as one thing changed, another thing had to change.

Stephen Vitiello:

And there was just some inner monologue or inner dialogue going on with Joan about at what point is something resolved, and then she would ... Probably like a lot of people either because the audience is walking in so you have to be done or something felt resolved to her. But I don't know that it was always communicated except that's what we're going with. I was just going to say I was just remembering, I mean The Kitchen performances for thrilling, and there were so many people from her era in the audience. I mean knowing that Bruce Nauman was in the audience one night was to me unbelievably terrifying and thrilling.

Stephen Vitiello:

Other artists that she knew. Other artists, I remember Tony Conrad being in the audience as well, and Tony was a friend, but someone I also was always like a little bit wishing to please or impress. There was an appreciation and a love for her that you felt, especially in those shows in The Kitchen. The Tate was a little different. Not from a lack of support but not her community necessarily. The Kitchen was a black box theater. The Tate was kind of wild because it was in the Turbine Hall which has some of the worst acoustics anywhere. She had spoken word in her piece as well as music, but they did an incredible job, big speakers, the audience close to us, and it was almost more like a living installation to perform that in the Tate.

Kristin Poor:

I was going to ask, because Joan's work does have such complex sonic mixing of sources and, as you said, the live text. We'd love to hear any thoughts that you have about how she worked with those things, how you remember the balance being brought together. Any other thoughts you might have about that would be really helpful.

Stephen Vitiello:

Part of it was just like with *Lines in the Sand*. It was coming up with the pieces of music that worked for each section. Creating transitions. I had worked this way before, but I believe I had two CD players and like a DJ mixer, so the tracks were on the two CDs and then I just had to very carefully ... There's some parts of the piece where I played bass live or I did something live, but mostly it was prerecorded or prerecorded with some manipulation. But the most important thing was to watch for the changeovers and to be exactly ... Whether I was watching her feet, whether I was watching hands, whether I was watching the screen, depending on the part of the piece.

Stephen Vitiello: It was very important to her to never mess up the transitions. So, if I had one track on one CD, the other one queued up, and then the DJ mixer to like sort of, with my eyes, be watching the stage, with my hands to be moving the fader to get that moment between the sections. I think relative levels were important to her, but my sense was it wasn't about ... It's kind of like we were talking about the videos earlier, the quality or the ... Whether it's an MP3 or whether it's a transfer of a record, like there was a Harry Partch track that seemed kind of crummy quality to me. That didn't matter to Joan nearly as much as filling the stage with that piece at that moment and making sure that it came in when it was supposed to come in and leave when it was supposed to leave.

Stephen Vitiello: And I don't know for sure, but my guess is that Joan was thinking about it very cinematically, that the audience was probably not going, "Ah, Harry Partch right now." It's more just that there was this tone that was evocative of the scene, and the scene and the text. And that in some ways it might be more like ambience, but it was also chosen for a very specific reference, whether it was cultural, whether it's time or era-based or something that there were some very important reasons she felt that Harry Partch piece would fit that scene, or my electronic track, etc.

Kristin Poor: And did she communicate those reasons to you as part of the rehearsal process or was it ... No?

Stephen Vitiello: No, no and not that I remember. Not at all. No, it's just ... But she would feel it, and it would ... And she was, as I said like even I would be frustrated, and then I'd also think, "Oh, but she's right." I mean, sometimes I've collaborated with people and I'm like, "Whoa. They pushed me for all that and why make that decision?" And I don't ever feel like that was the case with Joan. You would see it in the end. You would go, "Okay, well, she was putting it in, whether she knew what she wanted or she was waiting for it to be discovered. It was for the right reason and it's better for it."

Kristin Poor: Do you or before we move on, I just wanted to say that the DJ Spooky soundtrack was from Documenta 11.

Stephen Vitiello: That makes sense. Okay, thank you.

Kristin Poor: Put it in the audio record here.

Stephen Vitiello: Yeah, thank you.

- Kristin Poor: And do you have any memories of exhibitions or installations or performances of Joan's that you saw over the years?
- Stephen Vitiello: I saw—and I think this was before I worked with her live—I remember seeing her perform at Wave Hill in the Bronx, and it was, oh it was so fantastic. I'm wondering if she worked with ... If it was Jason Moran or ... Who did the live music for that or was it ... There was a pianist, and I ... Do you know the date when she was at Wave Hill?
- Kristin Poor: Was that *Variations on a Scene*?
- Stephen Vitiello: Could have been.
- Kristin Poor: I will double-check.
- Stephen Vitiello: Okay, I'm guessing it was, it was 1990s but I just remember it was indoor/outdoor. The audience arrived knowing very little and the beauty of Wave Hill with the grass and the grounds and the different indoor/outdoor spaces moving from space to space. It felt inspiring and it's just an aside, but I also collaborated with Tony Oursler and Constance DeJong on a bunch of projects in the 1990s but I had seen them earlier at The Kitchen do a piece. It was a similar feeling to what I felt with Joan where I just felt inspired and excited and felt like, "Wow, this is the kind of thing that would be nice to be a part of."
- Stephen Vitiello: Otherwise, I saw Joan's work at various, or being with her at the World Wide Video Festival in either The Hague or Amsterdam when it moved to the Amsterdam, and she had a swimming piece there. I saw the show at the Queens Museum, which had a number of installations. I was always a fan. But most of the contact was really the years at EAI doing distribution and then that brief but intensive period of collaborating with her on *Lines in the Sand*.
- Kristin Poor: Did you travel to see the Stedelijk exhibition?
- Stephen Vitiello: I didn't.
- Kristin Poor: Okay.
- Stephen Vitiello: One other, actually just one other quick memory is I remember seeing Joan a few times with the Wooster Group in *BRACE UP!* And that was the first time I met ... I don't know if you've seen it or seen documentation. The performance starts, and about five minutes in to the performance, the doors burst open from the

back of the audience, and Joan runs in and starts apologizing and saying, "I'm so sorry I'm late." And it's so believable because it was so her. Then the second time I realized, "Oh, it's staged." It kind of felt ... Actually, and then later I saw her perform in a Robert Ashley piece. But she is one of those people who is so singular. The energy she brings to the stage.

Stephen Vitiello:

I also, I helped shoot a video once with Trisha Brown, and Trisha remembered Joan coming in as a young student to Trisha's class, and Joan was wearing all mirrors. It seemed like it was one of those things where it's just ... Those encounters are unforgettable. Even if we might forget. I probably had a thousand students, and there's a small portion you remember. So Joan Jonas showing up to class wearing mirrors, it's something you'd remember.

Kristin Poor:

Sounds wonderful.

Glenn Wharton:

Yes.

Kristin Poor:

It was *Variations on a Scene* at a Wave Hill. That was in 1990.

Stephen Vitiello:

That makes sense. Well, so it's really early for me. I wonder who was doing the music, but yeah ...

Kristin Poor:

I think she didn't start collaborating with Jason until later.

Stephen Vitiello:

Exactly.

Kristin Poor:

But we can find out who that was.

Stephen Vitiello:

Yeah, I think I remember it being piano. Even for me, I didn't know I wasn't going to work with her after the Tate Modern. She had said, "Let's do more." And then suddenly I heard she was working with Jason Moran. Everything I understand. He actually was a way better ... And he's a brilliant performer, composer, collaborative improviser. But also for the kind of neat ways that I can imagine someone being able to play with her, I feel like he would be a better choice than me. So also the other thing is like sometimes you find out, "Oh someone else is in that show. I should be in that show" and sometimes you're like, "Oh yeah, but that's good competition." So I would say I lost a very good competition.

Kristin Poor:

Thank you for all of those memories. I wanted to just also ask for the record, because we had had some reason to think that you had worked on the Stuttgart exhibition in 2001 and the Whitney

version of *Mirage*, which was also done in the very early 2000s. There was an early installation version of it there, and I just wanted to confirm with you that you don't recall being involved with either of those.

Stephen Vitiello: I don't recall at all. No, and if you want, I can even just pull up email for a second to remember what that color piece was that I might've been credited on, but I probably wasn't credit on for doing the finding and the transfer of that. No, because I was finished at EAI in 2000. I was sort of in between those jobs until 2001 when I was at The Kitchen. But I don't remember in any way having any involvement in those shows. Could be that I forgot, but I don't think ... The logic doesn't make sense.

Kristin Poor: Okay. Thank you.

Stephen Vitiello: Sure.

Kristin Poor: It would be ... Oh, go ahead Glenn.

Glenn Wharton: No, go ahead.

Kristin Poor: It would be good to get the title of that color piece, but we can also add it in.

Stephen Vitiello: Yeah, if you want, it'll take me like the quickest second. It'll take a second. Okay, so it's *Glass Puzzle*.

Kristin Poor: Okay.

Stephen Vitiello: So when you guys wrote to me, I emailed Lori Zippay at EAI and I was like, "I need some institutional memory assistance." Even the Stedelijk, "What happened?" And then I pulled up my catalogue but yeah. Lori said that the piece I was remembering was *Glass Puzzle*, she says it was later edited with Seth Price at EAI and then showing through Yvon Lambert gallery. There was a funny ... Sometimes there's a little bit of a power struggle with artists because EAI had artists who in many cases were very well known who also had galleries. We have the non-editioned work, galleries would have editioned to work. But there were some interesting moments where a gallery would come to us and say, "We don't want you to distribute that anymore, and we're going to edition it."

Stephen Vitiello: This is not quite the case probably with that piece by Joan, but it happened with a number of artists, and we've had to say that, "We've been selling it, renting it for twenty years. Like, how can

you suddenly ...” Or would they frame and slightly changed the title. But I don't know that the art world always fully understood how and why we existed. Although we were also coming out of a legacy of Howard Wise's gallery as well as the Castelli-Sonnabend histories. And at a time when video wasn't a commodity or it was much harder to market, but when that power shift happened in the mid-1990s, there were some funny moments or sort of trying to rewrite history or change the treatment of certain works.

Glenn Wharton: Well, it came from a deep belief that art should be shared and distributed. It was almost the purpose of video art or the underlying motivation.

Stephen Vitiello: Agreed. Yeah, agreed. Yeah, no, I know the politics are very important.

Glenn Wharton: A lot has changed since then.

Stephen Vitiello: Yeah, true. I know it.

Glenn Wharton: Listen, this has been really, really wonderful. Can you think of anything else that you would like to share with us?

Stephen Vitiello: No, I'm glad you're doing this. I think Joan is amazing, and it's been exciting to watch. Even thinking back to that Roberta Smith *New York Times* piece. I think it was when the Queens Museum show was on, kind of saying in some ways, “Shame on you art world for not understanding how important this woman has been all along.” And like, “Let's now take note.” So, I'm glad what you're doing will allow people to keep taking note.

Glenn Wharton: Can you think of anyone else that we should talk to that worked with her back in the days that you did?

Stephen Vitiello: I mean I was thinking, I don't know if you're ... Neil Benezra worked with Joan on the sound for the Queens Museum show. He might've worked with her later, but I just remember Neil working with Joan then. Seth Price, if you guys haven't spoken to Seth. Amazing artist, but also worked as editor at EAI. Robert Beck, who's now Robert Buck also before that had been editor at EAI. I don't remember the names of the video person from *Lines in the Sand*. I could look her up, or you could look her up. I think she was German.

Kristin Poor: Astrid Klein.



Stephen Vitiello: That's right. I loved ... I really enjoyed working with her on those pieces, as well as, as Lisa? And again, the performers I'm not remembering, but I think that Joan did have certain people that she had ongoing collaborations with. Yeah, if I think of others, I'll try to email you but hopefully you've got some of the really good ones.

Kristin Poor: Okay, thank you. That's so helpful.

Stephen Vitiello: Oh, good. I'm glad. Okay, I was worried this would be a disaster, but I guess we had some stories, at least.

Kristin Poor: No, I think that's very helpful.

Stephen Vitiello: Thank you.

Glenn Wharton: Absolutely, not a disaster at all. In fact, it's a great interview.

Stephen Vitiello: Oh, good. Thank you, okay. All right, well, pleasure to speak to you both.

Glenn Wharton: Yes. Thank you so much.

Stephen Vitiello: My pleasure, yeah. And talk to you again, I hope.

Glenn Wharton: Okay.

Stephen Vitiello: All right.

Kristin Poor: Thanks so much. Bye-bye.

*This transcript is intended to provide an accessible form of interview audio content. It has been edited for factual accuracy and clarity. Any alterations are noted with brackets.*