Carey, Brainard. “Channing Hansen,” *Museum of Nonvisible Art*, 6 November 2026.



Interviews Artists

Channing Hansen

By **Brainard Carey** November 6, 2026

This interview has been transcribed and edited for clarity.

Brainard Carey: You’re listening to Yale Radio WYBC. This is Brainard Carey, with the lives of the artists, architects, curators, and more. I’m talking with Channing Hansen. Channing, thanks so much for being with me today.

Channing Hansen: It’s a pleasure.

BC: Channing, we’re talking about your show at Susan Inglett Gallery, and there’s a lot going on here. On one level, we’re looking at a beautiful visual work, if we can just begin there. There’s a lot of theory in the work that I want to talk to you about today, but to look at it purely visually, what are we looking at? It feels both organic, oceanic, and also like a universe. Just talk to me about the shapes and narrative.

CH: I kind of have a joke. What happens when an artist deliberately builds a system capable of surprising the artist? You get a philosophical question with yarn attached.

BC: So, let’s talk about that, about your process, because you’re working with algorithms when you knit, so what exactly does that look like? Are you using a computer that generates this color? Because you have a special relationship to color, as well, right? Just walk me through it, how you see color, how you get the algorithm to generate this.

CH: For me, I’m really interested in how my scientific fascinations can inform an abstract artwork without requiring it to illustrate a scientific concept. And so, my algorithms don’t simply automate the work, and they’re not using large-language, ChatGPT stuff, this is my own algorithm. They basically create a situation in which I have to negotiate with something I didn’t completely decide. I’m wrestling with this algorithm, but at the same time, I don’t think the technology behind the making of the work is all that interesting for me. Whether I’m using code I made in Python, or a custom-coded AI construct or an analog process like GPS data, I create a system in which information becomes physical, and to me, that’s interesting.

BC: You’re giving up a certain amount of control, right? This is a collaboration.

CH: Yeah, it's a collaboration between an algorithm I wrote and control, the artist, the physicality of the work, the materials, and the sheep. The computer produces something abstract, my body translates it, and the material resists it. The finished object records all those reactions. The work kind of emerges from a feedback loop.

BC: And let's talk about that feedback loop, because this is what's endemic to your process, right? What does that particular kind of way of working with a loop give you that other ways wouldn't? Because it's a very specific kind of dialogue that is often undone as well, right?

CH: In some ways. It is a translation system between different kinds of information, I like to think of it. The algorithm doesn't make the artwork; it creates the conditions under which the artwork can happen. I'm really interested in what happens when the authorship becomes a negotiation. From my wrestling with the algorithm/score, to recognizing the names of every animal that I used in my media lines. It kind of reminds me of the Sol Lewitt quote, "Neither lines nor words are ideas. They are the means by which ideas are conveyed."

BC: I love that. And the animals, can you give me an example?

CH: If I were to give an elevator pitch, my work is knitted paintings based on algorithms using conservation-breed sheep. 90% of the worlds sheep right now is merino sheep, because of factory-farming, and this causes all the other sheep that have been around for centuries or millennia, are now starting to go extinct, because you have, you know, the "monoculturing" of everything. So, I work with sheep geneticists, hobbyist farms, and conservation farms to source my materials, the wool which I then wash, dye, spin into yarn, which is basically a transfer of my energy into the wool in the form of twist. And then it goes into the actual process of negotiation with the feedback loop of an algorithm that tells me what to do where, and I have to negotiate with it.

It's like this human-physical limitation. The algorithm might say, "Knit this!" But my body has to ask, "Can I actually knit this?" Sometimes the algorithm tells you to do something structurally difficult, and you have to compensate physically. So, the machine proposes, my body negotiates, and the material ultimately decides.

I like to think of the algorithm as a score. An algorithm, in my practice, is essentially a set of instructions with set variables that act as constraints. It gives me infinite possibilities; it can be color, stitch, density, scale, direction, repetition, mistakes, duration, material, even the size of the work. The algorithm gives me a set of instructions, and I interpret it physically. So it makes it actually closer to musical composition or choreography, or genetic sequencing systems.

BC: That's very interesting. I want to ask about the sheep conservation farms. That's really interesting. I don't know anything about sheep, other than merino wool sheep. I don't know about extinct sheep that are still around, or I guess they're not around, if they're extinct. What kind of sheep are you getting this wool from? Can you tell me more about them, because that sounds amazing. The source is so important.

CH: Read any of my media lines! They're like Corriedale, Border Leicester, California Variegated Mutant, Romeldale, Santa Cruz Sheep. Sanat Cruz Sheep was almost extinct, they only had 200 left in existence, and I think they're slowly making a comeback, and now there's only 2,000 or 3,000 of them left, I don't have the exact number. But it's been many decades trying to bring back the population of Santa Cruz Sheep that was nearly decimated in the '80s.

BC: So, what's the difference in these wools? You're working with several. How do you choose one? To me, this is the equivalent of making your own paint or something.

CH: Yes, it's exactly that. It is a medium, like paint, that I use to have a discussion with art. It's a medium for me to explore the dialogue with painting. Are you familiar with the quantum mechanics term "superposition?"

BC: I'm familiar with it, but I don't understand it.

CH: In quantum physics, there can be multiple states at the same time. Unless you observe the state of a particle, it is there, not there, everywhere, nowhere, all at once. It's in superposition, it is in all possible states. And it's only until you bring consciousness into the equation, and actually look at where a particle is, does it actually exist in any one place. Some people have looked at my work as drawings, some people have thought of them as tapestries or sculptures, or as paintings. I like to think all interpretations of my work, as to what kind of thing they are, is valid and is in the eye of the viewer.

BC: Let's also talk about what you mentioned before. Fluxus, Al Hansen, your grandfather, what was it like growing up under that influence? Was art something normal to do, was it something strange or serious to you?

CH: I grew up in an art family. My mother was a Warhol superstar, my father was an arranger/composer, so everyone around me was making art, music, or performances. The early punk-rock scene in Los Angeles, I was surrounded with the art process, even if I never got to see the finished product, art was the activity, not nearly just the object. In this way, my work has been influenced by the Fluxus idea of "Art is life" and "Process over product."

When I was in art school my grandfather would write to me with advice. His best advice was "Be wrong, make mistakes. Your mistakes will reveal the future of your work. Progress is a series of funerals." And that's why I always add a mistake variable to my scores.

BC: That's a great line, thank you for sharing that with me. And your mother, influence there? You know, because that's also quite a scene. She was in a whole world.

CH: She was in several of Warhol's movies. I think the movie *Prison* was made because Warhol met my mother two days after she got out of juvie, when she was 13 or something. And he was like, "Oh, how wonderful! Let's make a movie!"

BC: And is that also an influence on the work? Well, I guess everything has to be, right?

CH: I very much grew up in the Fluxus tradition, my grandfather Al Hansen was one of those early Fluxus, and also in the Happenings. He took Jon Cage's class of music experimentation at the New School in 1950-whatever, I forget what it was, in which Happenings kind of came out of that. Dick Higgins, Brecht, just so many people in that, Allan Kaprow was there. These people then went on and started doing the whole Happenings movement and Fluxus.

BC: And Fluxus has such an influence, right? We're talking about how it's leeched into your work but also it departs quite a bit. How do you think Fluxus is being contextualized now? It's this historic movement, but is it having an influence, do you think, in general, on other artists? It must be, right?

CH: Yes, but I think more so in Europe. I think definitely a lot of the poetics of Fluxus. That this notion of, especially with social media, your whole life is on display so you're trying to curate this whole life-as-an-artwork. That aspect is very Fluxus. Chance operations, like using my algorithm.

BC: Yeah, in Europe, that's interesting. It's a different mentality towards the art world there, as opposed to the United States. Europe is developing an art scene in a different way.

CH: Absolutely. I mean, art world, art market, artist. It's three separate things, but what I think about a lot is that the Fluxus is just inherent in my DNA, strangely, since I'm working with actual animal DNA, but in the beginning, my exploration of fiber as a medium, I kind of distanced myself from the notion of craft and the title "fiber artist," because I kept saying "craft solves questions, art asks them." I wanted to shift the discussion away from knitting-as-craft, and towards craft as a philosophical instrument. Craft asks, "How do you make this structure work?" And art asks, "Why should this structure exist?" The technical problem becomes a philosophical problem. The more technically sophisticated my processes became, the stranger the underlying questions became. The hand isn't executing ideas that already exist in full, the act of the making is part of how the idea becomes known. Because I usually use different scientific theories or metaphysical kind of things in my work.

BC: And we've been talking about some of these things, that border on all of these issues. Removing all of the algorithms and the metaphysical issues, to viewers who haven't read anything or know your history, how do you imagine they experience it? What's happening for them?

CH: The ideas behind the work do deepen the experience, but the viewer doesn't need to understand the algorithm or the science to have a meaningful encounter with it. I love how my work has so many entry levels for people to engage with it. From people who have never stepped into a gallery before, but were just like "Whoa, what's this?" to going into the art-historicity of the various elements that I'm referencing. In a way, the process is inseparable from the object. The finished work carries the history, even when the viewer knows nothing about that process.

BC: Knitting is a process that's very intimate in a way, and also the material has that dimension of "materiality," as they say now. You want to touch it; it's one of those works that you want to touch.

CH: I think that's another one of those entry levels, that people see a soft sweater and they want to touch it. Knitting, it used to be high-tech, and were trade secrets, and guilds protecting how they knitted things. Now it's so ubiquitous that it kind of disappears into everyday life, but instinctually, everyone has a connection to textiles.

BC: That's so true, it's such an ancient material. I wanted to ask you one more question that's a little off topic. What are you reading at the moment?

CH: I'm currently reading two books. One is *The Invention of Craft*, it's worth a reread, by Glenn Adamson. But I'm also reading *Magic of the Ordinary: Recovering the Shamanic in Judaism* by Gershon Winkler.

BC: Ooh, that last one sounds great. I get some of the most wonderful recommendations through here. I want to thank you, Channing, for talking with me today, and I encourage listeners to go to the show, of course before it closes. Again, Channing, thanks so much for your time.

CH: No problem!