

00:00:00:15 **INTRODUCER:** Hi everyone. I'm very happy and honored to introduce our speaker tonight, Raúl de Nieves. De Nieves was born in 1983, Michoacán, Mexico, and is currently based in New York. His artistic practices crosses over sculpture and performance, using mostly traditional craft materials such as beads, paper, and textiles, alongside techniques such as cutting, stitching, and gluing. His works have been widely shown all over the world, including the Swiss Institute in New York; Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles; New Orleans Museum of Art; Company, New York; the 2017 Whitney Biennial; Documenta 14; MoMA PS1; the Watermill Center, New York; Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo; Zabłudowicz Collection, London; ICA, Philadelphia; The Kitchen; the Museum of Arts and Design, New York; Marfa Ballroom; Artists Space; Performa 13 and 11; SFMOMA; and many more.

00:01:06:04 His first solo exhibition, his first museum solo exhibition, Fina, was held at the Cleveland Museum of Art, Transformer Station, was recently held, and ended two days ago, three days ago? Sorry. He has two upcoming solo exhibitions at Company Gallery this year, and at ICA Boston in 2020. His sculptures and performances create fantastical figures and narratives, embellished by extravagant colors and patterns. They're simultaneously facets and symbols of celebrating life and mourning of death. In his interview with Art 21, referencing the flies that fill in the gaps of his stained paper window installation at the Whitney Biennial, de Nieves said, "The fly is the core of life that is constantly watching." His art reminds us of every small particle that creates an epic, a larger journey between life and death, happiness and sadness. The way he approaches craft has been very inspiring for my own thinking, which is why I'm very excited for him to speak now. Please welcome Raúl de Nieves.

[APPLAUSE]

00:02:33:16 **RAÚL DE NIEVES:** Thank you very much for having me. Today was actually a very inspiring day for me, to be here and to be able to talk to some of the curators that are part of this project here at Bard CCS. It's often very interesting for me to engage in these types of conversations because as you know, we're all learning as we go along. So definitely, feel free to ask questions at any given point. I will be reading some poems throughout my talk that coincide with some of these experiences that I'll be talking about. And first, I'd like to maybe just talk a little bit about myself and where a lot of point of narratives and inspiration come from.

00:03:25:18 I was born in Mexico in 1983. And for me, my upbringing really gave me a sensibility to understand so many different aspects of life. As a child, I really experienced what life really kind of had to give to someone as a young child. My father passed away when I was very young. But in a way, my family always told me that it was something that we should celebrate and learn from, these experiences of what it means to lose a loved one. And by losing a loved one, we gain maybe more love or an understanding of the different aspects of life. Death really is something that I cherish, because I value my life to the highest degree of what one can value themselves. But also because it's given me a sensibility to just also see my mother experience something of what that could've been like. Michoacán really is a really beautiful place that celebrates death. Every time there's a Dia de los Muertos, we would gather around with many families to see other people in sorrow. And sometimes thinking about what sorrow means and seeing other people cry can be intimidating. But in a way, it was a way to kind of free yourself from being ashamed of, you know, believing that death is something that awaits all of us. I

talk about death a lot because obviously, it's something that I know will happen to me, and will continue happening to the rest of us. But in a way, it's like planting another seed, like I said. I'm really reflecting on what we have as today, and what we will have as tomorrow. So I'd like to continue to talk by having just a small moment of silence in remembrance of everyone that is loved and who has been loved and that is missed. [SILENCE]

00:06:29:03 Thank you for allowing me to partake in this experience with you. Right now we're seeing this photo of one of the places that I've found to be so inspiring as growing up. It's the large cathedral in the center of Morelia, where I'm from. I remember going here every Sunday, worshipping something that maybe kind of sometimes rejects us, but gives us a sense of strength because spirituality is something that we're kind of all searching for—or I personally think I am. The Sunday afternoons were filled with a lot of joy, and obviously, bringing all the family together. And one of the things that I remember the most was the objects that were inside these places. The sacredness that somehow had these things that we would go and visit, and sometimes touch, in order to feel like we were a part of something that wasn't actually there. I didn't really even know what art was. I think I was just really connected to these objects because it was something that was kind of passed down to me. And it was the beauty of these spaces that held everyone together, you know, mourning their loved ones or celebrating a moment of success of happiness.

00:07:57:16 I always remember that when we would go to church, there was one experience where towards the end of the mass, the sermon would ask you to say hello to the person next to you and shake hands. And that always kind of stuck to me because it's something that we forget to do. But in these spaces, it kind of was somewhat safe. The beauty of the space inspired me to kind of just really look around and think about why this place existed and what it was doing to everyone and how it connected one another. It also gave me this idea to question my sanity and like, to think about what it is now as an adult, to feel like you have this sense of faith. Whether it's in something so personal like the church or something that can actually feel like it's a point of reference to feel rejected. I still often visit these spaces because I feel like it's one of the places where I can have a moment of silence to really decompress my thoughts and my insecurities because in a way, as you can see, I'm just like everybody else. And we all go through these moments of life where we're feeling insecure or afraid of what [it] is that we're searching for or how we find it. But somehow, through these spaces, as conventional as they can be, they open up my psyche to understand who I am as a person and who's next to me, and maybe reaching out my hand to ask someone how they're doing.

00:09:49:09 The Sundays actually really contributed to, like, seeing these beautiful artisanal people dance on the street. And that sense of memory really just stayed so close to my heart because it was something that I would see and really take now, as an adult, and remember these experiences. This image of the old man dancing really just stuck to me. And it's what's really inspired me to really kind of take in this honing of my culture and really understand it of how beautiful, like, where we come from really is, and where it allows us to tell these stories and feel connected to something that maybe you're not a part of. The old man would dance around with several other old men, which usually range from an actually elderly person to a very young child, forming a line and pretty much just doing a very simplistic dance of— Almost like tap dancing. It was like huaraches with tap shoes underneath their sandals. And they would congregate and pull each other with this stick. And it felt just so beautiful to see that they were not even holding hands, but that something that was like part of nature guided them through this almost like ritualistic practice.

- 00:11:15:19 Their clothing really, like, stuck to me because I was able to see some of these people make the clothing on the street. And it really gave me a sensibility to ask my family who these people were. And they always referenced them as the artists of Mexico, the people that were actually working the streets in order to making a living of something that couldn't be done in a normal basis; that their traditions were something that was passed on through families, and that that was something that we were experiencing. And to kind of really just think about it as a gift that people still were performing these ritualistic simple gestures, in order for people to have kind of like a nice afternoon and, you know, to really feel this connection back to where they're from. So like, watching these people obviously excited me, because I really was thinking about, well, what is there to do outside of kind of trying to be creative? You know? Making these narratives actually something that could be tangible, and really relate back to, like, the beauty of how objects were made, and then how they were presented back into the world.
- 00:12:39:19 In 1993, my mother chose to move my brothers and I to San Diego. And in a way, it was a little bit scary, obviously, as a child, because I had to find a way to readapt to something that was completely different. San Diego was a very middleclass part of the United States, and it has a lot of military bases. When I arrived to San Diego, I felt kind of lost and confused, as a nine-year-old trying to learn how to speak English and really fit into, like, back into a new society that didn't have the old man, or even a church that I could go visit. In a way, I wanted to fit in and I wanted to conform to what it was to be almost like an American. I used to think about America as like what I saw in movies, and would imagine that, like, everything was like a movie. Like that the movie theater was the form of reality and anything could be possible. And I think in a way, it did show me that because I saw my mother move us to San Diego and create a new life for us.
- 00:13:56:02 I studied up into high school and took some community college classes in San Diego. And after high school, I was starting to really realize that there was something missing in my life. And I think it was this aspect of the performance quality and gaining back a community that I could feel like I was a part of. I started going out and maybe, like, dressing a certain way, asking for a different kind of attention. And that's when I started to realize that there was a different kind of attention and different things happening that weren't necessarily so easy to find, but you had to look for them yourself. Music really derived again back into my practice when I started to see these DIY hardcore shows. This is this really amazing band that really changed my life in San Diego, called The Locust. They were based out of San Diego, and had a record label called Three One G. Meeting these people gave me a new understanding of what it meant to be someone with a voice and to be able to bring people back into a sense of community, and to see this dance or this sense of anxiety be performed up in front of people. I made an effort to become friends with these bands, and really just pushed myself to really want to be what they were doing, to really experience this live frenetic action of, like, music, and to see people once again reenact in a different form. The Locust were such an inspiration, and still have been. And I know that when I go back to visit San Diego, I often see these people still at the bar, playing music and doing what they love.
- 00:15:55:13 The Ché Café was one of the first places that really kind of gave me this idea of community. And this place was located in the UCSD campus. And it was open to anyone that could be a part of this experience. This was a political place where people had a voice outside of the norm. It gave you a platform to not just perform, but to really execute ideas through the DIY culture, creating scenes, you know, having food be given to people. The Food No[t] Bombs was a big part of this situation. And then this place really just felt so close to home because it really did open up so many opportunities for so many people to, like, feel like they were a part of it. And the fact that it was in the UCSD campus kind of started to give me the sensibility of wanting to maybe be a part of an academic world or to engage myself in school. So when I was in San Diego, I decided

to maybe think about another place that would have the same kind of experience happening, but more in like an everyday experience, where I could see these people not just in one place, but that they could surround the streets.

00:17:19:08 During that time, I was really questioning what I wanted to do with myself. But finding this kind of like form of freedom was the thing that kind of gave me the push to maybe want to ask myself, do I want to be an artist or do I want to be a performer? Or is it just do I want to belong into a certain community? And what was I supposed to do, and what did I want to do? So I felt that, like, maybe moving away from home would be kind of the push to really find myself and question my surroundings. So this is a poem that kind of gives me the sensibility of having that experience. And it was something that I had one time talking to my mom, feeling lost. Feeling like I didn't have a way out. My insecurities were really pushing in and I was feeling very scared of who I was as a person. Not only because I was confronting my own sexuality, but just really trying to be as open as I could to not just my family, but to myself. To really give myself the opportunity to really flourish as a person. To really get to know myself. So this poem goes like this.

On the edge of a cliff, I stand alone.

I'm afraid to see what's on the other side.

[Spanish].

I don't know what I see.

I just see myself.

And all I want to do is jump.

Jump in order to maybe understand.

To find myself and come back as something new.

[Spanish].

00:19:28:16 Moving to San Francisco was the next thing that I could think of. I felt like I really needed to engage myself back into this community that I wanted to fit in, to feel like I was being accepted for who I was, not just for what I wanted to be. San Francisco was the first place that I could think of because it had this vibrant lifestyle. I had always read about it in, you know, books, thinking about the 1960s and people roaming the streets as Deadheads, as you'd want to call them. Music being the heart of the practice. And you know, thinking that there was more out there than what I was searching for. San Francisco gave me that sensibility because it also allowed me to really engage myself into wanting to maybe partake this opportunity of being an artist. This is the place where I decided to choose to go to school, and then felt like I was being rejected by school system. So I said to myself, "Well, in a way, nothing else can stop me now because I'm here and I've already left home." Home was like the last thing I wanted to think about because I wanted to challenge myself. I stayed in San Francisco for about four years, trying to just really grow and find everything that could be inspiring to me. These parades of people parading themselves with true nature of how proud they were really started to just flourish so much of understanding. But then there was still this lack of— fear inside of me, making me feel as if there was nothing I could do or understand. But something really just kept pushing me. So I kept searching into, like, the streets and finding myself back into these places that had music. Music really has been such an informative aspect of my practice because it allows me to only just see myself as someone that can talk to others, but entertain people. To give people a sensibility to just let go of themselves and really experience the now, the view in front of them. In a way, like, these spaces have been so sacred to me. Since I've been in New York, I've always been part of this what you'd want to call DIY community. Places like the Ché Café really just embedded so much into my brain of how much you could do in space and how many people are allowed to be a part of it.

00:22:22:14 As I was searching, I started to really incorporate myself in the musical aspect and create a band. This is my current band right now. We've been together in New York for about fourteen years, since I've been here. Nathan Whipple is the guitarist. And I met him on the street, just as he was, like, walking. And he saw me and we saw each other, and we just started talking and kind of really just vibing off one each other's memories and, like, stories. And the band really came along. Jessie Stead is the percussionist, and she's also an amazing person that stumbled into our lives and has been really a core person of this group. She's actually almost like the mastermind that holds the band together. This is our album that we just released. And I'm showing you this because I think in the fourteen-year run, we never really took our music seriously. It was more of like an escape of trying to deal with ourselves. But within those fourteen years, we were able to put this album out that just came out last year. And it's really, really amazing work. It just showed me so much of, like, the trust in one another and the fun that you can have with these experiences of like, you know, collaboration.

00:23:54:26 When I was searching for a meaning, I kind of went back into this weird religious kind of situation, where somehow this image of Saint George and the dragon came into my life. And it really started to teach me about what it was that I was doing and how I could actually battle my own personal fears. When I thought about this image being presented to me, it really just executed this idea of painting and forming my own visual language through something that I understood, something that was seen in an everyday format, and to think about traditionality, and to question this kind of sense of, like, understanding how Saint George and the dragon becomes a saint in order to save his city. So I often saw myself as the dragon himself. I was constantly trying to battle with my own personal fears, and I was searching for that kind of like heroism to push me. This image somehow, like, pushed me to the understanding that there wasn't a right way to do something; that it was just through inner vision, and to really just kind of believe that anything is possible. I constantly think I'm, like, living a dream; but I'm actually living reality. And these moments are what put me back into reality, because they're a coat of arms that exist through history. And to dissect them in, like, my own personal way has been such an amazing experience, because from the sensibility of just seeing an image of Saint George to think of me being the George itself or me guiding my own self through this experience has been a blessing.

00:26:03:07 The paintings really started to derive into just these abstract forms that kind of were the same the way that I was thinking. And I was wondering why I kept painting this image. The image, I still paint. I've probably painted about twenty of them. And when I started doing this exercise, I told myself I would paint fifty. I hope one day I do get to paint the fifty paintings and see them all come together once again. But this past year, I had the great year of seeing this painting that I was painting in San Francisco over ten years ago be brought into a reality larger than life. The painting was selected in Boston as this larger-than-life mural that's presented at a health clinic in Fenway district, and now I can see it 173 feet tall. To think of myself as like that person that was asking for an answer, and to kind of just see it be put into this situation was really intimidating. But it also gave me this idea of understanding that patience is, like, what this is all about. To really believe in something that actually has meaning, and that you can create a meaning once again is the experience of this painting being seen next to, like, this health clinic. When I was asked to be part of the selection process, I was kind of really scared to even understand how to do this. But through the help of my friends, I was able to kind of work out the system of how I could propose this to a large group of people and make this a public work.

00:27:59:13 The work is going to be up for about five years. And it's something that I've only visited once, and hope that I can visit again. But to remind myself once again of that twenty-four-year-old feeling insecure, and to see this beautiful thing happen in a public space has been just

so rewarding. And I think it's been through this questioning of, like, what it is and what does it mean to be afraid. How do we think about fear on an everyday experience? I constantly wake up and I'm afraid of myself because there's so many things that I could do that maybe I shouldn't do, but I still do them. I guess at the end of the day, I'm thinking about how it is that we question ourselves this, and what fear actually is man's best friend, in a way. We carry it along with ourselves. And in a ways, I've always thought that fear is my best friend that I want to get to know because I don't want to be afraid of it. I actually want to shake hands with it and be acquaintances. To still have it come back into my life and teach me something new every day. It definitely kind of sounds very, like, quasi-intense to talk about these things, but I don't know what else to say, other than that this was a reality and that somehow, this weird image of Saint George and the dragon kind of helped me understand myself and question my reality, and then push myself to not really be afraid of taking the risk of doing the things that I'm doing now. To go forward without having the proper, you know, agenda of how to do things, but to believe in yourself. And once again, to maybe even think about the DIY quality of life. That anything is possible if you feel like it really exists.

00:30:07:06 Sculpture really became kind of like the next process after doing these paintings, because I felt like I was diving into a world that I wanted to be a part of. I wanted to engage myself back again to, like, a reality of understanding what it means to be an artist, and to learn from something so simple as a craft tool or something like your shoes. My shoes became a sense of inspiration for myself once I moved to New York, because I felt like I had made the steps and was continuing this journey. And in that journey, I was seeing my footwear almost like this object of desire, a fetish. I remember wearing the same shoes over and over again, and not wanting to throw them away, but keep trying to fix them. To give them a new purpose. To stitch them back up or glue them with the shittiest glue, but still wear them because I felt like they had something really personal. When the shoe was kind of like starting to just take on more of this role of what it could do, I remember this curator, Omar Chahoud-Lopez, who gave me my first opportunity to show in New York when I move to New York, he looked at my shoes, at my apartment, and asked me why they were overly decorated. They had some yarns and tape on them. And I said, "I don't know. I just keep working on them and I feel like they just look more beautiful the more I fuck them up." He actually kind of pushed me to maybe consider the shoe as a point of reference to making sculpture. And I think without his pushing, I might've would've gotten there; but somehow him pointing that what I thought was a discarded object that could be used into something of my practice really gave me, I don't know, the push to really go forward. And in a way, I think that's something that I've learned so much from these experiences of inviting people into my studio or having conversations like this. Because without the proper, you know, way of learning how to make art, it's almost like I want still to be pushed by somebody. To get, you know, ideas. And for someone to also just ignite the fire inside of me and to make me feel that it's possible.

00:32:52:13 The shoes really did start to become these, like, objects of desire, because I started overly decorating them, to the point where I couldn't even wear them anymore. But it was almost like bringing back the shoe from its death into something beautiful was kind of like really just a first ignition to making a sculpture. And to think that the shoe had two options to work with, and that the shoe really kind of balances yourself and it gives you this kind of freedom to fully express yourself, is when I started kind of really seeing that maybe there was something I could do with this discarded object. The beads really just came out of nowhere. They were kind of a mistake to work with, but they really just started to give me the sensibility of time. To see the accumulation of this simple material being taken into something of, you know— Of making it even precious. These are just all plastic beads, like, literally held by glue. And it's surprising how much you can actually create mass with such a small little increment. The shoes started to just kind of form

into these weird shapes that I was actually having so much fun working with, because I felt like it really was this intuitive practice. It was giving me like a personal freedom to kind of just experiment with what it means to have two objects to work off, but still find a relationship that they could actually be something that marries them back together.

00:34:43:15 After making the shoes is when I started to really think about, well, if I see this object end here, how do I continue it to grow and, you know, reference back the body? The figurative sculpture is something that I'm very highly excited about because I think looking at our bodies, there're so many ways that we can present ourselves. This work is called *Days of Wonder*, and it's an homage to my mother. Days of Wonder is derived from my mom's daycare, which is called Days of Wonder. And working on this object gave me almost like the freedom to see something fail for so long, but to not ever feel like I had to give up. It took me about seven years to create this object because I saw it fail so many times. And through the idea of failure is where I was kind of being challenged more. The work itself was being my teacher, at this point. It was giving me the opportunity to see myself criticize my own personal doing of why am I doing this and will this work? I remember so many times, my friends would come to the studio and laugh because they would see the sculpture on the floor, and I would laugh with them. To the point that one day I was so frustrated that I literally smashed the piece into pieces. And then through seeing the pieces, it's kind of how I understood the mechanism of the work itself. I could see the core of the sculpture and I could finally start to understand what balance actually meant. And it just reminded me of the simplicity of, like, the shoe itself and how, like, using that simple object was starting to ignite this fire of, like, how to do something.

00:36:44:24 Looking at this thing, I was just so in love with, like, his body posture and the colors that housed his whole entire body. So after seeing this work kind of like succeed, it was like, well, how do I become part of the work again? How do I really become *Days of Wonder*? I want the sculpture to be back into a form of function. To think about function was the beginning of what ignited all these things, these like, leftover broken shoes and how they had a function at one point. And I took the functionality out of it and made it this fetish object that had no point, other than to be this beautiful thing that I could stare at. That's when I kind of started to experiment more with the idea of the body itself and to use, once again, these simple elements of that old man and his costume. To kind of just play around with the idea of identity, and to really fetishize myself as a human being that wasn't necessarily human. These costumes really did derive from the idea of looking at that object for so long and then understanding what it was made out of and how actually, I could activate these artworks. These things really just became almost like an accident themselves, because I like to think that everything kind of has this accident quality. And through the accident, it's when you're starting to really see how you can fix something or how something could be better.

00:38:28:12 Working on these objects really also then started to give me even more personal freedom of, like, how I could express myself. I really thought of myself as the most beautiful drag queen, when I would put these things on. And then I started to think about much I could incorporate this into my practice and really give it a new life, to become a new character and to not really have a resemblance of who I was, and to continue to put back that mask. You know, thinking back at The Locust, how their faces were always covered, and that there was no sense of identity. But it was like this human being or a being that didn't really have any sense of gender. The works then really started to start marry them one another, where they started to make so much sense, where the paintings of Saint George really derived this whole idea of a narrative, where the narrative was now a world that I was creating. This was actually my first show I had at Company Gallery. And when I look at this work or this image, I see so many years of practice and so many years of kind of just experimenting with ideas. But taking this simple gesture as

three elements of what my practice is about: the storytelling, the idea of life and death, and then the marriage of a new world, a new beginning. This image always has been so inspiring to me because I did this. And it took me so long to do this. But again, time was like my best friend at this point, where I had visibility to kind of just experiment and see this work really transform itself, not just from the show, but to actually think of what abstraction really means. And to give meaning back to something that is recognizable to the self. The show was called El Rio. And I wanted to reference the idea of a river. Like the river coming down and bringing life back into the world, but also the river overflowing and creating disasters, maybe floods. But through those floods and the idea of decay is when new growth comes about.

00:40:55:25 My inclusion in the Whitney Biennial was another form of inspiration because when I met the curators, I had not realized that these people had been a part of my life for so many years and that they were watching my work grow. This experience was something that has given me so much personal freedom to really take these humble objects and materials into another form. To really think that art is a form of magic. I remember Chris and Mia walking me through the museum, and I was really wondering, after so many years of wanting to be a part of this community or this show that houses American artists, and to feel like I'm a Mexican American in a place of prestige, I was like, what am I going to do? How am I going to show who I am as a person? I was definitely confused. But through the help of the curators are the ones that kind of encouraged me to do this. They walked me through the museum, and we were standing in front of glass windows. And they said, "This is where we see your art." And I was looking out into the street, kind of clueless to what they were talking about. And they said, "We see your art just in here, but out there. We'd love to know if you could take on the challenge of creating something on top of these windows." And at that moment, I didn't know what to think. I obviously once again felt afraid to face up to, like, a challenge.

00:42:44:25 When they asked me to create a mural on top of it, I didn't even know what that would look like. And they were like, "You should think about this and let us know if this is something that you could do." And immediately, I was like, "I will do it." When I thought about this and I was making this image, I thought of myself once again as like baby Raúl being afraid of, you know, being who I'm supposed to be, or having the courage to understand what it means to be an artist. In the first bottom row of this mural, you see this personal fight. There's a fight within itself. It's like this green monster is the dragon once again, guiding me through my own fears. But there is courage upon it. On the second tier, there's this idea of celebration of life, death, and beauty. There's these urns that are being presented through these dancers, precariously maybe waiting to be tipped over. But at the end of the journey, there's a craftsman sitting there, back at his table working, figuring out how to complete its job. On the third tier is where I started to really feel like maybe that is a moment that you have to knock down. The tower can't just stay up for all eternity; it needs to come down at one point, in order for something new to grow. So I chose this idea of a gate, with an entrance that had the words peace, love, truth, justice, harmony, and hope. In a way, that was something that I was struggling with. But seeing the simplicity of how you could marry all these things into a narrative was kind of just the way that I felt like I could really just let go and actually do the thing that I was supposed to do—which was continuing to work with my humble objects and see them transformed, and marry this kind of beautiful story of life and death.

00:44:56:06 You see here this white, walking, almost-religious person asking for the idea of temptation, holding an apple in one hand. And on the other hand, there's a dead bird. The dead bird is actually what I feel like I've gone through so many times and seen happen, which is this idea of conquering these fears and putting them to sleep, in order for them to grow. Like the fly itself. It is almost like this personal secret that guides you, that knows everything you're thinking. Or

least I like to think so. I see these flies now, and actually was so afraid of them before because I was told that maybe the fly was the devil following me around, or like my own personal fears. But then the more I started seeing these flies, the more I kind of wanted to become the fly and really just fulfill myself with that role of creation, and believe that there is a humility aspect to life. That treating these humble experiences as something that could give you the stepping stone to grow is of the experience.

00:46:09:16 Here I am, proud. Really just feeling like this extra glow of life, because I felt like there was a moment of myself that I could see a growth actually coming. You see me here inside my artwork, really just feeling like it is an image of myself. When I think about who I see is when I see myself working. When I see myself the joy that it brings me. And then these moments of life that I can have to have conversations with people like you, or to be able to travel and just have a story to tell. And that it really does come from this place of kind of wanting to grow and really just feel this, like, understanding of being proud of who I am and the experiences that the simplicity of art making has given me.

00:47:10:11 The works have been, gladly, celebrated. And it's so surprising to me of where they end sometimes. I never had the knowledge of thinking that something so simple could be celebrated in forms of where people actually want to be a part of your work. And also, like, feel what it's like to maybe put something on like this. And I often think about that when I'm walking through museums or seeing things that obviously you can't touch, but you want to feel connected to. And in a way, inviting, like, these other worlds inside into my practice is kind of that same experience to opening up myself to people to really understand where the work comes from and how it really is just a simple gesture of seeing someone actually create something with their hands and really take time as the guiding force of how to do things.

00:48:14:12 Collaboration has given me this understanding of, like, where it could go, anywhere. Thinking about, like, the band itself and how it's opened up all these pictures, it's almost like these objects become just so beautiful that there's something so, I don't know, crazy. This box was made by Tiffany. And in a way, I never even thought that that would be a possibility in my life, that someone as the prestige of Tiffany, the jewelers, would consider my artwork something of importance. To see this box is a self-realization of really kind of thinking that anything is possible, as long as you open up yourself to kind of want to be a part of other people's lives. I have one of these boxes in my home and I barely ever touch it, because I feel like it's almost like unnecessary. But in a way, the beauty of it— And to see how it was made and to think about the craftsmanship that went into making this, and to meet the actual craftsmen that made this box, people that have been working for the company for over fifty years, and that they're master engravers, and how they replicated my art over ten times in the same manner, was just so fascinating to me. And I think in a way, this kind of idea of collaboration has given me the sensibility to be open to work with people outside of not just the art world, but a different world that is this unattainable world. Like, these luxury brands that sought after artists. But then at the end of the day, they're really taking care of you, somehow.

00:50:14:18 This is the realization of the window that we did with the Tiffany. And it just was so amazing to see it once again replicated and be taken serious in this way where it was like, almost like this beautiful experience as, like, what I'm actually going through. And I don't know, the reason why I bring this up and put these works up here is because I think in a way, it's like the whole possibility of things. Just last year, I was able to realize this larger-than-life experience, which is a carousel, with the help of Bulgari. I applied for a grant through them, and I was one of the finalized people that got selected. But I wanted to— When I applied to get their grant, I wanted to think of something that kind of reminded me of childhood and that would be something

of beauty for people to experience. And the carousel became almost like the cycle of life once again, where you see this thing that we are actually all aware of and you can see as like something very traditional. And once again, you see the snake being chopped up in half or in multiple parts as like references to this kind of idea of letting go of those fears.

00:51:52:18 Last, I'll show you this beautiful show that I just had in Cleveland art museum, which was titled Fina. And Fina is the name of my mother. And this was almost not just an homage to her, but an homage to everyone that you look up to. All these characters were almost like these fetishized creations of my own personal, like, madness. There're all these different worlds that are colliding together. And then you see, on top of the ziggurat, baby *Days of Wonder* again, dancing and full of joy, amongst all these beautiful creatures that don't necessarily have any resemblance to actual life, but more of like a fantasy. A fantasy that actually can become reality, because this did become reality. And through the idea of collaboration and building these personal relationships with the people that are actually here to help you is how these things come about. And that's one thing that I've been telling myself is to never be afraid to ask for help. To continue to ask for help and to see where that help can take me.

00:53:11:27 The last thing I will read to you is a poem that kind of references the whole perfect circle of how I think I see myself. And it's almost like the ending or the beginning of the first prints that I showed when I was talking about the child on the edge. I don't have that one memorized, so I'll have to read it to you. I hope that's okay. But it goes like this.

00:53:47:29 *Old woman.
You have lived a very beautiful life.
And it's time to let go of fear.
Fear only brings you farther from the self.
With the loss of fear, one can be a wandering spirit.
And soon will choose where the spirit is to go.
Your old body and brain are not eternal, but your soul is.
Old woman.
Why are you shaking?
Why do you shake when you close your eyes?
You're not awake.
Fear not your body leaving you, for it is not your soul.
My spirit wanders, body to body.
We're on a journey.
You must continue.
Do not be afraid.
By giving me a chance to help you, you will have me by your side at all times.
The body I have is light as a feather.
You have given me a chance to continue with greater knowledge.
To always be thinking with justice, generosity, ethics, patience, diligence, and most of all, renunciation.
The message you have brought me can only make me wiser.*

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]