

Transcript of Interview with Summer El-Khodary by Tory Schendel Cox

Interviewee: Summer El-Khodary

Interviewer: Tory Schendel Cox

Date: 03/30/2020

Location (Interviewee): Evansville, Indiana

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Abstract: In response to COVID-19, the Evansville Museum of Arts, History and Science launched the mini-series, "Cultural Insights: Interviews in the Creative Sector," to highlight colleagues and professionals working in the same or similar field of museum professionals.

Summer El-Khodary, Founder, Cultural Communications, Inc

Tory Schendel Cox 00:00

Hi, my name is Tory Schendel Cox. I'm the Virginia G. Schroeder Curator of Art the Evansville Museum. And today we have Summer, and thank you so much for your time. And I'm going to pass it off to you.

Summer El-Khodary 00:10

Yeah. Thank you so much for having me virtually. I mean, this is the best we can do under- under circumstances, for sure. But I figured it's better to produce some content for people while they're in this situation, rather than kind of being stagnant and waiting. It gives them something to occupy their time and not think about what's- what's all that's going on in the world right now.

Tory Schendel Cox 00:31

Absolutely.

Summer El-Khodary 00:32

Yeah. So just a little bit about myself. My name is Summer El-Khodary. And so, I'm actually graduating from the University of Evansville, in May, with my bachelor's in science and public health, with a nutrition emphasis. And I'm applying to physician assistant school near the end of the month, as well. So, it's a little bit of a crazy time for me, and then everything moving online, I'm kind of glued to my computer screen right now as most of us are. And so, kind of, I've also founded a nonprofit organization. And so, one, it's called cultural communications. And so, it's- I always tell- it's kind of a long story of how it started, because it wasn't necessarily what I wanted to do originally. And so, if some of you are familiarized at the University of Evansville last spring, they hosted their community Changemaker challenge, and that was the first annual year for it. And so I kind of heard about it and was interested about it. I was really interested in the service-oriented aspect in it. And I always was one of those people that wanted to make some type of change. And so, I originally enter with this idea called Culture Fest, which I did with a partner of mine. And it was the whole point was to kind of unite all the cultures within the community. So, we really saw that a lot of the current festivals that were offered were very like, segmented where a lot of them were just representing one culture. And so, we decided to kind of unite them. And so that was kind of our idea. And short- short story, so we didn't end up getting the funding we needed just because I think I was going a little over my head at the time. And so, the anticipated cost that we calculated for it was very large, and is not something that they could offer, like all the amount of money for it. And really what I wanted to do was one portion of the of the thing, which was discussion panels series. And so those discussion panels series really took

away the superficiality of culture, and really went into more of the deeper issues that a lot of those people deal with. And so that's kind of what we ended up with. And I called it cultural Communications at the time, which was a project that I was just working on. And that kind of started over last summer. And we hosted our first talk in December. And I kind of ran into some issues regarding people taking what I'm doing seriously, and legitimizing it. And so, I felt like if I had the nonprofit status, that would help a lot and people legitimizing what I was actually doing. And I've always had a dream of starting a nonprofit organization, I just didn't think it necessarily happen this early, you know, kind of life throws you some curveballs, and you kind of just have to take them and roll with the punches. So, I figured it'd be just better to kind of start off that way, get the legitimization from being a nonprofit organization. And also, it just helps you gain connections for grant writing, if I ever wanted to get any types of funds from organizations or people or connect with others as well. It just, it just added a whole 'nother factor that I think, as an individual, being this young that people sometimes don't take me seriously. So... Kind of that's what we do. And so really what it does is amplify the voices of marginalized communities. And so really, I just had a like, being a minority group, being a woman, being Muslim, being Arab, I've had my fair share of difficulties. And I've never had a platform to express that in a neutral space. And so, and I felt like, I've never had the opportunity for people to approach me with questions because a lot of people feel a little bit insecure to ask those questions, feel like they're being- they're kind of pressing on to your space. And so, I figured it might be easier to provide a platform. And so, we've had two discussion panels series so far. We had one at Innovation Point in downtown Evansville, in December. And so, our topic of discussion then was just living in America. So, we had first generation immigrants, second generation immigrants, and we had international students just talking about their experiences living in Evansv- living in America, because a lot of them have lived in multiple different places. And then for our February one, we really kind of had a young people be the vocal point of it. And so, we had high school age and college age individuals, and they talked about their experiences living in Evansville. And we hosted that at the University of Evansville. And we actually saw good, like good momentum considering like, the one in December I did- I anticipated lower attendance just because it was near the holiday time. And so, it was around 30 to 40 people. And then in February, we had around 60 to 70 people. And so, I really was intrigued by like, how much that actually increased. And, you know, it's, it's a little bit of learning from my standpoint, like I, there's just some things that I didn't anticipate, or it's more work than I thought, I thought it'd be easy just to gather a group of people and have a conversation. But you know, just getting connections to different people. I want to make sure that I had, you know, representation from everywhere, I didn't want people that all look like me being up there because that wouldn't be representative. So, I try to do the best I could to have representation for multiple areas. So, I always sent somebody from African descent, somebody that was Arab, somebody that was, you know, South Asian, somebody that was Asian, European, like Hispanic. And so, I wanted to make sure we had that representation everywhere. And so, I think people respond to that well, because they saw that I was making that effort to provide that representation, rather than having a lot of people that looked like me up there because it'd be easy to find, I would know a lot of people that look like me, but I felt I need to take that initiative and make sure. And I always I'm one of those people that like to provide like an encompassing experience. So, a lot of local businesses helped out with food. And I was like, really surprised by that. Because, well, I know, our community's very giving, but I would just like call them on the phone and kind of like ramble on about what I was saying. And I just was so like, I was like, "How do they even believe anything that I'm saying, I'm not providing them any proof." You know, I know that they believed me, and I think that really shows like, what type of community we have here and how kind hearted and how they'll take the word of a person, even if they didn't- even if they don't see like exactly what you're doing. Like I could have just been saying that and grabbing that food and like eating it all at home or something, you know, so I just I found that, like, just- I was just like, so amazed by that people like, how did they just like give you that food? And I was like, legit, I do not know. But like, I am so very grateful

that they did. And so, I really tried to provide, like a good experience for these people. And I knew like the first time around like, I was like overwhelmed because a lot of people felt more comfortable submitting paper questions. So, we had an option of paper questions or people to ask questions out loud. And everybody did paper questions. And so, when I was doing the paper questions, I was so overwhelmed, because there were so many that I never asked the audience for they're like maybe audience members would also have something to contribute or- or they would have additional questions, but I was just so like, so like, in those papers, but I kind of really wanted to focus on the discussion point. Like, really, because my whole point was discussion. And so, on the second talk, we really tried to increase that. So, we used like another platform called Slideshow. And so really that that is like an online question. So basically, you can submit questions online, and that encourages other people to think of questions, because you can see other submitted questions as well. And so that really helped. And then I also asked for audience engagement with questions or thoughts and- and once I started to write some, I viewed points because I acted as the moderator during the time, I felt like I really got that engagement. So, I think, once I've established like that, precedent that this is something that's always going to be established each time I think people are going to be more willing to share kind of their viewpoints.

Tory Schendel Cox 08:48

Wow. See, that's just an amazing experience. Yeah, cuz I can visualize what this looks like. And I just wish I could be physically there to witness it. And I'd-

Summer El-Khodary 08:59

Yeah.

Tory Schendel Cox 09:00

I know, it's hard to plan for the advancement because of what we're going on. But do you know the next time we're going to have a panel discussion?

Summer El-Khodary 09:08

Yeah. Before all this stuff happened, I had a meeting scheduled. I hoped to have like three events in the fall. And I had meetings scheduled with three different groups to kind of collaborate. And so, I was hoping if you heard of the nonprofit organization, Young and Established, and so they're very big nonprofit organization in the community that really does a lot with youth and youth empowerment. And so the guy that's a part of that Courtney Johnson, who's the founder of it, we were thinking about doing something together; we haven't necessarily sat down and talked because our plans kind of changed with all of this. We're hoping to host an event together, and I'm thinking to possibly host it with the Youth and I think that would be really interesting, like high school students because before- before my spring break happened, before all this stuff happened, I went and talked to the International Club at Bossie high school, and I did a presentation and did a stimulation with some of the questions that we used. And they really got into it to be honest. And I was very surprised of how outspoken they were, and how big the international population there was. And so, I connected with some of the people there as well. And- and I hope to maybe do something in the fall with them, I think they would be an interesting group to do with or other groups in the EDSC. And I also talked to somebody at the University of Southern Indiana, from the social work department. And she was thinking about doing a mutual event together as well. And so, I think that would be really interesting. I kind of want to do it around the community, we always kind of change locations just to see how it works and to reach different groups of people. And then there's somebody else that... DeAndre Wilson, and he has a nonprofit. Yeah. And he has a nonprofit organization as well, which has to deal a

lot with cancer and health care and all of that. And so, I was thinking about hosting some type of talk as well, at a hospital once this thing kind of maybe blows over. So, I'm hoping that one probably should be the last one at the end of the year. But really to kind of see how like healthcare is affected by different racial groups and how a lot of, especially like African Americans concerns are often discounted in healthcare. So, I think that would be very interesting to discuss. And I think that'd be even more interesting because of this virus and Coronavirus. And I know a lot of what's going on in other communities is that because of like ventilators and stuff, they're having these ethical questions of whether or not who's the person to have it versus not. And so, I think those are would be good questions to explore, and see healthcare workers who may have been in those situations and their types of reactions, hopefully, and this community, we don't get to that point where we have to make those types of decisions. But if we do get to that point, kind of see from somebody in that position, like what was going through their head? Was there also cases of like, that you had to decide racially, between somebody as well as that something that because I feel like that would be an ethical question as well. So those are kind of the things that we were exploring. I'm also hoping to do- I'm trying to produce content now for- because I did have something planned in April 9. There is the Festival of Nations, and I was going to be one of the booths there. And now that that, obviously is cancelled, and I already had an established event as well. So that had to be cancelled. So, I want to produce some type of content online, we're actually- me and my graphic designer are currently working on something- something online interview series. I don't want to give too much away, but it's- it's gonna be- it's gonna be pretty fun. And it's gonna be- it's not going to be all Coronavirus related, it's going to give like, I feel like a cultural view to it in a way. And so, we have a for our first guest on there, as somebody who's an exchange student right now who's kind of stuck in America can't go home. And so, and her experiences living in a warzone and all of that, and so it kind of gives perspectives of Coronavirus in this quarantine, all of that. So, I feel like that will definitely be very interesting and something I haven't heard in that perspective just yet.

Tory Schendel Cox 13:28

Correct. Yeah. Wow. That's gonna be very powerful.

Summer El-Khodary 13:33

Yeah. We're hoping, like, we're hoping to record some time this week. And we're working on possibly getting it out there in two to three weeks, hopefully earlier, and kind of just working on what we can and trying to get guests from around the world, because we kind of only hear what's happening in America. So, I really want to connect with people around the world and, and hopefully get interviews with them. We'll see how that kind of works. But I'm hoping that we will be able to produce something like that.

Tory Schendel Cox 14:02

Absolutely. And would you be able to share with our viewers where they could find that content and where this platform is gonna take place?

Summer El-Khodary 14:09

Yeah. Currently, we haven't established where it's going to be just yet. We're trying to film it on something and then the that platform will help us distribute it hopefully, if they're able to, it'll be accessible to all people through like Spotify and iTunes and stuff like that. And so, I'm hoping that if it gets distributed like that, then we'll be able to find it on there.

Tory Schendel Cox 14:31

Absolutely. Oh, definitely, looking forward to him. Please keep us posted.

Summer El-Khodary 14:35

Yeah. So I'm excited about it, too, because we've kind of tested the audio quality and did some of the interview questions yesterday with the first guest. And I think it's going to be I think it's going to be really good. So we're just kind of working out some of the kinks and everything. I've never edited audio, and I was like getting frustrated with myself was like, let me step back a little bit. So yeah, it's harder than anticipated. So...

Tory Schendel Cox 14:59

That's why I'm grateful for our marketing associate at the museum-

Summer El-Khodary 15:02

Yea. (laughing)

Tory Schendel Cox 15:03

She's editing, and I'm so grateful for her.

Summer El-Khodary 15:08

Definitely.

Tory Schendel Cox 15:09

Well Summer, is there anything else you'd like to share with our viewers today?

Summer El-Khodary 15:12

Yeah, and so I think a really big thing to take away just from everything that's going on in the world is kind of like, I just find it very fascinating how we were able to like everybody kind of transition to online, and everything is now like, digitally, like you're digitally connecting with somebody, workouts, talking to your friends, it cooking classes, you know, any type of social engagement has been moved online. And I think we're very fortunate enough in the United States of that thing that we can do. And I, and I think like, based off some of the experiences, I have had these experiences, but even like the guests that I talked to, and her experiences of being like, in quarantine in like, in war zones, and stuff, where electricity is cut off, like they don't even have access to those types of entertainment.

Tory Schendel Cox 15:59

Yeah.

Summer El-Khodary 16:00

So, I think it's just kind of having that appreciation, like we can be saddened about like, what we're losing. I mean, all of us are losing something whether or not going to weddings, graduations; I was supposed to graduate and my graduation is delayed, like all of those types of things. Uh, yeah, it's very sad to think about, I think, but it's very- I think it should be appreciated that just what we have access to like just being in a home with a roof, not being struck by that tornado that happened- that happened a couple days ago. And so just having those little things and having the access to entertainment, being able to go out outside and just don't be near. But like, I think those little things are something to, to keep in mind. And just to know that those people that they're looking forward to are

still trying to produce some type of content or do something for you digitally. So, it's not something you necessarily have to miss out on. And those events that you were looking forward to, might be made up a little bit later. So just to just to keep people's spirits a little bit higher.

Tory Schendel Cox 17:05

Absolutely. So as always a pleasure getting to speak with you, I definitely-

Summer El-Khodary 17:11

Aw, thank you.

Tory Schendel Cox 17:12

And yeah, there'll be a stranger, and let us know if there's any way we can help promote your content. So...

Summer El-Khodary 17:19

Yeah, of course, and I appreciate you guys having me on as well. And with the woman series and everything, and I look forward to what you guys are going to be producing online as well.

Tory Schendel Cox 17:28

I appreciate it. And for those of you who don't know, the woman speaker series is a series of the Evansville museum is hosting. And what that is, is every month we're going to have a monumental woman speak about her experiences. And Summer was supposed to have a panel with us in May. And we're hoping- hoping that it can still happen. But at this point, it's just too early to tell. But nonetheless, we will have a platform, we will have a place for museum to talk, and we're always here for you.

Summer El-Khodary 17:55

Yeah, of course. Thank you so much, and I appreciate you having me on.

Tory Schendel Cox 17:59

Absolutely. So this is a Evansville Museum recording, and Summer, thank you so much for your time.

Summer El-Khodary 18:04

Thank you so much. Have a great day.

Tory Schendel Cox 18:06

You too.