

Transcript of Interview with Emily Gartner by Tory Schendel Cox

Interviewee: Emily Gartner

Interviewer: Tory Schendel Cox

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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.

Emily Gartner, Fashion Designer, Artist, Instructor, Operates a painting and sewing studio www.ArtThreadsStudio.com at Circle City Industrial Complex on the East side of Indianapolis.

Tory Schendel Cox 00:00

Hi, my name is Tory Schendel Cox. I'm the Virginia G. Schroeder Curator of Art at the Evansville Museum, and today we have a special guest. Emily, thank you so much for your time, and I'm going to hand this telecast to you.

Emily Gartner 00:11

Oh my gosh. Well, thanks for the big handover. Um, for those people that don't know me or know about me, I used to live in Haynie's Corner Arts District, not too far from this beautiful Alhambra Theater and just got some really good traction with some of the historic landmark art that I did and then put it onto wearables. And last year I got involved with Indiana fashion week, and I was an onramp cohort is what it's called, where they pick 30 plus artists from around the state to meet creatively for a weekend, put our heads together and actually talk about how to have a sustainable art business which is really tough these days, obviously. But in the process of making those contacts with Indiana Fashion Foundation and also Indiana Arts Commission, I just met some really fabulous people in my art business, the numbers were going down, and I'm a full-time artist so that's concerning. And I needed to really look at different ways to cast a wider net. So, having met some of these people I felt super comfortable with at this point, casting that wider net actually meant moving to a bigger city and opened up a studio; I actually secured the studio before I moved here full time.

Tory Schendel Cox 01:57

Wow.

Emily Gartner 01:58

I got the studio in November, and it's that Circle City industrial complex; it's about a mile due east of Monument Circle. There's over 100 plus artists in that particular huge old car factory building, they used to make car parts I believe. And then there's a piece of weight brewery at the top of the building, the beginning of the building, and then there is a distillery, eight day distillery at the end of the building, and

a chocolate factory is going in, a bowling alley's going in. We have Indiana writers workshop and a lot of nonprofits, so we also, forgot about this, we have an indoor winter farmers market there too, which I was doing that every Saturday, and I actually just absolutely loved it. I would, I'm on the first floor in that building so, Ron Austin who's a great wood craftsman from Kentucky and a lot of people in Evansville also know him and he's had some great pieces that working together at Evansville Museum. He helped me set up a mobile rolling cart for me to just push that cart down the warehouse hallway and then be at the Saturday winter farmers market. So, I would go every Saturday, but I don't know, I, it's gonna be hard for me not to talk about COVID-19 because everything has stopped, and I really think it's important for me to talk about it and reason being there's a lot of artists out there that are struggling right now. It is my 100% income, so when you don't have income, you can't pay the bills. So I just think it's really important for other artists to see me telling my story as well to let them know that they are not alone, to not, try not to panic about it even though honestly, I've had my ups and downs. Right now, I am lucky that I am affiliated with Indiana fashion week because they opened up a new studio on the second floor really close to my studio, in the same building, and they were getting ready to have their grand opening, I was going to have a grand opening, Earth Day, April 22nd, and what is, what started with all of this happened and there was the mandate from governor Holcomb. People were like begging me like, "let's get on the facemask" thing and "what are you doing?" And well, I had to put the proverbial face mask on myself, I don't know how else to explain it. I had to apply for food stamps, I had to apply for public assistance. That is not something I was comfortable with.

Tory Schendel Cox 05:22

Right.

Emily Gartner 05:23

Never thought I would have to do it. Not that I made a grand amount making art per se. But it just wasn't something that I ever thought that I would have to do. But here I am. So I actually had a telephone appointment yesterday with F, S, F-, FSSA, Family and Social Services Administration. And you know what, you just have to, you have to stop for a moment, take a moment, make sure you have your family and your friends surrounding you, and you're checking in on each other. And you have to adapt and adjust. But the important thing is as a creative, no matter whether it's a musician or what, you still need to create every day, because that's who you are by your nature, you're a creative. So, I, it was crazy. Like, oh, one day, it's like, "okay, I got to do my taxes because if I don't do my taxes, I won't get my stimulus check. And I really need that." And then another day, it was working out a new pandemic lease with my landlord, who fortunately, we worked out a 90-day new contract just for, for now, and we'll reassess that when I come back around. Called my credit card companies, people that, companies that had automatic withdrawal, Adobe Creative Suite, what have you. So, it's like, okay, let's take care of ourselves. And that's the important thing too, take care of yourselves. And for me, and I think, for a lot of artists, taking care of yourselves means still being creative. However, it's a situation of grief, and so, everybody handles grief differently. So, some people can't create right now. They, they're just not in that place, and I understand that too. But I started to hand paint bags. I can never get away from a handbag, I

just, it will always forever be part of what I do. And I had a friend of mine who works at USI and some other pe-, actually my son and his fiancé, they're like, "Mom, your art is changing. And we really like it." It was becoming less busy, a little more minimalist. And I was having fun with it too. So that I decided I would paint like a 12 by 12 painting every day. Would you like to see one?

Tory Schendel Cox 08:10

Yes. Absolutely.

Emily Gartner 8:13

Okay, let me see! I'm tanning myself over there in the window. I need to take a break from that anyway. Okay, let's see what we have. Some of them, not so great. But I'll show you at least two.

Tory Schendel Cox 08:28

Great.

Emily Gartner 08:29

Come back over here. I am a very big Andy Warhol fan, and I am a child of the 60s. So, this is very spiral graph-like can you see it? [shows painting]

Tory Schendel Cox 08:49

Yeah, I like it.

Emily Gartner 08:52

And then I had rubber stamps that I was doing with a class where they would [audio cuts out] things with a rubber stamp. So that was just a fun piece. And then I really was following the Cares Act bill, the stimulus very, very closely, you know, contacting senators contacting-

Tory Schendel Cox 09:15

Good.

Emily Gartner 09:16

-Congress people. And so, the stimulus bill got passed. And I just made this piece [shows painting] because it felt -

Tory Schendel Cox 09:26

Wow

Emily Gartner 09:27

-like we were a bit out of the darkness. We're not, we still have a long way to go. There's, there's still gonna be a lot of things going on. But it was the dove for peace, and then the Asian's symbol for calm.

So, with that stimulus bill being signed, it did give me a sense of peace, it did give me a sense of calm. And you know, it's just, I mean, it's not even kind of one day at a time, it was, at times, it was becoming one minute at a time or one hour at a time getting broken down that much. So really going back to the face mask, then it became a concern. And I didn't realize that until I reached out to other fashion designers here, they were all getting the same calls that I was, and we were really concerned about it being CDC compliant. Like, okay, we want to make this, we want to do this for our community, it's important. But it's not the right amount of filtering, we want, we want to, we want to do our very best,

Tory Schendel Cox 10:44

Right.

Emily Gartner 10:45

So that became a whole thing. And what has even gone a step further now, is that Eskenazi hospital here in Indianapolis, they desperately need surgical gowns. So that's where we're at. Indiana Fashion Foundation, and in conjunction with Pattern Magazine here, they wrote a grant. And that grant allowed them this studio space called Stitch Works. It is history in the making for fashion in the state of Indiana, in that it is the very first industrial cut and sew studio. And so, it's kind of a big deal-

Tory Schendel Cox 11:36

Yes!

Emily Gartner 11:37

-because who would have thought that the first project we would work on in that industrial cut and sew would be a project of such high regard and importance. So that we're all trying to do our social distancing while we work today. I've really pretty much had moved quite a few things home, so I could work on what I needed to at home and not, not worrying too much about that. But the amount of space, we needed to roll out the huge tube of fabric, and we were cutting eight layers at a time and just handling the big roll of fabric, it really required two of us to do it together.

Tory Schendel Cox 12:26

I bet.

Emily Gartner 12:27

So today we, I don't know, we basically got it worked down two takes for now. We'll get our time up, but I thought it was pretty good for first time out. It takes 12 minutes to cut one surgical gown. And it takes about 45 minutes to sew it. So, one hour to sew each gown. So, I'm trying to think of the name of the Formula Three company by Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Dallara is their name, is the Italian company. They were cutting gowns for us, but they had some problems with their laser cutter because it's used to cutting probably leather, or vinyl for the Formula Three. I know race fans will probably be going oh my god, she doesn't know it's leather or whatever. But, I don't know, they were having some

difficulties. And I think that's really typical with a cut and sew operation anyway, your first projects, you're going through some trial and error until you get every-, all the kinks worked out. But it was really great, even though we were talking muffled through masks, it was great to be with them today and find out what their stories are, what their backgrounds in sewing and fashion are. You know, really some outstanding talent just in the few people that were there today. So, it's an honor to be able to do that for the healthcare workers here. It's... we have a goal of making 2,500.

Tory Schendel Cox 14:16

Wow.

Emily Gartner 14:17

So, if there's anybody that knows anyone that serves in the Indianapolis area, and they want to help out with it, it is stitchworksindy.com I believe. So that's probably what I will be doing for work for the next two weeks. And not two weeks, what am I saying? Two months, rather. I wish it was going to be just two weeks and that and it would be over but probably for the next two months. And then you know, I desperately need to reach out to my customers and let them know what's going on. I really, I didn't even know how to approach it. What, what do I want to tell them? I don't want to be a Debbie Downer. But I'm also not going to be glossing over what the situation is either. So, have we given a good balance of both? Like, kind of, "I'm okay, I'm going to be alright, I hope you're okay, and you're going to be alright." And let me know what I can do for you, you know. If somebody needed help with a sewing machine because they wanted to participate in sewing masks for their son who's a delivery person, which I know, I had a question from Evansville, and it ended up she figured out the problem with the machine. She was just upset. And sometimes, you know, right now we just have to pull back a little bit and say, "do I need to go like, just lay down and take a nap?" And that's okay, too, just to rest your mind. So, it's been interesting, and I think, you know, we have a hash tag here, that says [#indykeepscreating](https://twitter.com/indykeepscreating). And there has been a few large, I guess you would call it endowments for artists like myself to get a bridge gap grant. So, while we're waiting for the stimulus check, or whatever we're waiting for, that we would have a little bit of money to tie us over with what our immediate needs are. So, I did find out the other day that I got that and was super happy about it. So, there's really cool stuff going on here. You know, even when you just take a walk, I mean, I know that's happening in Evansville too. I saw a friend from the neighborhood, Phil Hooper-

Tory Schendel Cox 16:52

Yeah.

Emily Gartner 16:53

-and his little boy had, he had a birthday the other day, I loved, loved seeing "honk for [inaudible]" or whatever the sign said, I thought, "that is so cool." There are things that if we think a little different, we can, we can, we can make it work for how it is right now. And, and I mean, I love that. I'm just loving the art behind you.

Tory Schendel Cox 17:20

Oh, thank you.

Emily Gartner 17:22

And just loving that you reached out to me as well. You could have reached out to a number of, numerous other people. But I appreciate that, that you knew you reached out to me. So...

Tory Schendel Cox 17:37

No, absolutely. We were just thrilled to see what you were doing, my boss and I, and we wanted to reach out and see if we could have a moment of your time, which we sincerely appreciate. To hear the Indy artist stories, it's important to have a, like you said, realistic understanding of what's going on. But like you said too, this is a really unique time for a creative because our entire world changed in less than 48 hours.

Emily Gartner 18:02

Yeah.

Tory Schendel Cox 18:03

How do you work with social distancing? How do you work with the digitization of our field?

Emily Gartner 18:09

So. Well, yes. I mean, it was like the mad rush for everybody, Oh, I got to get my Etsy site up. I've, I've been meaning to do that, or, you know, whatever, whatever it was that they were wanting to do, or, you know, work on editing an archive of photographs that they haven't visited in a while. And I mean, I haven't done online classes at all. And I'm thinking, "Okay, I'm gonna try that. Gonna see how that goes." And, as you can tell, I'm not used to Zoom either by, by our little startup there, but, you know, we, we managed to find out, and we talked to friends and asked them, you know, for little tips to see how we can do better. So, it's, it's really, it, it's really good. The creative things that I've seen happen, just like the Berkley School of Music, with their concert, that was pretty amazing, numerous things. So, you know, I've really tuned down a lot of negative, I'm not watching a whole lot of TV; I'm watching a PBS at night to get some of my information. And I think too, that you just have to know how to quiet your soul. And that's very helpful too. And not every day do I know how to do that. [laughing]

Tory Schendel Cox 19:50

[laughing] Wise words.

Emily Gartner 19:54

But you just, you know, start all over again and try again, and it's fine. It's been really great too because the Indiana Arts Commission, their staff has, I mean, really been called to duty; there are 30,000 artists

here in Indianapolis, which includes nonprofits as well as artists, and when I say artists I mean musicians, performing arts, the whole gamut. But they have been offering webinars twice a week and on Monday afternoons are financial webinars and then Wednesdays are just kind of subjects that are coming up like what did that stimulus act mean, what is a link for pandemic unemployment, it's the same as regular unemployment, and it's all jammed up right now. So you're thinking, "oh good, it's not just me. This is, this is what's going on with all the other artists too." You're allowed to kind of, as any webinar, you know asks questions ahead of time so the panel if they have time and can get around to it can answer your question while, while they're presenting. So that, that's been really grounding too because it's so specific for the arts, and I would encourage anybody, an Evansville artist or in the state of Indiana who will be viewing this, to go check out Indiana Arts Commission website if they're looking for very specific questions. I can almost guarantee you there'll be a link online, that will help you out. And if there's not, you know, they'll find an answer for you so that's been really, really good too.

Tory Schendel Cox 21:52

No, absolutely. Definitely appreciate all the work that the Indiana Arts Commission does year in and year out [inaudible] for the community for obvious reasons, nonprofit artists and everything in between. So definitely grateful for them, but is there anything else you'd like to share with our viewers?

Emily Gartner 22:12

Um, I miss home, but a lot of people have said, "oh my gosh, how are you doing?" And, and I do miss home, I miss friends and family there, I miss people in the Haynie's Corner Arts District that were my neighbors, but I did live on the east coast for 25 years, so it's like, I'm okay, I'm good. And I do have a really nice neighborhood here, and it's a great place to walk every night when the weather's permitting, so I'm just grateful for even the small things right now. And that's where I'm at today, check in another time, it might be a different story, but that's, that's how, that's how I'm currently managing. Doing these surgical gowns, and I will some ask for people too because I know that that is going to, a lot of people are already starting to ask, "will you please do that?" and I will definitely do that so just to put people's mind's at ease. If they need to have that, I would be willing to do that.

Tory Schendel Cox 23:25

I mean I definitely appreciate it; it's been so insightful speaking with you and we're definitely-

Emily Gartner 23:29

Thank you.

Tory Schendel Cox 23:30

-excited to see the continual good work that you're doing, and then once this is over, I can't wait to start seeing your artwork again.

Emily Gartner 23:36

Well, I have some older artwork at artthreadsstudio.com. I think it's whatever is in current inventory and some new pieces, and I'll be adding a few new things, there's not a whole lot on there, but there is some things on there. I had planned to, soon, work on an Indianapolis series, like I had done in Evansville. Some stained glass domes in Indianapolis which would be fun umbrellas and scarves so that's probably what my next collection will be.

Tory Schendel Cox 24:21

Wow, definitely looking forward to it, but we definitely appreciate your time and look forward to seeing more. We will visit your website, but please don't be a stranger

Emily Gartner 24:31

I definitely will not, and thanks for having me, and tell Mary I said hi and Liz and Comet and the rest of the gang over there, and I hope to see you all real soon

Tory Schendel Cox 24:44

Absolutely. Well, this is the Evansville Museum recording, and we definitely hope to see you soon, so bye for now

Emily Gartner 24:49

Thank you, bye bye.