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Tips & Hints For Mass Media Interviews

From a workshop by Sharmilla Ganesan in September 2020, for Rimbun Dahan

Preparation

- It is useful to know how much time you have for the interview, so you can structure your answers.
- Crafting a story doesn't mean faking it. Be authentic and sincere. But remember you are talking to a bigger audience, and you want them to understand your story.
- Show your bio, media statement and artwork to someone else to get their feedback, before you go to the media.
- You are not writing for funders, academia or other artists, so keep your language clear and simple and relatable.
- Bios that are full of facts (“I choreographed this piece and this piece and this piece, I performed here and here and here”) should be balanced with more interesting human details and narrative.

During the Interview

- When speaking for radio or television, always address the interviewer as if s/he doesn't know anything about your work.
- Remember that the general audience does not know anything about you, and does not care. So don't waste their time. Try to give them info they need and stories that may interest them. Because if you are not doing something interesting for a general audience, then why are you talking to the media?
- No matter what the first question is, ALWAYS begin with a short summary of WHAT the artwork is: for example, a solo contemporary dance performance on stage, an exhibition of photos on Facebook, a book of impressions written by a team of authors...
- Take general questions from the interviewer as an opportunity to deliver your elevator pitch: the info or narrative you really want to deliver. Do not assume that the interviewer will ask you the questions you want. Make sure YOU push the topics you need to cover.
- Don't know how to answer a question? For a print interview, just take whatever time you need. For a radio or tv interview: repeat the question, while you are thinking of the answer. OR: reframe the question to one that you want to answer. But in any case you need to be sure what story you want to tell.

- Don't bury the lead. Identify what the interesting, evocative, resonating themes are in your work – ghosts, skulls, hauntings – and introduce them earlier.
- If you are too close to the artistic process and don't know what kind of things appeal to a general listener, practice talking to a non-artist friend about your work and ask them what topics jump out at them.

Connecting with the General Audience

- Avoid an insider, technical point of view too early in the interview.
- Non-artists may not be very interested in your process. So save your process for later in the interview.
- Try to start with a memorable, relatable STORY. Bright, concrete, visual details or simple colourful anecdotes can connect more easily with an audience, especially if you have a complex or dense topic.
- Consider aspects that a general audience can relate to: food, romance, family, emotions etc. Personal connections and personal experiences can be helpful.
- Consider what the audience will see or experience at your show or exhibition, rather than what you plan to do as an artist. Flip your point of view! (This is different from telling the audience what they will feel or think about your work.)

Talking About Your Work

- Work on being able to describe what your works look like. Consider mental images and concrete sensory details to describe music or costume, which are recognizable or relatable to your audience. Help your audience to visualize your work.
- Don't undersell your work. NEVER SAY YOUR WORK IS BORING. If you don't think your work is worthwhile, no one else will either. Your work doesn't need to change the world: something humorous, makes an emotional connection, creates a new perspective – this is enough.
- Description of artistic materials, using concrete visual images, can also connect to an audience.
- If you are including jargon (i.e. “non-representational”, “micro-photography”) you can always give a very quick definition. A solid example of what you're talking about is helpful too.
- Avoid saying, “I'm going to give you some background...” Too much feeling of impending information dump! Just start telling the story.
- Also avoid, “That's a very complicated answer” or “Some people might find this boring” – assume an optimistic attitude towards your ability to communicate the value of your work to your audience.
- Don't give away the whole story (i.e. don't describe the performance from beginning to end). Give some interesting details, and keep some for when the audience sees the show.
- Generally the audience is not interested in details of funding, or previous phases or versions of the project. Keep the focus on what the work is now.