

**Ernesto Burgos interview 3/29/13,
in his studio on 313 Butler Street, Brooklyn, NY**

AM:

Now that we've been talking for half an hour.
Alright, I just want to ask you a bunch of questions, so.
Where are we?

EB: Right now we are in my studio in Brooklyn, Gowanus area, I think, Park Slope.

AM: I don't know where we are, Gowanus or Sunset Park, is this Sunset Park?

EB: No, we're not in Sunset Park, that's farther south

AM: ok

I will be familiar with that area soon.

ok.

Can you describe your studio space?

EB:

Describe, sure. What would you like me to describe. The actual space we're in or the building?

AM:

Both, because I'm sitting here, I'm facing two windows. I guess we have to describe the space. You can light it near you - it's ok. We have to describe the studio space because people can't see it. That's the only thing. So I'm facing two windows, Ernesto's fabulous new computer, and Ernesto. And behind me is the rest of his studio with fluorescent lights mounted in a square.

EB: Fluorescent lights. Yes.

AM:

It's genius, I'm stealing it. And the rest of his studio has (his) sculptures in it. And now it's clean as opposed to the last time I was here.

EB: Correct.

AM: Anything else you want to add about the space?

EB: No that's pretty much it, that's my space.

AM: It feels good in here.

EB: It does feel good in here.

AM:

Alright, we shut off the music, the music was good too.
So, what do you do in here?

EB:

I do like a range of things in here, I'd say half of it or more like a quarter of it is more office area, you know I do computer work, I'll read, I'll sketch, I'll think and so the other part of it is more kind of a production area, where I actually, physically make the work. There's also a shop in the building that we made for ourselves where we can do, I guess more construction work, dirtier work so a lot of the nasty like sanding you know painting, etc. is done outside

and I'll pull the stuff back in the studio, which is more of a white box to look at stuff, to think about, you know relationships, installations, etc. But, I am trying to make it as cozy as possible, I spend a lot of time in here.

AM:

I would too.

Alright, well said.

Can you introduce yourself?

EB:

Yep.

My name is Ernesto Burgos, background history, where I'm from?

I was born in California, my father was exiled from Chile in the 70s. So I was raised in kind of the Berkeley area of California and at one point my father decided to move back to Chile once the dictatorship was over ruled or overthrown. My dad said he didn't want to die in English so we moved to Chile, I grew up there and did most of my schooling there. And I moved back to the states when I was 19 or 20 with the thought of studying architecture, sounded nice. A lot of my uncles were architects. So I moved back with not really a clear sense of what I wanted to do. I took a couple of drawing classes and painting classes and ...I enjoyed the compliments. Yeah, then a couple of my professors really advised me to apply to art school so, but again at the time I wasn't really interested. I mean, I enjoyed going to art class, I was young, I was skateboarding a lot, that's primarily what I was doing was skateboarding. So one day a professor grabbed a bunch of my works and she shot slides of it and pretty much held my hand and took me to portfolio day. And she kind of walked it around to different schools and I got into some schools and went out to San Francisco to go to art school.

AM:

Nice. And then, somehow you ended up in New York.

EB: Yeah, but that was like.

AM: Years later.

EB: Yeah 7 or 8 years later.

AM: Alright

EB:

So it's been, I spent 3 or 4 years in San Francisco, I was already starting to show a little bit, like my senior year of undergrad in San Francisco, you know in random little group shows, whatever. And then somehow I ended up in Miami, well not really somehow. This was kind of around the time Miami Art Basel already had three years of existence so some of the faculty, some of my professors, showed work at the fair, so they went to Miami during the week of the fair and obviously overwhelmed and blown away by the amount of people, internationally, that were there in this week and just thought, wow Miami is like the epicenter of art. So they were asking me like, what are you going to do? Are you going to stay in San Francisco are you going to move to Miami? I said I have the possibility to move to Miami and they were like, you have to go because Miami Basel is like THE THING. So, I was young, again didn't have any set plans so I took their advice and I left, I went to Miami, like 10 days after I graduated from undergrad. And I could have stayed in San Francisco which, in hindsight, well, I guess you can't really look back on things. But,

AM: You can, but without regret.

EB: You can, yea, you can't change.

So I move to Miami and come to find out, which I guess is kind of obvious, yeah, Miami for that week is yeah, filled with people.

AM: Right, fabulous

EB: The week is done and Miami goes back to being

AM: Miami

EB: Regular Miami So,

AM: How long were you there?

EB:

Post undergrad I was in Miami, I'd say, like 2 years, 2 and a half years.

But in between, after I graduated, I did take a trip to NY.

For like ten days. And that kinda like really switched. You know I'd been to NY when I was really young, with 2 of my brothers when we were like 14, but after undergrad coming up to NY for like 10 days, I kinda knew, I wanted to be in NY. So even those two and a half years in Miami which was fine I got a studio, I had a job working at a museum as a docent, so I was kinda like at least somehow kinda involved with art on a level. I got to show a little bit down in Miami, but the whole time, those two two and a half years down in Miami were really dedicated to flying to NY two or three times a year for like 10 days, I almost stayed a couple of times and then, I knew I wanted to be here. So, I applied to grad school from Miami, I applied to grad schools as an excuse to be in NY.

AM: Of course

EB: I applied to be in NY. And luckily they accepted me.

AM: And they haven't kicked you out yet.

EB: Not yet.

AM: So that's where we met.

EB: We met at NYU.

AM: I forget what class we were in together, was it Ross Bleckner's class that we met, or was it a different one?

EB: Yep, it was Ross Bleckner's class.

AM:

Good class, good man. OK

That's a good introduction and we're going to have many more interviews because I don't think we're going to have enough time in the day today for me to ask you all the questions I would like to ask you. OK, so about your, about that fact that you're essentially a foreigner, and that English is kind of your, not your second or first language...it's like....you just.

EB: No, I mean, I'm like 50%.

EB: So when I'm there, I'm like 50% there and 50% here. And vice versa.

AM: ok, So where is home?

EB:

Home is New York.

AM:

ok.

But your family is in?

EB:

Yeah, the majority of my family is in Chile.

AM:

I would love to go over that at another point, but ok.

Today we are here because of STUDIO so, here's another question.

I want you to describe, I guess where I should start is I am one of your tenants in the Wythe Building, 29A Wythe is a studio building, I'm in there and I came back from Spain needing a space and Ernesto said there's a space and I jumped on it and I had that space before my show and then there was a bigger space that opened up which I am currently in. However that is ending in a month.

EB: In a month.

AM: At no fault of yours.

EB: No

AM:

So we're currently sitting in your studio which is a different part of Brooklyn and it's your second studio building that you've built out.

EB: Correct

AM: So can you describe the construction and creation of these two studio buildings?

EB: Yeah, the first one was, we actually rented the building before we finished our MFA at NYU.

AM: The one I'm in.

EB:

The one you're in, yeah.

And it was really kind of a, we were young - er. I guess more naive, or we had a more take on ambition. We knew we needed studios immediately after, like we didn't want to graduate and then move all our stuff into storage. We wanted to move straight into a studio and continue working. So we actually probably fell behind in all of us, on our thesis and stuff at school to get our paperwork together to figure out, to get money together, etc. To get this built. We had no idea what we were doing, we wanted studio space. We rented out this building and in hindsight it wasn't the most practical building. It taught us a lot, it taught me a lot. So basically, we rented it out of necessity. We figured if we were to each go out on our own with what our individual budgets were, you know we could get a space, our own personal space, but you know if we combined more people more money then we can get a larger space and get more space individually. So we took that idea, not a huge idea, took that idea and just you know we rented a large space and we divided it up, we built walls. At the time I really had no clue of what I was doing in terms of building construction, sheetrock, mudding, paint. But we learned along the way. Luckily we had another friend of ours who was also involved in the project, he had a little more experience, so we just kind of like followed his lead. And we all just kinda like learned along the way. So that kind of prepped for the second building which obviously we walked into with a lot more experience in terms of like who we could sublease to, what a good tenant was. Because over the course of the five years you have people that move in, move out, and you have to rent that space immediately or else that gap of money is coming out of our own pocket. Which we could never do, so like...

AM :

You had to find out who was serious, who was going to stay in this space longest.

EB:

Exactly

So, yeah, so our need for a ___ studio space, at least on my level because I did a lot of the renting myself to the other tenants, I learned and developed I guess a bunch of other things that I never knew, or never thought I'd be doing like real estate, really. And like, almost like profiling people and I got to the point where someone would walk in or show interest in the space and walk in and I would know immediately if they were going to take it or not. Or I would know immediately if I wanted them there or not.

AM:

Exactly

I've had a little bit of experience with that. You can tell immediately.

EB:

I mean yeah, after awhile you know. You know exactly what type of people you want and what type of people you want and what type of energy you want.

AM:

And who do you want, what kind of energy do you want?

I mean who is your ideal candidate for, in order to rent out the studio spaces next to you, how many spaces do you have here, I guess?

EB:

In the current building?

AM:

Yes, in this building.

EB:

There's 18.

AM:

So 18, so you want what out of those 18 people is the ideal personality or success level or ...

EB:

I mean to me, success has nothing to do with it.

AM:

Or just energy.

EB:

Yea, just energy. Energy, someone who's respectful of other people's energies. When you've got some people in a space it's kind of like

AM: Your all roommates

EB:

They're all roommates and everyone is here like to do their own kind of more private thing within their own space and you want to be respectful of that. When I'm working I don't want to be disrupted by anything; loud music or people walking with drunk friends or whatever. It's happened believe me. It's happened.

EB:

An ideal tenant, someone whose respectful of other people's spaces, obviously someone who pays rent on time, people who are not needy, unfortunately artists are very needy people. From like the youngest one to the oldest ones. There's a range, but their just very, they are like hungry cats. They're very needy people. So yeah, people that are independent, practical, can figure things out on their own, don't ask like ridiculous things of us, you know because we've already created spaces for them to be in, then again people are just very like needy and demanding. Like they are art studios, some people think these are like hotel suites.

AM:

Try renting out apartments. I'm sure it's five times as bad, right.

EB:

So yeah, maybe yeah, I think that is the ideal tenant, who pays on time and just is respectful of other people's space. Because its, you know, it's kind of like - yeah, they came to find a space where they can do their own thing, so. Let others do their thing. And just kind of have it flow like that. So no drama.

AM:

Right, that makes total sense. Alright, with the other space, I don't know if you can talk about this, maybe without naming names, we already named the address, maybe I'll just take that out. So you can talk about this. So now you're essentially a landlord, right? As you were saying. You've got your hands in so many things in the involvement with this building and the other building including well, the other jobs you do and also being an artist, but can you speak about the legal issues you've been having to deal with with the other building?

EB:

Uh, yeah

AM:

Your legal issues with the other landlords, the people who own the buildings, excuse me.

EB:

So yeah. When we moved into the building we were like, we were very naive about what New York real estate is, what building codes are.

AM:

Right, so it was a learning process for you, because clearly you started from scratch,

EB:

Started form scratch.

AM:

you had no idea about any of the rules.

EB:

Nothing. So in the other space we were able to build more studios because the space itself had really high ceilings. We were just like, alright, we'll build a second floor. And, again, it was us like googling how you build a second floor, like what type of beams you need and where you need support, etc.

AM:

Gorilla style

EB:

Gorilla style yeah. It never fell down, it worked perfectly

AM:
It's still standing

EB:
It's still standing. Yeah. And it's worked amazing.

AM:
And I'm on the second floor, no?

EB:
That floor was already built though.

AM:
Oh, ok.

EB:
Yeah, you're actually on thethat one's probably up to code.

AM:
Probably not, actually.

EB:
Probably not.

AM:
The ceiling is falling in. But that is not your fault.

EB:
So, basically we built that thing and it was fine and like, at some point, I mean the Landlords knew what we were doing. The Landlords were totally fine with it. They were....

AM:
Because they rented that space and they were, they didn't care what happened inside probably.

EB:
They didn't care what happened inside. It was a weird space. Other artists had been there before.

AM:
And it was an industrial space.

EB:
It was an industrial space and like, but no one had ever, I mean people had built lofts in there but not, they built lofts, they didn't build a second floor.
People lived in it before. Already the building had a history of things being done in it which - to people like us is like, whatever, who cares. It's fine. But, I guess to like New York City whatever, building code it's not fine.
So, what happened was about three years into it, three years and a half into our lease.

AM:
Standards are relative by the way.

EB:
Yeah, inspectors got into the building, obviously walked around, and checked everything out. We'd done a lot of stuff, we ran electricity, plumbing, everything you know. We never had any problems. But then we got a fine, or the

landlords got a fine, because obviously we built without getting a builders permit, building with certain materials that weren't up to a certain, up to code, not that it was going to fall, but it had to be a certain way. So, but also when that happened, we also learned that all these things are public, so we started researching some more and just found that there were tons of things that were wrong with the building. That weren't up to code.

AM:
Right

EB:
So basically, we started having problems with the owners, they were trying to tack on a bunch of money and fines, etc. on us, with issues that were already existing with the building before we had even moved in. So the building was already not up to code. So, back and forth...

AM:
And they were already being fined. And they were just trying to transfer this all to you so that they were in the clear.

EB:
They were already being fined.
So they were in the clear, yeah. And like stuff before, so, like again, because things are public we started realizing, we found out about cases where like these same people had been sued before. Because certain things weren't up to code. I think some girl, or somebody fell off one of these lofts because there wasn't a railing. She sued the building. And again it's one of those things where it's kind of like, you know maybe she's, whoever this person was, should have put a railing, but in the end it actually falls on the landlords, it's actually their building.

AM:
Right.

EB:
And they have to keep and make sure the building is up to code. So stuff like that, so these people have a history of being very shady people. So now, yeah, so now we are dealing with them. And trying to get out of that as cleanly as possible.

AM:
Well because you have a five year, essentially what you did was you rented this space with a five year lease. Which was genius. So you could extend this studio space that you had built out and put so much work and so much money into for at least five years and now we're at the end of that five years, we have one month left, as of right now, and you're still dealing with these legal issues. Because they wanted, the essentially wanted to kick everybody out of this building because real estate prices have sky rocketed in Williamsburg.

EB:
Right

AM:
And they're probably going to either rent this out for either double the price or just sell the building and knock it down, because that is essentially what needs to happen I think.

EB:
Right, no, that's pretty much what's happening, so yeah, I mean again, we feel like they've just been very shady and they're kinda just trying to strong arm us, you know I am sure when

AM:
Because you're artists perhaps too.

EB:

Perhaps and also because they probably also saw us the way we were when we signed the lease five years ago.

AM:

They underestimated you guys.

EB:

Sure. And I'm sure. I think back on it and we probably walked in like 5 just kinda like naive looking kids that were just like, you know, so they were just like - yeah we got them. So, you know, but over the course of this thing, you know we've, you know you learn. You know and it's kinda like - you just start to realize that there's things that they have the power to do and that they also they don't. So, we'll see how this develops very soon.

AM:

I'm sure you'll be fine.

AM:

We all know some people right, so, ok.

Alright, so the other question.

I hate to make you speculate about the future because nor I or you - flip - knows what's going to happen. But, because you're building out these spaces, i mean I don't know that many people who do what you do in terms of building out you know 18 spaces. You know consecutively so you did - I don't know how many spaces are in our building? A lot no?

EB:

Probably like 12...

AM:

ok, so 12 spaces five years ago and then this space happened I think a year ago, so your, this has become something that you're capable of now and hopefully you'll do again with empty space that are around Brooklyn, and hopefully not that much farther out.

EB:

Yeah, hopefully not farther out.

AM:

And accessible by subway because that's important, but anyway. I hate to make you speculate but how do you think what you're doing here affects the future of accessibility for artists to have spaces like this. In terms of, ok so if you're doing this, then the landlord - this is a badly worded question because it's all speculation so, Artists have these spaces because of you, but because of you they might lose these spaces because Landlords might take over this idea and do the same thing and then essentially nothing will be affordable (or run by artists.)

EB:

I mean it's not a new idea. I mean this has been...

AM:

It's not a new idea.

EB:

It's been being done for, for forever.

AM:

It's not a new idea but.

EB:

Landlords do this already.

AM:

You're part of the machine I suppose.

EB:

Yeah, I mean - yeah definitely part of the machine but just kind of like, doing it by yourself means that you're not like, I mean you're participating in the machine but you're not like - you're just in more control. And by doing it yourself and making, putting the extra effort and sacrifice of time and money in the beginning, it does, it saves you money. In the long run it saves you money. And again, four of us went into this building with personal reasons. We all wanted our own studios, you know, so it's kind of like a double satisfaction. You get the space, a better space, that you want, and you do facilitate other spaces for other artists that, at affordable prices.

AM:

Right

EB:

You know, but again this is happening all over the city, all over.

AM:

This has been happening for years. I know, I know.

But you also do, besides this building and the other building you also do contracted work. No?

EB:

Yeah

AM:

Do you want to describe some of those?

EB:

I mean, yah. I do I mean all types of stuff, again, when I finished grad school I like, again, no job no nothing. you know I started hanging art at different galleries and that really did suck. laugh

I mean I work now with one gallery which is kinda like the only gallery I work with now and that's kind of amazing because, I don't know - relationship to gallery owners being an artist is kind of strange. But fortunately I'm working in a gallery where that is not even an issue.

It's very, I mean I kind of go and do what I do and because I've been freelancing for this gallery for about 4 years now, you know that's opened up other work options for me with that same gallery. Like fabrication. I've fabricated many things for the gallery they need, anything from like a pedestal to like large projection screens, I mean like all types of work. So, again, a lot of the things that I learned building out that first studio building have developed a skill where I can make money doing side jobs and I've, you know, I've avoided having a full time job. So I've never had a full time job.

AM:

Right and right and it can also pay for this studio, or maybe this studio is free because of the building that you did. But, and you can also rent your apartment and live off of these other jobs.

EB:

Yup, because you have to live.

AM:

Because of your grown skills, your developed skills.

EB:

Again, you know, freelance is freelance, there's times where it's really good.

AM:

Right

EB:

And money's coming in, and you're kind of like wow, this is pretty nice. Then there's other times where freelance is gone you know, but it's like that's just kind of like how it goes. It's a type of lifestyle that's very, that suits me very well. Suits my schedule well too. I mean it allows me to have time in the studio and I don't have to pull back..

AM:

In chunks.

EB:

Yeah in chunks you know.

EB:

I mean I am always constantly coming to the studio too, even when I am freelancing. You know, but it's kind of like, it's just very flexible.

AM:

But the reason you're freelancing is so that you can work in the studio, otherwise you would just get a full time job and that would be a wrap. But, you need time in the studio and so these sort of part time jobs make going to your studio accessible.

EB:

Right

But I couldn't have a full time job. Even working at the gallery I work at now, when I'm there like more than three of four days a week, usually I'm just there two days a week, but like when I spend a week there it's like - I start to hate the people.

AM:

Well, because it's changing your focus away from what you really want to be doing.

EB:

So having. So it suits me a lot better because having it forces me to want, it forces me to figure out a way that's more suitable for me to make money.

Kinda the same way, it's out of necessity, because I know the way I am, the way I function, it almost forces me to go out and almost create work.

AM:

Yeah

EB:

You know, and based out of other jobs that I've done, like, the people recommend me so it kind of like it just, it kind of grows on its own.

AM:

It helps that you're social Ernesto.

EB:

It helps that I'm social.

AM:

So we talked about finances, I mean clearly there's risk in putting in an investment into buildings like this and dealing with your own finances you know yeah, you have a part time job, you're probably not making what some of our friends are making that have full time jobs.

EB:

Right

AM:

So, there's risk in that but - but it's been working out.

EB:

It's been working out, but again, I'd rather ...

AM:

You'd rather take the risk

EB:

I mean at this point, it's almost, I don't think it's a risk because - right whenever you look at something on paper, like even building out this studio you look at that numbers and everything but it's like I feel like you can make things happen. Like if that's what you want and that's how you want things to be, for yourself, there is no risk, you're going to find a way to do it. You're going to invent a way to do it.

AM:

That's an artist's mentality - yeah.

EB:

You're going to open up a new path and a road that might seem is one directional.

AM:

Well, it's like willing and forcing a will and willing a force - you know, it's like if you believe it it will happen because there's no other choice.

EB:

I mean as cheesy and as repetitive and as many times as we have heard this before it's true, you can figure out a way. You can figure out a way and plus NYC is a place that allows people to do that. It's almost like NYC is very receptive of that type of energy. Of kind of digging and pulling and opening up new corners and NY is very receptive of that.

AM:

And I love that positive view because most people would think of NY as challenging you a way to fail. You know, it's like - if you can make it in NY you can make it anywhere, right?

EB:

Yeah

AM:

And that's really, that's the best part.

EB:

Those people just didn't dig hard enough.

AM:

Or climb fast enough.

EB:

Or climb fast enough, yeah.

AM:

I agree, ok.

Somehow we've made it. How long have you lived here now?

EB:

Going on 7 years.

AM:

Going on seven years?

EB:

Yup

AM:

You're almost officially a New Yorker.

EB:

Almost officially.

AM:

Wow, alright

So we talked a little bit about New York City real estate in general from your point of view. Are we going to be able to stay here?

EB:

Yeah

AM:

ok, good. Do you want to describe, or expand on that?

EB:

You want me to describe?

AM:

I mean how do you feel about NYC real estate, will you ever be able to have a place on Earth that is yours?

EB:

On Earth...

AM:

Here

EB:

Not, no, on Earth maybe, but no. In NY, I mean At this point...

AM:

On Earth, I hope both of us will.

EB:

You mean, it doesn't seem feasible right now. Or at all actually in my lifetime. But you never know, again like five years ago, if I thought like I'd be where I'm at. I mean I'm not talking about anywhere like grand, I'm just talking about just something unexpected. Who knows.

AM:

Unexpected things do happen.
Remember that story I told you?

EB:

Remind me
You've told me a lot of stories.

AM:

I came in here the last time and I was like, you'll never believe the email I received today.

EB:

Oh, right.

AM:

Yeah

Unexpected things happen. This clearly isn't going in the recording, on air but unexpected things do happen. I guess we have to dig harder, climb faster, I don't know, put out more radio shows, get more investors.

EB:

Do something.

AM:

I don't know what it takes, but I need a place on Earth too.

You know, one of my old bosses, I had a conversation for this show with one of my old bosses (former boss), the real estate agents, well the real estate lawyers, excuse me, and they said if artists could just get together and buy spaces together then they'd be set and from then on they would have their space and no one would be able to touch it and I thought. I said, well, that's really fabulous and that's a great idea, but in the end of the day, getting the money to buy the space is an issue.

EB:

Right

AM:

Because at this point it's, the amount of money necessary to even put down a downpayment is astronomical.

EB:

Yeah

I don't think that makes sense. I mean maybe, and again, this is just me speculating on how it used to be in NY. But just from stories I've heard that maybe would have been the case YEARS ago.

AM:

30 years ago

EB:

Like 30, 40 years ago. Where you could actually find spaces, you buy them, great. But now I almost feel like money-wise even if I had it...

AM:

Money is no object at this point.

EB:

Money's no object, but even if I came up on a chunk of money, that would allow me to do a down payment on a building, I don't know if I would invest in a commercial building. Thinking about a long term plan, for me and my goal, my thing is I need to have a studio,

AM:

Right

EB:

I have to have a studio. So it's like, do I take that money and invest it in a commercial building or do I take that money and figure out kind of like a long term plan and a rent plan that will keep me kind of secured, or having a secure studio for like the next 10, 15 20 years. I mean I've thought about that at different times, but obviously that chunk of money hasn't appeared, so, it's like I'm not really making a decision.

AM:

It's like winning the lottery. What would you do first if you won 100 million dollars, you know it's like.

EB:

Well then it would be easy.

AM:

And what would it be?

EB:

I would buy some buildings.

AM:

Good

Alright, so we are talking, clearly, a lot about space and studio so I mean we haven't even touched upon living space. You have a living space, you have somewhere to sleep. Basically, that's all it takes right?

EB: That's all you need.

AM: That's all you need. The same with me. I mean.

EB: Right now, I mean. and again

AM: Right now how far away from your living space are you right now?

EB: Three blocks

AM: You're living space is three blocks from your studio.

EB: Right.

AM: So travel time is ?? Nothing.

EB: Nothing

AM: Nobody has that in NY. This is like small town, foreign country living.

EB:

I mean again, like my space, my room is literally, it completes what it is supposed to do.

I mean it's just a bedroom, that's why I spend so much time kind of making my studio a place where I can actually be.

I mean literally I go home.....

AM: And how is that?

EB: How's what?

AM:

How's your studio a place to be and why is it so comfortable here?

Let's describe what's over your head.

EB: There's an espresso machine.

AM:

Next to the coffee machine, the newly purchased wine glasses are on the floor. No but this space, in it, there's a fridge.

I mean you could essentially spend from 8 in the morning here till midnight.

EB: That's what I do, yeah.

AM: There you go.

EB: Yeah, I mean

AM: Then you go home to sleep

EB: Then I go home, and I sleep and wake up and I come here.

AM: Yeah

EB: Again.

EB: Yeah.

AM: That's ideal, really.

EB:

I mean, again, yeah I put so much time and energy into this place, that this is really like again, it's like if some of the things that I do here were at my home, you know or I had a space for that stuff, you know it'd be different, but it's like, I mean again, I come here and I can just sit down and read, I can do whatever here. So, I mean like, this the studio was my North. This was first, and where I lived was actually secondary to this or dependent on this. So I just, I was like, I need to find something that is very close to my studio.

AM:

Right

EB:

This is where I'm going to spend all my time.

AM:

Because time is money and so many people travel so far to their studios and then they end up not going because it's too far, it's like by the time I get there and by the time I get back, it's like is it even worth it to get there and spend you know half the time that I already spent traveling there to make work. And to me having a four hour chunk minimum is like, that's like a golden spot because then, then you can stop, step back read something, you know take a mental break and then get back to work.

EB:

Actually 4 hours is yea that's a good, that's kind of how I gauge it. If I have four hours, even if I'm running around the city, and you know, I'm heading back to Brooklyn, and it's 6:00 / 7:00, you know going back to my apartment or coming here is..

AM:

A waste of time. Well, going back to your apartment is a waste of time. Coming here you have 4 hours of good quality studio time.

EB: But also what I'm saying is it's the same thing. It's like, it's the same distance.

AM: It's the same distance, yes.

EB:

I would just come directly here. And even if it's like I just want to wind, again if I just want to come back here and sit down and relax, I don't have to go back to the apartment. I mean I can go to the apartment but I could just do it here.

AM: Right

EB: So, that's why I wanted them to be very close. It just makes sense.

AM:

It does.

Would you ever live in the same place that your studio is?

EB: No.

AM: Why?

EB: I need the division.

AM: I do too.

EB: The separation.

AM: Yeah, plus you work with a lot of noxious chemicals, no?

EB: Yeah, but it's not even the chemicals.

AM: You need the division, but in addition to that it's.

EB:

I mean I guess yeah. It'd be wise, but it's not even the chemicals, it's the waking up and going somewhere. You know if I had my bed here, or if I slept here.

AM: The discipline would be different.

EB:

The discipline would be a lot different.

You know when you come here in the morning, just by coming here you feel like something needs to get done. Even if it's like research, even if it's like writing something down.

AM: Even if, I mean that's totally part.

EB:

Yeah. It's all part of it, it's all part of it. So like waking up, even that ritual of waking up and it's almost like you're walking, you're going to work. You're going to your office.

You know.

AM:

And that's what this is. And so many people forget that, who are probably listening to this, thinking oh, artists they have other jobs, that's their job, no this is our vocation, but at the same time this is our job. We walk into our studio, we turn on the light and we get to work.

EB:

Right, and again I make my own personal work here, but again a lot of these like side jobs that I do, I mean, a lot of that work gets done here as well.

AM:

Right

EB:

You know. The planning gets done here. Some of the fabrication gets done in the shop. I mean this is, I mean, again this is like a studio, my own personal studio, but it also functions like on various levels.

AM:

Yeah

This space is multi-functional.

EB: Multi-functional

AM:

Alright. Well good, and I'm sorry, but this is so awesome, the lighting.

So that's it.

You also have daylight coming in here which helps. I mean most people, I've actually, I know people who work in basements, who don't even see the light of day, I mean that's miserable. This is such a nice space.

EB: Yeah, I mean having these windows, it's like a, you know it's a luxury. At my previous studio, I didn't have any windows.

AM: It is a luxury.

EB: No ventilation.

AM: That's not ok.

EB: Yeah, it's not ok, but that's whatever.

AM: It was what it was.

EB: It's what I had.

AM: Yeah, exactly. We are like chameleons. Artists need to just make it work, right?

EB: Yeah, I mean yeah, you figure it out.

AM:

So you were listening to some music earlier, what do you listen to in here?

EB:

Oh, what do I, I mean my music is very sporadic, and I apologize to all of my neighbors because....

AM:

laugh

EB:

But, again. Because, yeah, because different things happen at different times, different background music accommodates what I'm doing at certain times, so.

AM:

Or your mood. ok

EB:

Or your mood, yeah, anything, everything. If you go through my music there's a little bit of everything on there.

AM:

ok Do you ever listen to radio? Like WNYC or...

EB:

Rarely do I listen to the news or anything on the radio in the studio.

AM: OK

EB: Just music

AM:

Damn, one lost, ok.

And who do you let in here?

EB: I let, I'm very private. I don't let that many people in my studio.

AM:

Oh, well thank you very much.

EB:

Obviously, I'll invite certain people. Most people that I know, obviously you invite people that you don't know that want to get to know the work. But in terms of like when I'm working on things I have a very, only a handful of people that I actually listen to. There's way too many voices out there, way too many opinions, too many agendas. And in the end it's good to be aware of those things, but when you're working on your own things, to me it's a very you know a very private personal thing. And I want like the work itself to dictate where the work itself is going to go. I want my reactions to what I'm making to dictate where things are going to go. And have that be independent of what's going

on outside of these doors. I mean not to the point of being naive, you know because of course, you know like everything has a relationship to everything else, you want to be part of a dialogue, you should be part of a dialogue.

AM: But that dialogue is with yourself.

EB:

You should be aware of the dialogue, right, but again I've said this at other times, but you should. I think there's a time to open and close your door and you really need to develop kind of a sense of when you open the doors to the outside world and when you close them.

EB:

Yeah. Believe me, when it comes to like looking at things and thinking about things, objects, painting, whatever, I'm actually, I'm an optimist. You know I'm really interested in it.

EB:

I want look at things, I want to get involved in things you know, I want to enter other people's worlds through what they're making.

AM: Right

EB: You know, so, mostly it's just questions.

AM: Right

EB:

And, like questions of like where the thing is? Where it could grow? Where it was? What it's doing? What it's doing in relationship to other things? So, I mean I just go and I look and think about other people's things the same way I do my own. Where it is critical but at all times it's trying to be constructive.

AM:

Yeah, but as solitary as you are in your space, you're really collaborating with other people by going into their spaces and asking those questions.

EB:

Yeah, again it's out of, it's a huge personal curiosity. I mean again.

AM: Maybe that's the word. Just the curiosity.

EB:

Well, I also just like to step out of my world, it's also like refreshing, you know. It's a lot easier.

When it's my thing it can be, it's not stressful, but it's a weight. You know, but when you're going to talk about other people's work it's like everything just seems really clear. It's like oh yeah, this is what you should be doing. Or maybe you should try this?

But when you're doing your own thing, it's just like everything else in life. It's like when it's your own it can be very problematic because we make it problematic.

AM: Complicated.

EB: You know or we get caught up in details that only , even.

AM: That no one else would notice.

EB:

That no one else would notice.

AM: It's very true.

Alright, and maybe the last question, but I'm not sure. What are you reading now?
You have a very large bookshelf in here.

EB: I do

AM:

Well three bookshelves.

EB:

I like books.

AM:

Yes, good

EB:

I like books. Right now I started reading *The Little Prince* again.

AM: You did? In English or in Spanish?

EB: In Spanish.

AM: Of course.

EB: I mean there's books that I go back to like occasionally. I mean I read most of these books on this shelf.

AM: And also some of them are reference, clearly.

EB:

Some of them are reference, yeah.

Yeah, I went back to reading *The Little Prince*. I read before this I read *Open Veins of Latin America*, by Eduardo Galeano.

AM: ok

EB:

Which I had read before, years ago. But, I mean there are some books that I go back to occasionally, they are just reference points. Things I like to read? I'm not huge on fiction.

AM: ok

EB: I like historical books, I like biographies.

AM: What's your favorite biography?

EB: upffff.

AM: I know, that's really hard.

EB:

I've read many biographies. It's tough to say, I mean what enjoy about biographies is I guess hearing other people's stories. I'm reading autobiographies.

AM: And are these biographies or autobiographies of artists?

EB: Sometimes of artists, sometimes not of artists.

AM: Historical figures or whomever.

EB:

What I just, yeah. I'm, what I'm interested in the road. The roads and the things people have gone through to get where they're at. And again, not in terms of success, not of how I went from being at the bottom to being at the top, that's not what I, what's interesting to me. What's interesting to me is how people react and kind of bounce off of things that appear in their life.

AM:

Like which path they took at a certain crux.

EB:

Right, which path they took, what, again what their reactions, again. Things that appeared in their life and how their paths have had to kind of like detour and create new roads which they may have never expected. And that just like, things that like resonate, things that I can feed off of.

AM:

Well, also Jack Risley, I don't know if you know him from NYU. But he once said you'll end up doing what you never had imagined doing.
Because life is not linear.

EB: It's not linear.

AM: Or maybe it is linear, but it's not a straight line.

EB: It's not straight. It's a winding road.

AM: Yeah

EB: It's a winding road.

AM: Circling, winding..

EB: Sometimes it goes back and it goes forward again. Right, you know.

So, Yeah, no I agree with that. That's absolutely true, you end up doing things that you, I think you end up doing things that you on a very kind of very subconscious level that you want to be doing. But you're doing them in a way that you never thought that you would be doing them. Which to me is very interesting.

AM:

Why do we suppress those parts, it's almost like suppression and then it's like ok I'm allowed to do this and I want to be doing THIS, but somehow between the two you have to make a balance.

EB:

Right, well. You want to make the balance, it's like you're mixing two colors. And you know if you mix this and this you're going to get this color. But, what I think is fascinating is that when that it's not all formulaic. I think...

AM: It's not

EB:

I think when you mix two colors you actually get a very strange color, maybe not too far off from the color you thought it was going to get mixed, but it's different than what you thought was going to get mixed.

AM:

Yeah, I like that ok.

I think that's it for today.

EB: Alright.

AM: Ernesto, this was a really good interview. Thank you.

EB: Thank you.