

MoNA Moments: *On Surge 2023: An Interview with Chloe Dye Sherpe, Jackie Qataliña Schaeffer, and Jamie Donatuto*

Transcript provided by George Luo.

Narrator: Welcome to MoNA Moments, a podcast hosted by the Museum of Northwest Art, located in La Conner, Washington. The Museum of Northwest Art resides in the land of the Coast Salish peoples, specifically the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community. With gratitude, we honor their stewardship of these lands since time immemorial to the present day. This land acknowledgement does not take the place of authentic relationships with indigenous communities.

In this episode of MoNA Moments, you will hear guest curator Chloe Dye Sherpe interviewing artist Jackie Qataliña Schaeffer and scientist Dr Jamie Donatuto about their collaboration for the 2023 Surge Exhibition at MoNA. *Surge: Mapping Transition, Displacement, and Agency in Times of Climate Change* is the fourth iteration of this exhibition in the Museum of Northwest Art where an artist and a scientist collaborate to produce a work around climate change and its impacts.

Chloe Dye Sherpe: Hello everyone, thank you for listening to this MoNA podcast about the Surge Exhibition. Surge mapping transition, displacement, and agency in times of climate change. My name is Chloe Dye Sherpe and I'm the guest curator for this exhibition. Before we get started into our conversation, I think it's important to read the museum's land acknowledgment. The museum of northwest art resides on the land of the coastal salish peoples, specifically the Swinomish indian tribal community. With gratitude, we honor their stewardship of these lands since time immemorial to the present day. I think it's also important to note that the land acknowledgement does not take the place of authentic relationships with indigenous communities. We have a wonderful conversation planned for today about this exhibition, and I'll just introduce myself and pass it on to two of our guests here today. As I said, my name is Chloe Dye Sherpe. I'm the guest curator of *Surge: Mapping Transition, Displacement, and Agency in Times of Climate Change*. It's an honor to come to the museum to guest curate this exhibition. I'm an independent curator and writer. I'm also a curator of the Lumiere Group, which is an art consultancy based in Seattle, Washington and we work with clients on our life cycle management and I manage our relationships with our artists and galleries and acquisition strategy for various clients throughout the United States and Canada. And with that, I want to pass it to Jackie and introduce herself and talk a little bit more about her artistic practice. Jackie, go ahead.

Jackie: Thanks Chloe. [Speaks in Iñupiaq]. I'm Jackie Qataliña Schaeffer, I am Iñupiaq. I was born and raised in the community of Kotzebue, which is on the Northwest coast of Alaska. And I was raised in a very traditional lifestyle. I am currently the director of Climate Initiatives at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. And at the Consortium my job is to work with our 229 federally recognized tribes across the state. As they transition into a new way of living due to climate impacts and that kind of crosses over into my worldview of being raised in an indigenous lifestyle and art and creativity and the interconnection of the planet has always been a piece of my world. Therefore, it's not separate. And so I think that the art piece really speaks to that and indigenous people across the globe feel that they have been bestowed this great responsibility for the land, air, and sea and all the creatures that inhabit the land alongside us. And so we're not separate from that environment, we are a part of it. The sense of responsibility is greater than the emotional tie. It's that intimate, intricate connection that is tied to all the spirits and aspects of earth. So therefore, I think that really is my interconnection to this piece of art and I will now pass this onto Jamie for her introduction.

Jamie: Thank you Jackie. Thank you Chloe. My name is Jamie Donatuto and I am the Community Environmental Health Analyst for the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community. It's a pleasure to be here today, speaking of both of you. I've had the honor of working for the Swinomish tribe for the last 23 years and also the honor and privilege of learning from many tribal community members, which has also shaped my worldview about how humans are so interconnected to all other aspects of the natural world and other innate beings that are in it. And I have worked with Jackie for the past year and half on a climate change project. We've known each other for a couple of years. And when she was offered this opportunity at *Surge* to be one of the guest artists and she asked me to be a contributing scientist to it, it was an exciting moment for me and something I'm really proud of being able to do just to be in support of a really strong indigenous voice and help spread the word about climate change and its impacts and some of the adaptation measures that indigenous peoples are leading the world in. So thank you.

Chloe: Thank you Jamie! Thank you both for being here with me today to record this podcast for the museum. I want to give a brief overview of the exhibition and then we will get to the main part of the podcast, which is hearing about your project for the exhibition. This is the fourth iteration of *Surge*, and I think it's so appropriate that you both mentioned interconnectedness, which has really been the theme of this exhibition series since the beginning. As in the previous editions, this exhibition engages artists to work with environmental researchers and educators to present the public with new perspectives on issues such as flooding, storm search, coastline erosion, glacier retreat. All of this through exhibits lectures and education programs and that of course had been the focus of the previous three editions of *Surge*, but for this fourth edition, we really

also wanted to specifically talk about the human impact and that's how we landed on this subtitle which is "Mapping Transition, Displacement, and Agency" really as Jackie had already mentioned, talking about the very tangible human impacts and again this interconnectedness. And all of these different aspects work with each other during this very challenging time and very kind of dynamic time in our environment so with that I want to pass it back to our artist and scientists just to get an overview of their project, and we'll have a couple discussion questions. So why don't you go ahead and provide us an overview of your art project.

Jackie: Yeah! This is something that is kind of part of my whole world. I've been working with the community of Nuataaq for well-over a decade. They are a small Yupik community. They are the first community that has to fully relocate to a completely different place due to climate impacts. The community faces not only river erosions due to tidal influence but also degraded permafrost and severe storm surges that have basically chomped away their community in the last decade and so the human piece that has to adapt is kind of two-fold here because the western constraints that prohibit us from timely adaptation totally is the opposite of what our traditional way of living was. So this project is really about sharing that story. Indigenous populations in Alaska migrated with their food resources until western contact. Then, they were forced to live in a specific area. All of them on the coast of either a river or the shoreline of a sea in the ocean, which put them in a vulnerable position to begin with and so this trauma and forced location is now forcing them to be relocated due to the actual process of which it was enacted. And so traditional people are very adaptable because they migrate through this land-based relationship and it's not very far, it's pretty isolated and their food resources are this small imprint and it's constantly moving with nature and so there is no disruption in that process. But western contact forced this disruption, forcing them to be in one place. The threat was either you stay here or we take your children. That's a pretty dynamic trauma to live through, but they survived so now they are being forced to relocate and really this project is about that. Where do we find that intersect between traditional ways of living and that traditional knowledge system in that traditional worldview and the intersect to science because if they had the modern tools could they have adapted differently if we didn't have those barriers and constraints to access funding because now it's based on *money* not people. So everything in response to climate change is based on money and either we are waiting for money or it has to make money and so there's this intersect and then science is having to prove not only the earth's science but this traditional knowledge system didn't fit into western science ways of thinking and I'll give a quick example with the intimate relationship with ice. So this community is isolated and you have to fly into it and you have a period in the fall where the water is freezing into ice. And then you have the same period about 6-8 weeks in the spring where the ice is turning into water but the relationship with that

transition is very intimate to the Yupik people for that area as it is to all indigenous populations and is to all people with that traditional living. So western science may have a science expert say in Colorado or Arizona that is looking through a technology lens but they don't have that intimate relationship like the people do and so where does it intersect and how do we learn from each other and really this is really the summary of this project is that to work with scientists like Jamie who are starting to understand that there is space that could be created for this dialogue and i'll pass it on to Jamie

Jamie: Thanks Jackie. Really ever since I met Jackie I've appreciated her gentle ways of explaining that there is more than one way of knowing and that there are multiple knowledge systems and to be able to not only recognize them to bolster them and to support them and uplift them and I remember that one of the things that a Swinomish elder once told me was that "hey, you can't give thanks over a can of spam" and i just looked at him and i remember thinking "I'm not exactly sure what he is meaning" and I remember when he looked at me that it's going to take a while for you to figure it out. And really what he was saying now that I've thought about it for many years was that there are practices and ways of being and knowing that as Westerners we just don't understand because we don't have the same connections to the lands, to the waters, and to the airs. So while many western folks in society are faced with issues of climate change and impacts of climate change relocation doesn't have the same sort of impacts that it does for people who have a very different way of knowing and being in connection. For instance in traditional foods to have stewardship and to have those connections between your food and how you harvest them, and why you harvest it, and how when you harvest it, and when you give thanks, and how you share it. These are all part of a world system that many westerners just don't know about and so for instance, climate change impacts the location, impacts food security and food sovereignty. We start to think "oh this resource is disappearing and lets substitute it with something else" or really what was saying was that you can't. You can't for many indigenous peoples who have very special connection and relationships to these more than human beings and so instead of for instance if he couldn't go out and harvest salmon but instead the government is saying "here is your can of spam" and it's the same nutritional value. He's saying that it doesn't work like that. You can't give thanks in the same way since it's not a reciprocal relationship and I think that being able to explore those ideas and share those ideas is super helpful in thinking about ways to move forward for everybody in the context of climate change and adaptation. And that's one of the reasons as to why I really loved the piece that Jackie did in thinking what it depicts and what it needs.

Chloe: Thank you both for these comments! I have a couple takeaways or thoughts that came to mind as you were speaking and the first being of course the work that Jackie has created and I think it's important to note that there is a very strong figure in the

artwork. It is one of only three artworks in the exhibition that have a figure in the artwork. And I think in that way it has a kind of immediate tie-in for the viewer whenever you have a viewer in an artwork or another figure in an artwork. It creates kind of that very immediate, almost emotional connection to a piece and so I think that further underscores Jackie your points in this, interconnectedness and these long very deep-rooted connections that people have both to one another and to the land and also to the surrounding environment. You've also talk about various knowledge systems and early on *Surge* was predicated on the idea that art can provide a different way of communication, so allowing some of the really important, really key both very scientific and cultural systems and understanding and research that they can be communicated through art and I'm curious to hear from both of you what your view is on and what role it can have in this climate discussion.

Jackie: Yeah you know, I've said it before and really there is no separation in my world. Art is part of who we are and it is our way of expressing ourselves. So my family has been in the same geographic area on the planet enjoying the same foods for over 500 generations and we have a no waste way of living. Prior to western contact, there was no waste. There was no waste management. There was no waste system. There was no waste. Every part of the animal or plant was used in some way and it's those little pieces that weren't your food or medicine that became art pieces and so that interconnection of art is no different from talking about the ice. It's one of the same. So if you look at human evolution over time, it's the arts, it's the music and the connection to the planet that has sustained humanity over time. The philosophers and artists were huge parts of the visioning of how we stayed in a place that adapted and transitioned so that we could continue to live as humans on this planet. And so I think we have to remember that, that I yet have to be in a forum anywhere, even at the UN level, where we have philosophers standing up, sharing this space for discussion. So art to me is when we can infuse that philosophy into the discussion of climate change and to me as an indigenous person it is very easy for me not to disconnect those conversations and or topic sectors. But for westerners, especially in American, western academia, we have separated all of them out. They're no longer all one. They're separated. And so I think that's where we have to look internally as we transition into the future is how do we reconnect not only those elements of humanity but that interconnection with nature because it is a mirror effect it is not separate.

Chloe: Thanks Jackie. I really appreciate the comment that you are making as someone who spent some time in academia. And perhaps Jamie can also speak to this as well. How challenging it can be in that setting to have an interdisciplinary discussion and so I think that your point is right on and that firmly resonates with me in how important it is to bring different disciplines together that have been separated when

really I think it can become so much more powerful and nuanced and productive and deep if they are actually integrated and interconnected. Jamie I'm curious to know what your thoughts are.

Jamie: I agree completely. And to me, just listening to both of you I have this sense of talking about community and the importance of community and connections but I think we can also translate that into what's happened in academia where its separation is almost a breakdown in the community. And so theres these silos that aren't speaking to each other and if they can be brought together there are synergies that exist where people can work crossfields and have an openness and understanding aren't necessarily experts but everybody is there. They all have a role, and all of those people can help to work with each other in the community because I think that really is the only way that we can move forward and that art is one of those ways that we can break down some of those barriers. So I fully appreciate the opportunities that art can provide in that way.

Chloe: Do any of you have any advice whether they are either scientists, artists, or maybe just someone who is really interested in this conversation? Do you have any advice for them considering that they will continue to collaborate with professionals of other fields? So how to try to break down these barriers from your experience or from what you have observed, what would you tell them?

Jackie: You know having worked in this space and facing all of these challenges where sometimes two worldviews don't mirror each other. Sometimes, they are completely opposite, and so you have those uncomfortable spaces where maybe you just have to just simply accept that there are going to be two ways of projecting or sharing and that is ok. So my advice would be to make sure that you don't always have to be right, they don't always have to be right. Sometimes, they are just side by side holding hands, sharing information in two very different ways sometimes, but it's still sharing, and it's like watching two children who speak two foreign languages play together and language is not a barrier. Love is a bond, right? [slight chuckle] and they still do the same kid things and so I guess my advice too would be to not be such a rigid adult and be a little creative and playful and think about that as your having uncomfortable spaces and hard discussions. Because it's ok, I think as adults we forget that.

Chloe: Yeah, we forget that it is ok to have a disagreement or to feel uncomfortable once in a while. I think you know it leads to a tough conversation but maybe one that makes you stronger or think about something in a new way. I think that this kind of curiosity and creativity sometimes comes out of these very difficult discussions.

Jamie: Absolutely, and I think in order to get to that curiosity and creativity, adults need to remember what that vulnerability is and to really lead on coming in, not as “experts” and that there is a humbleness for them to learn from others and that is part of the sharing and as Jackie said “we’ll may not agree; we may have different worldviews” but that doesn’t mean that something positive can’t come out of even just listening to another person or another group of people as long as that openness and curiosity is there.

Chloe: And I have to share very early on Surge that for the first exhibition we did a lot of exercises with our partners, which is SC2 - the Skagit Climate Consortium. I have to give that team so much credit because we did so much work back and forth on the interpretive text for that show and they came with really fantastic in-depth, scientific interpretation and we did this exercise going back and forth, discussing what would be accessible to the public. How do we have these very in-depth, very data-rooted texts available to visitors to the museum and I think both of your points about being vulnerable and ready to learn and ready to have difficult discussions that interaction with the Skagit Climate Science Consortium always comes to mind when I think about that.

Now in our last minute or so, I just wanted to provide both of you with the opportunity to share anything else about participating in Surge or your collaboration that you had together. I know that the collaboration is such a unique aspect for this show. At least when I talk to colleagues in the same field, they are always surprised by how wonderful these collaborations are. So I just wanted to give you both a little moment if there is anything you wanted to share about your partnership.

Jackie: Yeah, I truly appreciate and adore the work that Jamie does. I think its that sisterhood of sharing space and way of thinking that we really do appreciate that. But I do want to share that something is great to remind everyone as we build relationships and move forward in time that despite countless acts of genocide and historical injustices and inflicted by colonization, indigenous communities across the globe continue to safeguard the planet’s diversity. And indigenous peoples’ lands host 80% of the world’s biodiversity yet they constitute just 5% of the world’s population and that’s taken from the UN biodiversity conference on impacts on indigenous communities. And as an indigenous person, I just want to share that I know that we can work side by side and that we can bridge those two world views because I do it everytime when I have conversation with dear friend Jamie whose as scientist and very intelligent

Jamie: Aww thank you Jackie. Jackie’s a tough act to follow! I would say that as a western scientist, it’s important to remind ourselves that we have grown up in one certain mindset and that indigenous folks have been forced to grow multiple mindsets

and it's great that people are really excited to work with indigenous communities but it's also key to understand that it's going to take years and years and years to understand a different world view. And the best thing that us western folks can do is to listen and be in support of the folks who already know, who are mostly the indigenous folks who have been in these multiple worldviews for so long. We have a lot to learn, but I think that there is a lot of information that's already known that will help us all to move forward in what needs to be done in a fairly rapid manner in the context of climate change. So I have hope [slight chuckle].

Chloe: Well I appreciate both of you sharing this optimistic view of how we as a society and as a community can move forward together. I think that this topic can feel very overwhelming so having the opportunity to listen to two individuals like yourself I think can be very powerful and very uplifting and Jamie as you said a reminder to approach a topic with some humility and an openness to learn and so I just wanted to thank you both for taking the time to have this conversation today. It's been an honor to listen and to learn from you both and to be participating in this exhibition with you. For those of you listening, when this podcast airs in November in 2023, I just want to share that the exhibition will on view until January 21st 2024 and if you are listening after the exhibition has closed, then the museum will have more information about this *Surge* as well as previous *Surge* exhibitions up on their website. So for now, thank you so much for joining us.

Narrator: *Surge: Mapping Transition, Displacement, and Agency in Times of Climate Change* is on view at the Museum of Northwest Art from October 14th, 2023 to January 21st, 2024. Thank you for listening to this MoNA Moment.