
Interviewer: Ben Freeman

Interviewee: Lisa Melmed

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Summary: In this interview, Lisa Melmed describes her work as a teaching artist with Urban Pond Procession, touching on UPP's partnerships with Providence CityArts and several schools in the area surrounding Mashapaug Pond – including Reservoir Elementary, Highlander Charter School, and Community Preparatory School. She reflects on the changes she has observed within her tenure, explains what role UPP may play within larger remediation and community revitalization efforts, as well as larger social and political contexts.

Ben Freeman: All right, my name is Ben Freeman. I'm sitting here with Lisa Melmed – is that how you pronounce it?

Lisa Melmed: Mm-hmm.

BF: Great. Um. And we are sitting in the first floor of the John Nicholas Brown Center. It is Tuesday, March 19, 2013 – amazing that I could remember that – um, it's 10:30 AM, um and Lisa, I'm going to ask you to introduce yourself.

LM: My name is Lisa Melmed, and I'm a teaching artist in Providence, Rhode Island. And my relationship with Mashapaug Pond is that I've been a teaching artist with the Urban Pond Procession for the last few years, starting in 2010 – early two-thousand – yeah. Winter 2010.

BF: Great. Um. Can you describe for me what your work with the Urban Pond Procession looks like, um, as well as what the organization is, as you see it – what are the mission? What are the values? That kind of stuff.

LM: Mm-hmm. The Urban Pond Pond Procession is a group of volunteers and artists and scientists and community members who bring awareness to the ponds – a lot of people don't know about Mashapaug Pond, even though I believe it's the largest natural pond in Providence. Um, even kids and people who live right near the pond – am I talking loud enough?

BF: Yeah.

LM: Okay. Um. And we do workshops and – for the community – and in schools to raise awareness about the ponds, and also to create props for the annual Urban Pond Procession, which is a parade that happens, um, every year. This year it will be on June 1st. *[coughs]* Excuse me. On Saturday, June 1st. Um. I could continue.

BF: And –

LM: Yeah?

BF: In, um, terms of your work specifically – do you work mostly in schools, do you work – or, or you sort of – you mentioned that there were in-school workshops, and then also ones that happen elsewhere in the community? What's – what's the deal with those?

LF: So this year my roles are, um I'm co-fac – co-facilitating the public workshops with another teaching artist named Juliet Cassolin, and she also teaches at CityArts. Um. And so we're – the public, for the public workshops we're leading kite-making – um – workshops. At local events. We just – we had one at the Roger Williams Botanical Center for the Southside Community Land Trust Urban Kick-off event. And kids came and made kites, and we're also doing some – um – what are they called? –

wind socks as well. And – so we’re doing it at different community locations, libraries and parks and also events in the community. Um. And then in – in addition to the public workshops I am involved in the schools this year, um, co-teaching a project at Reservoir Elementary. And we went into the fourth-grade classrooms. Um. I went with – or, I’m co-teaching it with Sean G – sorry, Sean King, a landscape architect. And we are working with the kids to come up with a design for – to use – to use this space behind their school that the principal calls the Dust Bowl. And initially the school was thinking about paving it over and turning it into a basketball court, um, but we’re bringing in some other options and working with the kids to come up with a creative idea that is sensitive to stormwater and thinking about where the water goes, and so it might include a rain garden, it might include some kind of play structure, or musical component. We’re still in the early phases of that. And every year – uh – the Urban Pond Procession has – or, for the last few years there’s been a certain theme or focus for the year, and this year the focus is on storm water, and last year the focus was on the legacy of Gorham Silver, who had their – they had their factories right on Mashapaug Pond, as I’m sure you know –

[4:58]

[continued] – and then the year before that the focus was on the Narragansett legacy, and life around the pond. *[to interviewer, re: mic position]* Am I too close, or too far?

BF: Um. You were a little too close / just a second ago, but in general it sounds really good.

LM: / Okay. Good. Okay.

BF: Um. Cool. So tell me about how you came to be involved, uh, with Urban Pond Procession, um, as well as to what extent you yourself maybe were or were not aware of the pond prior to that.

LM: Yeah. Um. As an AmeriCorps member at Highlander, we – uh – part of our role was to help out with the CityArts spring break camp, and we – the focus of that camp was, um, on environmental awareness. So it happened to fall at the same time as Earth Day, I believe. Um. So I was thinking about different projects that we could do with the kids that week, and then about the same time I noticed on – which doesn’t exist anymore – the, uh – what was it called? – the Community Engagement Bulletin for RISD? Um. They used to have these emails that went out every week. Um. And that doesn’t – or maybe it was the Public Engagement? I forget what it was called, but it doesn’t exist – they, they did some shifting at RISD. Um. But I noticed a workshop that was going to be happening that was about the Urban Pond Procession, and specifically about making flags. Um. And – yeah, and I had never heard of Mashapaug Pond, or the Urban Pond Procession, but I went because it sounded really interesting, because it incorporated arts and the community and the environment, all things that I was interested in. So – um. So I went and then I – for

that ca – that week-long camp, um, we made flags for the parade, and we also made fish costumes out of cardboard. And we made some rain sticks. We did a lot. It was pretty packed, and it was a lot of fun. And then I continued to make fish costumes at Highlander in the after-school program, and I also was volunteering at English for Action that year, so we did a flag-making workshop there. Um. And we also did a – a very large workshop with the entire Highlander after-school, um for – from K-8. So there was one Friday when everybody did something for the UPP. And that was my involvement for that year, and then the following year was really my highlight, um, of my experience with the UPP, because it just so happened that my, uh, fellow AmeriCorps member at Nathan Bishop was a drummer, Chris Lee. And we decided to co-teach a after-school program called Build Upp The Beat – Build U-P-P The Beat – and the – that year the focus was on the Narragansetts and their resourcefulness and the way they lived along the pond, so we created – the kids created instruments with buckets and different household and recycled materials. And Chris taught them some amazing arrangements, and it was a real band, and it was so exciting. It was a lot of fun.

BF: That's amazing.

LM: Yeah.

BF: That's really, really cool.

LM: Yeah.

BF: Um. Uh. Oops – *[re: flipping a page in notebook]* now, I always forget that that's going to make a sound. Um. So maybe I'd be curious to hear more about your, uh – you mentioned that, that there was sort of this intersection of arts, the community, community engagement, and environmental concerns – or environmentalism, if you want to use that word – um, I'd – I'd love to hear maybe more about, like, your background there and sort of what the environment has meant to you in your life, and where that comes from for you.

LM: Yeah. Hmm. Well – I never really took any environmental classes – like, environmental science classes growing up. Um. I always wish that I had. But I always loved being outside, uh, being in my backyard growing up. The birds, and the chipmunks, and – um. Yeah, I always loved animals and plants, and –

[10:00]

[continued] – so I always had that love for nature and the environ – the environment, and this – this particular project spoke to that, and also to the – the ability to make a difference, and – and bring more people outside, and to – to create a – to make efforts towards creating a space that can be used for outdoor recreation and appreciation.

BF: Um. And you mentioned earlier, uh, that there was sort of this coalition of community members, artists, scientists, that are all involved with Urban Pond Procession, um, and I guess I'd be curious – um, you spoke a little bit earlier about storm water – Um. Uh, you know, some of those things maybe a scientist would have a fuller understanding of exactly what's going on. Um, but – but maybe not – so I guess I'd curious to know, like, how do you feel about the science of the – of what's going on at the pond –

LM: Yeah –

BF: – Do you feel that you grasp it, is it important for you to grasp it in order to do your work? All that kind of stuff.

LM: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I feel like – I – I don't feel like I fully understand it as much as I would like to. Um. But I'm really thankful that we – within this community there are these scientists, um, and environmental educators who have been a part of it, so for example last week we had Will York come in to Reservoir, and he gave a presentation on storm water to the kids, and that was – that was helpful for me as well. And the kids – they did an experiment where they had different, um, objects and, um, materials in a cup – like, in different cups, um – like stones, and a sponge, and rocks, and they – they were looking at impervious surfaces. And, um – so that's been helpful. And also Amelia Rose from the Environmental Justice League has been really helpful, so it's been really interesting for me to – to work alongside people with the scientific knowledge and – and background. Um. To help me understand it.

BF: Um. Yeah, I can imagine. And, I, uh – um. What did I want to ask you? It was in my head, it just went out of my head again. Um. Well, that one's gone. That's okay.

LM: Yeah. And from what I understand, this – this isn't an expert's view, but the – the importance of the storm water issue this year's, the reason we are addressing it is because, um, storm drain run-off is a major, um, factor in the blue-green algae blooms on the pond, and I have been to the pond multiple times, um, I believe it's, like late summer, early fall, when it gets really green, and just – doesn't look good. And they have signs around the pond, saying that – you know, talking about the toxic, uh, toxic algae, and how – and I know how storm drain – storm – storm – bah. Uh. How runoff from, um, fertilizers and other – other sources can contribute to that.

BF: Um. Now, now we've touched a little bit on the science, um, which – and, and, and we're – I think we're in – we're in a similar place in terms of – we both understand, um, the basics of things, um, and it's nice – but it is nice to have scientists' voices, absolutely. Um. I'm curious, like, what – and this is sort of a philosophical question, but, like what can art do? Like, what is the purpose of art, um, in bringing a community together? How do you know it's working, if it's working? Any thoughts you have on those ideas.

LM: Yeah. I believe that art is a way for people to understand these, these issues. If they're creating something, they're experiencing it in a way that – that can increase their understanding. And, um, art can draw – bring awareness to the situation at the pond. Um. By having kids walking down the street, and the whole community walking down the street with artistic creations can, um –

[15:00]

[continued] – can open people's eyes to the pond, that a lot of people don't even know that it's there, and, um if they know that it's there, then they – and they know the situation there – then there's more capacity to make a difference there, and make some changes. But if nobody knows about it, then nobody can enjoy it. And also – um – it's also dangerous if, if people don't know the situation there, and then they just go and – the – you know, go in the water or go fishing and eat the fish.

BF: Um. Have you been, uh, involved in any sort of direct advocacy efforts, whether through, you know, petitioning someone at City Hall, or working with someone in – in a higher-up position anywhere – Um. Has that been part of your experience at all?

LM: Uh – no. / I, unfort – Uh. I would like to! Yeah. Yeah. Um.

BF: / Do you have any desire to?

BF: Um. / Are there – well, what were you going to say? //

LM: / Um. // Uh – I don't remember.

BF: Um. Do you – uh – I guess sort of something that – that I'm always curious about when it comes to this area and this particular issue is, is I've heard interviews with folks that, that are from the area that say, like, "Yeah, like, I really care about these environmental concerns and these political concerns, and I want to get involved." And then some people that will say, like, "I don't know, like, it's a nice pond, and, like, yeah, it's a bummer that it's polluted, but I don't really want to get involved." Um. Do you have at all with – with maybe, with your students or with other folks in the community, um – do people want to get involved? Do they just want to enjoy the pond but don't want to have to deal with the actual work to get there? Do you know what I'm asking?

LM: I think they do want to get involved. Yeah. As they – they learn about it, they want to know more, and they want to see what they can do to make changes.

BF: Cool. Um. And what kind of stuff – I mean, from – from what you're aware of, whether through other people that have done it, um, or what you might like to get involved with, what are those kinds of steps that, that might be taken to – to allow change to happen? What sorts of things?

LM: Um. I'm not sure, specifically, / exactly, I feel like –

BF: / Sure.

LM: I don't know the exact – yeah, / I don't know. Yeah.

BF: / The exact steps. Sure.

LM: But I do know that – um – I believe that, I feel like Amelia would be the best person to talk to about this, but I know that there was a law that I believe was passed recently regarding schools being built on grounds that have any kind of toxic, uh, situation, and regardless of the ability to – to engineer a system that would, like, cleanse the air or prevent vapors, um, within the build – the school, um and the law was passed, I believe, after Alvarez High School was built on the Gorham site? But I believe that they're currently trying to build a school, um, in either Pawtucket or Cumberland that – that, um, is maybe not quite the same situation, but it's similar, and some people are trying to bypass that law. So I know that that's a situation; it doesn't have – specifically have to do with Mashapaug. Um. And – yeah.

BF: Related, obviously. I – I didn't know about that; that's curious. Um – [unintelligible] – um. Something that, uh, [unintelligible] something that I have found interesting in listening to interviews is, um, uh, is, is people saying, "Oh, uh, you know – we – I – I'd love, I'd love for Mashapaug Pond to be sort of a community asset again, or something that people really could enjoy, and this kind of stuff – and, and I'm curious: like, what does that look like, when you imagine it? Like, what – if, if we could really revitalize and remediate Mashapaug Pond and the surrounding area, like what would that be? What do you imagine? What do you dream?"

LM: Yeah. Well, often when I go into schools or, yeah, usually when I go into schools the first thing I ask kids is "What – what do you guys envision for an ideal park or pond?" and they all talk about swimming and boating. Um. And also – I'm thinking of this, this park in Pawtuxet Village, which is, um, part of the watershed but up a little bit, and I – I remember going there with some Save The Bay kids over the summer – last summer –

[20:08]

[continued] – and there were these artists there, painting watercolors, and the kids were so amazed by that, and it was just a beautiful, beautiful spot. It was called Ay – Ayres – uh, I forget, it starts with an A. Um. But it was just so beautiful, and, like, green space. And a lot of these kids don't have much green space. In their community. So.

BF: Do the students that you work with at schools end up marching in the procession?

LM: Mm-hmm. Yeah, we try to get as many of the kids to come as possible.

BF: How do they feel about that? Do they like it?

LM: Yeah, they love it. I mean, some of them get tired, especially the year we were carrying those – some of the instruments were a little heavy. Um. This year the route will be a little bit shorter, but they're really excited. And in some of the reflections we did after the procession, the kids were like, "We were amazed how many people care about this pond, and how we felt like we were – were making a difference," and – and how they were – they loved going to the pond and seeing how beautiful it was. Um.

BF: That's amazing.

LM: Yeah.

BF: Um. That's really, really cool. Uh, where – so, in years past, where has – what has the route of the procession been, and sort of what has that whole day looked like? In the past.

LM: In the past it started at the Boat House, behind Ocean State Job Lot, at Mashapaug Pond. And it's kind of, like, nobody would know to go back there, so – I'm assume – I'm assuming you've gone – there, we're thinking about, um, somebody had the idea of painting a mural behind – behind the Job Lot, with a map that says "You are here," and, with a big arrow, so we're – we're hoping that that happens this summer. Um. But traditionally the procession starts there, and then we go and wind through the neighborhood, um, past the Liberty Elm Diner, which sadly had to close down recently. Um. And usually that's been a really big highlight, um, dancing behind the Liberty Elm with Big Nazo puppets and the bands playing and – yeah, that's like a little dance party back there, and then we continue on to Roger Williams Park and end at the Temple to Music. And it's always been really beautiful to end there and have – there's food, and, um, performances, and speakers. Right on the – at the Temple.

BF: Um. Now, speaking of this network of ponds, including Mashapaug, and Spectacle, and Tongue Pond, and then the Roger Williams Ponds. Um. Do you – uh – uh – ha – do you feel that your work has been centered on Mashapaug specifically, or do you sort of speak to those other ponds – are - are the other ponds as important in your personal work life? Do they – do they have an impact on what you do? Or do you feel it's all centered on Mashapaug?

LM: I think more – the majority of it is centered on Mashapaug, but we do, um, talk about how it's all part of the same watershed, and often people don't know about Mashapaug but they do – almost all of them know about the Roger Williams Park Ponds. And so often – with groups, like, of kids, I'll say, "Raise your hand if you've been to Roger Williams Park Pond," and they'll all raise their hand and say what

they enjoy doing there, and then I'll talk about Mashapaug and how its – its waters go directly into Roger Williams Park Pond. Um. And then we like to have maps, showing that – that, that they're part of the same watershed and that the waters are connected. And I know Holly has been thinking about ways to address the water in, um, Roger Williams Park Ponds, specifically also, um, thinking about the – the goose poop issue. And creating some kind of, like, woven fence –

BF: *[giggling]*

LM: *[continued]* – to, like, prevent the geese from getting into the water, and so to prevent them from – from being there.

BF: Okay. Um.

LM: Which contributes to, um – higher levels of nitrogen, I believe, in the water.

BF: Cool. That's – I was going to ask, I was wondering what exactly the goose poop issue was.

LM: Yeah.

BF: **Um.** Well, that's a problem. Uh. That's funny. Um. I'm curious, uh, whether in your three years working with Urban Pond Procession, um, and and sort of working intensively in that community –

[25:02]

[continued] – um, to what extent you've seen changes in the last three years, or what – yeah. To what extent you've seen changes, and what they have been, if any?

LM: Well, I know that they're – um – working on restoring the ponds and creating a park along the border, and they're in the process of that. Um. And I also – in terms of the – the benefit to the community, I've just seen the – the benefit to kids, um, just the benefit of the experience for the kids. Uh. And seeing – and the fact that it's a project that they can be involved with, and – and feel empowered by, and see the power of – of their voice, in art. Art in the community. And also I've – I mean, I've seen, like, the photographs of the signs that Holly created, um, as comp – or, I've sign the signs as cre – as compared to the original signs, and, um, I have met kids whose – whose families do fish in the pond, and they didn't – and they eat the fish, and they didn't realize that they shouldn't do that.

BF: Wow. That's huge. Um. Yeah, I guess I'd be curious – um – I'd be curious, uh, with the students that you've worked with, um – to what extent there are stories like that. Um.

LM: Yeah.

BF: Uh. Yeah. Because – we’ve, we’ve talked before – and a lot of people have talked about this, like, “Oh no-one knows that Mashapaug Pond exists,” but some people / do, obviously, and some people have issues like that. Do you find that that’s widespread? //

LM: / Yeah. Yeah. // Um. I’ve met a few. I think the majority don’t know about it, and then the people who live, like, right next to it obviously know about it, and, um. I think the c – the, uh, percentage of the community that live right around it and in Reservoir Triangle that understand what’s going on there has increased a lot in the last few years. And, um, Amelia has done some really great work with them, to – and the Urban Pond Procession – to sort of build that community and, and, um, invite them to meetings with representatives from, from Textron and – from the city, and to, to assess what’s going on with that.

BF: Do you feel that the movement is growing? / Does it seem like it’s gaining momentum?

LM: / Yeah. Yeah.

BF: Cool.

LM: Mm-hmm.

BF: Um. I may have sort of already asked a question like this, but – but on that line, of the movement is growing and gaining momentum, like, what may be next? Or what could be – what’s in the future for Urban Pond Procession, do you think?

LM: Um. Well, I think, implementing change is – is the next step. Really making sure that it happens, like what you were saying with the – I don’t know exact – specifically, like, what some of the steps are, but that – that’s needs to happen now, that we’re getting people to – to know about it, we are now, I think, at the point where we need to – to take action, to really make thing – make a difference, physically, in the pond. And these designs that the kids are making, like at Reservoir, um. And also I’m going to be working – I forgot to mention – but my – some of my CityArts kids in the spring are going to be making animations for the traveling bus exhibit, that will also be part of the procession. Um. I forget – after – what was I saying before that? / Um.

BF: Um. “Implementing change.”

LM: Yeah. Um. Oh, and – with Reservoir they’re going to come up with these designs, but next year would be the time that, like, that project would be – would come into reality. Um. And I think that this year we’re bringing the focus back onto Mashapaug specifically by changing the route of the procession –

[30:07]

[continued] – um. I believe it's going to start at Adelaide High School and then stop at Reservoir Elementary to see the – some of the work there, as well, and to – and we're going to go through Murphy Trainor Park, um, and end up at – at J.T. Owens Ball Park, I believe. So I think that change will – will be really great, as well.

BF: Um. What was I going to ask you? – Oh. I remember. So, um. Obviously – so you, you were talking a long time ago about kite-making and wind socks, um, which seems, at least, uh, sort of afiel from, from your major in illustration, right – you were saying illustration is what you were concentrating in? Um. So I guess I wonder, um, to what extent has illustration played a role in, in your work with Urban Pond Procession, and, uh – it s – like there seems to be, like, a really, really cool illustration community in Providence – like, there seems, like, I've seen a lot with – with, um – silk-screening, in particular, is really amazing stuff. Um. I just would be curious to know, like, how your particular medium and areas of interest have influenced what you do.

LM: Yeah. Well, I'm really more of a painter than an illustrator, even though I majored in illustration. Um. And I have gone to the pond by myself and just painted, and that's been really rewarding. Um. And I think that – that experi – experience with – as a painter, and that, that part of me, has, has helped with – with, even though, um – I believe that it's helped with working with kids, just in that, that way of looking at the world, and, um, thinking about color and form and materials. Um. Yeah.

BF: Uh. Say a little more about that, I think / - [untintelligible] I, I love the thought, "the, the way of looking at the world," um, what painting may bring – and, and I guess I'd, I'd be curious to know, um – in, like, in your workshops with students, what kinds of things are you hoping they take away? What sorts of objectives are there? Um. Yeah. Any of those kinds of questions. //

LM: / Yeah. // Yeah. Um. Well, one objective is to learn the – the power of, of art – uh, of public art – and that art can, can draw attention to something and can make change. And – and also the power of creating something with your hands, and – and, um, observing and connecting art – art-making with place. I think that that's really meaningful. Um. And to see the power of transformation, whether it's the transformation of your materials, or the – and the transformation of a community. Um. And the connection of place to art-making through the choice of materials, as well.

BF: Um. What kind of materials have been impactful for you – and I loved that thing of making, um, instruments out of buckets and things like that. Are there other materials that have been really important for you in this work?

LM: Um. Well, we've done things with shells – well, I personally like to paint on shells, just because I really like the smooth white surface as a ground for painting, and, um, what else? I mean, the – the kids at Sophia Academy, when they worked with – with Holly and Paul Sharf, they used sticks collected at the pond to create their, uh, like bottles with little bottlecaps nailed into the sticks. Um. Yeah.

BF: Um. You spoke, uh – a minute ago about the connection between art-making and place. And – and I, I guess one thing I don't think I've really asked you but I'd – be – love to know is, like, what does this place mean to you? What, what has Mashapaug come to mean in your life, um, both just in and of itself, but then also as a – as sort of a precursor to making art?

[35:14]

LM: Well, it's a really beautiful place, and I found it inspiring, and it's meaningful to me because it's been the center of this community and, um, source of – of art-making. I feel like I'm not making any sense.

BF: No, you are.

LM: Okay.

BF: You absolutely are.

LM: Uh. Yeah. It – Mashapaug Pond also means to me – or it's meaningful to me because of the people that I've met through my involvement with it, and the – the experiences that I've had. They've been really wonderful and meaningful to me. So it's beyond just the fact that it's a beautiful pond, and – and it needs – it has some needs that need to be addressed. It's allowed for me to connect with other artists and other people in the community in a wonderful way.

BF: Um. Are there particular, uh, people that have been particularly impactful for you? I mean, I know you mentioned at one point Amelia Rose being someone that, that was – someone who was prominent in your mind. Who else is [untelligible]?

LM: Well, yeah, um, Holly Ewald – the, the founder – has been really great, a really great mentor for me. And I – and a lot of people, I mean. Janice Choi, and, uh, a lot of the circles are overlapping, like with City Arts and other organizations that I'm involved with. Um, and working with Chris Lee, the drummer, was – was a wonderful experience. Um. Yeah. Anna Meyers. I – I could go on. The whole – the whole group.

BF: Yeah. Um. So, this is sort of going in a different direction for a second, but, um. When you – so you grew up in, in West Hartford. Um. And, uh, when you came to Providence, um, do you remember, uh, if you had any expectation that you would end up staying, um, afterwards, slash the other part of the question is, like, do you

feel that you're here for a long time? Do you feel like you might be going elsewhere? How are you feeling?

LM: Um. Yeah, I had no idea what I would do afterwards or where I would be. I never really – I never thought about staying specifically until towards the end when I felt like I was starting to make connections in Providence, and feel like those connections have grown and deepened, and, um, so it does make it kind of hard to leave, because I feel like I have a lot of great roots and connections here now. Um. But I'm still open to – to trying new places, too. But I'll – it'll always be in my heart, no matter what.

BF: Yeah.

LM: Yeah.

BF: Um. Are there, uh – this is a huge question, so it might not make any – you might not be able to answer – but are there, like, particular memories, particular stories, um, that have happened at the pond or in a workshop that, just, when someone says "Mashapaug Pond" you go, "Oh, that story. It's so – whatever, you know – it's so funny, or it's so meaningful to me, or whatever." Take a second to think, but –

LM: Yeah.

BF: Um.

LM: Well, when I think about it I – I think about our Build UPP The Beat program and how much fun that was, and I think about those kids, and – and I remember our first field trip to the pond. And we were really quiet for about a minute, just listening – and then I remember, um, the kids, like, touching the, you know, the leaves and the sticks, and then I remember it started to snow, because I guess it was – I guess it was in March, when we went. Um. About now, actually. And it just snowed! Um. And as it was snowing we – we had brought some of our instruments, and, uh, the kids started running in a circle with the instruments and chanting, "Save the pond! Save the pond!"

[40:10]

[continued] And, uh, they were just having fun, and it was snowing, and – yeah. It was really – it was a fun moment. Um. And the – I think about that feeling after the procession that year, of – and being on the bus with the kids, and – and how proud they were, of becoming a band, and – and playing together. Yeah.

BF: That's pretty marvelous. Yeah, I've – I've found in my experiences at the pond, as well, I've had, um – I, I often have that thing where I, I stand and I listen first. Which – it's funny to me that you mentioned that, because that's been my experience almost every time I've been. Um. You've spoken, uh, about different, um, partner

organizations, um, or – or this sense of overlapping circles, between CityArts and Urban Pond, and, and – um. I guess I'm curious, like, who – who are partners for the Urban Pond Procession, um, that exist now? Also who are other p – people, organizations, institutions, that might – that there – that there might be mutually beneficial things that haven't sprouted up yet? Do you have a sense of any of those things?

LM: Um. Well, there have been a lot of partnerships with schools that have been wonderful. Um. Sophia Academy, and – uh – Community Prep, and Reservoir Elementary. The principal there is wonderful and really interested in the project, and very supportive, as well as the parents and the teachers. Um. And Alvarez – we're working with Alvarez now. Um. And I believe – yeah, Holly started working with Alvarez initially, when she founded the Urban Pond Procession. Um. And CityArts, um, mostly because I work there as well and I've just been like – connecting my projects, and bringing in other teaching artists as well. Um. And the Providence After School Alliance, um, when I worked with them I brought in the Urban Pond Procession content. Um. And I was at Nathan Bishop Middle School, and, um, Gilbert Stuart Middle School when I – when I did that. Um. And obviously Brown University has added a – another element to – to it, um, yeah, and we're – we're trying to – to partner with more organizations right at the pond. Because that's – that's the most meaningful, and we've – we've started to build a partnership with, um, Renaissance Church has allowed us to use their space, which is beautiful, and it's right there on the pond, so that's wonderful. Um. We have to talk to Ocean State Job Lot to see if we can paint a mural beh – in back of that. I think we've – we've gotten donations from them in the past. Yeah, but there's a long list of – of places. And – and organizations.

BF: Oh, no. My questions went away again, I had it in my head a second ago.

LM: Oops.

BF: Um. Oh, that's the worst. Uh – oh! I do know, I remember. Um. So – this is just a, a point of clarity for me, because I don't know the inner workings, but, um – so, when you say that there's – there's this community of folks that are all involved with the Urban Pond Procession and that's a really vital community and you feel that you know everyone – um. Uh. Is that – how – how does that community come together? Because it seems if you guys are all teaching in your separate workshops, / in separate schools, you might not know so much about each other. So how do you come together, and what does that look like? Um. Obviously there's the procession itself, // but –

LM: / Yeah. Yeah. // Right. Um. Often we have meetings at the Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island, or at other locations. Um. Usually there's food involved. That's a big factor. And – yeah, so there are – there are meetings, it – as it started to grow and branch out, we – we realized that not everybody – like, it just became difficult to have those, those regular meetings, because as – you know – more and

more people became involved it's become a little bit of a challenge figuring out how to – how to work it.

[45:13]

Um. So we had the – a Mashapaug Meet-UPP – with a U-P-P – um, recently, for – to bring together everyone who's involved. And we did the, uh, Renaissance Church. Um, and then there's a small corps of people, which I'm a part of, who, who meet – who've been meeting regularly. We met last night. Um. And we're sort of, like, representatives of different projects, as well. So not everyone who's helping is – has to come. I mean, we would – we would love everyone to come together, but it's just, like, it can become tedious to go through, um, logistically, to go through everything and have everyone together, all the time. So we've been sort of making sub-groups and then having representatives come together.

BF: Do students, um, or families ever come to those meetings?

LM: Yeah, we did have some parents come to the – the Mashapaug Meet-UPP recently. And, um – we haven't had students come to the meeting. I never really thought about that, and – we've sort of, like, represented them at the meeting, but that would be interesting. An interesting idea. Yeah.

BF: Yeah. I mean, I – I wonder if there might be space for that. / We – we've talked a lot in this class about, I mean, this format is also such an individualized, isolated thing – and yet, like, we're making a community of people, um, or – or speaking to a community of people, and so, like, what are ways for people to actually interact in real time and space? // I wonder.

LM: / Yeah. Yeah. // Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I like that. We'd have to – it's, it's – we'd have to think about, I mean, just a time when people could do it, when – you know – cause usually we meet in the evening, the kids wouldn't be able to come, but I'm sure that there's a way that we could do it on a weekend. I like that idea.

BF: Cool.

LM: Yeah.

BF: New ideas happen every day. Um. I'm – yeah, I'm mostly at the end of my questions. I wonder if there are things, um, you feel that you haven't said that you'd like to say, quest – um, questions that you weren't asked that you think you should be asked? I mean, I don't – that's a weird thing, but, um – are there points, are there sort of avenues we haven't gone down yet that you'd be curious to talk about?

LM: Hmm. Nothing's jumping out at me.

BF: Okay.

LM: Yeah.

BF: Um. Maybe I have – I have one other thing, which may or may not be fruitful. Um. Do you have a sense of, um, this project – uh, Urban Pond Procession and, and the ongoing remediation efforts at, at Mashapaug Pond – do you have, um, a sense of – oh, what am I trying to say? – like, the, the larger scale of those things, um, in the sense of, like, public art *in general*, or environmental art *in general*, or environmental remediation *in general*. Do you have a sense of if you guys are playing a role in that? Do you feel aligned with any larger ideas or larger movements? Um. Would you like to feel aligned, if you don't? Any – does any of that / – fruitful for you?

LM: / Yeah. Yeah. Um. It was really wonderful – I went with Holly and Janice to, um, the New England Consortiun – Consortium of Artist Educator Professionals conference in New Hampshire. Um. It was called, "Meet Me at the River." And we ran a workshop called, "Artists as Steward – Stewards of Place." Uh, and we presented our work with the Urban Pond Procession. And that was really great, to meet other artists and community members who were – who were like-minded and doing similar things, and how – how our project could serve as a role model for – for other locations and other, other similar projects. Um. Yeah. And there was a – another workshop that I went to in the afternoon. I don't remember what it was called specifically, but I remember learning about other, um, installation artists and, um, [unintelligible] specifically a female natural installation type of thing, so – I learned about, like, women who were using natural objects to create outdoor installations, and that was interesting.

[50:15]

[continued] Yeah.

BF: Um. "Stewards of place" is sort of, like, a really arresting phrase. I mean, tell me more about that phrase; / that's an awe – that's an awesome phrase. "Stewards of place." What does that mean to you? //

LM: / Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. // Well, it's about taking care of – taking care of a place, and – and giving it a voice. Yeah. So we had, um, we had different objects and images of different types of locations set up around the room at that workshop. Like, we had a little beach area with some shells and sand and little [unintelligible] and then a river area and a mountain area and forest, woodsy area, and, like, a grassland area and a swampy area, and we had people go around the room and write down pla – meaningful places to them that they thought of when they encountered these objects and, and places, and then they shared – and then it served as a workshop for them, to – to think about how they could, could serve – become stewards of some of the places that were meaningful to them. Um. After sharing our work with Mashapaug Pond, as well.

BF: Awesome.

LM: Yeah.

BF: Um. Great. Do you have any last thoughts? Cool. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me – I really appreciate, um, your time and your energy and I am super excited, actually, genuinely, to sit down and transcribe this interview because I think there are a lot of really fascinating things. Um. So. I'm going to – oh, actually you know what I'm supposed to do now? Can we actually – this is going to be fun – can we take, like 30 seconds, and we'll sit in silence so we can record just the general sound of the room. / Which is an interesting thing.

LM: / Okay.

[Room Tone]

BF: Awesome. Thank you. Cool. All right, I'm going to pause – well, am I going to pause this or am I going to stop this? Hmm. Should pause first –

[53:10]

[End of Interview]