

BETTY HAHN: In Conversation with Collective Constructs



Betty Hahn (LEFT) sits with Collective Constructs member and UNM MFA Candidate, Francis Reynolds (RIGHT.)



UNMAM Curator Angel Jiang displays a print by Hahn to a group of visiting students.

Episode Description:

Artist **Betty Hahn** has never taken the conventions of photography for granted. Her playful work often combines photography with other craft and fine art media, including embroidery and printmaking. A prolific creator, Hahn was also a photography professor at the University of New Mexico from 1975 - 1997 and continues to exhibit her work nationally and internationally. Collective Constructs had the privilege of visiting Hahn in her studio in Albuquerque, where she generously shared her thoughts on her work, her current practice, and the lessons she learned from decades of teaching.



Landscapes with Cloud Variations #3-5 (1987) by Betty Hahn, on display in Hindsight/Insight 2.0.

Click here to listen to the full episode on *HERE TO INSPIRE: UNM Art Museum Journal*

LEARNING ENGAGEMENT:

Think-Pair-Share Questions

Betty Hahn talks about her process as an artist. After listening, use the prompts below to form your own individual ideas, then discuss them with a partner and share with the class.

What is the significance of what Betty refers to as “form vs. content” and “picture space”?
What does “pure photography” attempt to do? Do experimental elements of play and manipulation distort truth or reality?

Writing Prompts

The history of photography carries powerful narratives that shape a nation’s view of itself and its history. Consider the following prompts to respond in writing:

Think critically about the US origin-story. What is it? Most people’s understanding of “America” is founded upon myth-like origin stories that include visual representations and songs about “freedom,” the land and the sea. These origin stories are central to “American identity.” With this in mind, consider how America is represented in landscape photography. How do histories of landscape photography shape and sustain America’s origin story?

Building-Critical-Awareness Discussion Questions

Hahn started embroidering on photographs in 1970. Her grandmother taught her to sew as a child. The devaluation of women’s work was certainly something she was aware of as a young artist. Her example of devaluation is from a personal experience with seeing the log cabin quilt pattern. With the example of quilting patterns in mind, identify other gendered roles in society (like sewing) and describe how this looks in art. In what ways has it been overlooked? How has it been used to invent, create, sustain, compromise, overpower, and survive?

Learning & Exploration Activities

Collaboration project: Work in pairs or groups of three. Agree on a topic, color, subject or landscape. Make a piece together that follows what Betty Hahn says: “Make it so the collaborators’ work shows up” ... “try to make it so that we both look like ourselves.”

Break down the photographic look of a snapshot or found portrait.

Titles as an inspiration. Start off with a title you find on the internet or in a book, and make a picture from that title.

Betty Hahn uses several terms to explain her art practice in the interview. Choose one of the terms listed below and define it using an illustration or by making a picture:

Cloud Negative, Picture Space, Repetition.