

00:00:01:09 **DREW THOMPSON:** Good afternoon. It's with great pleasure that I introduce Paul Sepuya, our guest speaker this afternoon. A bit of a story about how I came to Paul's work is, last year Africana Studies— Oh, by the way, my name is Drew Thompson, and I'm the director of Africana Studies here at the undergraduate college, as well as a member of the historical faculty, Historical Studies department. Last year, Africana Studies was undergoing a thought process about how it could be more critically engaged in the moment that we're living, through the creative arts. And then as I was talking to David Little, the recently appointed director of the Amherst art museum, he mentioned a story about Paul's work.

00:00:46:29 The museum was in the process of acquiring some new photographs, and it laid out three photographers' work that they thought was worth acquiring. And it ultimately selected Paul's work because of its inclusivity, the images that he represented, as well as the director was struck by how Paul's work united a traditionally fractured campus community in Amherst, Massachusetts. And so with that, immediately after I got off the phone with David Little, I emailed Paul to see if he would be available to come to Bard, because he's precisely the type of photographer that I think is critically important in the moment that we're living, as well as just doing incredible work. And as a testament to the work, I think this week or last week, it was recently announced that Paul would be a participant in the upcoming Whitney Biennial.

00:01:39:18 And Paul's work has been featured in numerous museum collections. Just last year, he was an artist featured at the MoMA's New Photography show. And this year, he'll have several upcoming shows: One at CAM in St. Louis, and other group shows at the Getty and Guggenheim. Paul graduated with a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and an MFA from UCLA. And I also learned in our correspondence is, you have become a critical component of the photography program here sometimes in the summer months, of the MFA program here at Bard. So without further ado, I ask all of you to welcome Paul Sepuya. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

00:02:30:10 **PAUL MPAGI SEPUYA:** Hello. Hi. Thanks for coming. Thank you, Drew, for the introduction and for— Yeah. It's so nice to see— I see some familiar faces in the audience, too. It's really nice. Okay. Yeah. It's great being up at Bard in the winter. It's a really pretty ride from the train.

00:02:54:13 Okay. So I'm going to try to keep this, like, not going too long, so that there's time for conversation. And so I'm going to introduce a few works, I want to talk about some influences, and then kind of give a progression to what I am currently working on. One thing I like to say before doing these talks, especially in school settings, is like, it's kind of nice, and easy in retrospect, to make things seem like nice, discreet projects. But like, everything just sort of happens. And where one project begins and ends really just comes out of a process of like, reflection, looking back, and editing, which I think is a really big part of things. I don't lay out, like, a thesis or an idea and then execute work. It's like, all just been like, a need to make stuff. So it's always good. Especially, like, some of you are probably thinking, like, your thesis stuff right now. That's like, really crazy. Just relax. It'll be cool. Okay.

00:03:48:26 Then okay. I'm only going to read a couple of things for this. I have this, like, document. It's like a Google Doc that just holds like a million thoughts and ideas. My own journals sometimes,

notes from friends, citations from things I'm reading. I just call it, like, a script for the pleasure of idle pictures. I printed it out last week. And so I'm going to read two things from it. One of it is something that was in response to a task that one of my advisors in grad school gave me, where he said, "Just, like, look at the picture and describe it." And it's because there's a lot of these, like, tricky-looking pictures, right? They're like mirrors and stuff, whatever. I'm not trying to make tricky pictures. But anyways, Jim told me to describe a picture, and this is it. Okay. "So this picture is called *A Ground File 8003*, from 2016. It's a small photograph." In real life, it's matted and framed. "And so to see it, you have to approach it up close. In this picture, there's a mirror sitting atop a bench, leaning against the studio wall at a slight sideways angle, so that the photographing subject, which is myself, is not visible. At the left of the mirror's reflection, the leg of a tripod enters into that reflected space, along with the drapery of this cheap golden fabric. Towards the bottom right of the reflection, a photo reflector can be glimpsed." The sort of little curved thing there. "The same drapery extends into the non-reflected present space in front of the mirror, and across the bench and behind the mirror, where it is reflected yet again, between a print clipped to a second mirror leaning against the wall."

00:05:25:17 And sort of see it. It kind of comes off a little above the top." The edge of a man's arm and shoe can be seen depicted in the print, the clipped print, which introduces yet another space into this picture. That space could be just off frame and within the same studio, or an altogether different space." And I have to confess, it is a different studio. "Either way, the studio becomes a ground that—" Or maybe I'll revise this. This photograph sort of presents a ground that re-presents itself through its own reproduction, incorporating into itself various other sites, through their reproduction [inaudible]. That's a lot there. But jump to the end of that.

00:06:03:25 So it's kind of hard to see in these projections, rather than looking at the actual print, but "upon inspection, this mirror surface is smudged with finger and body prints. *A Ground* was alternately titled *Mirror, after Evan and Robbie*, which indicates two types of traces present in the photograph, though each is incomplete and emphasizes a partial absence, the depiction of Robbie's arm and leg, and an almost indiscernible imprint," which is Evan's sweat smudge, which you can only see where the black of that reflector sort of becomes a little fuzzy. And that becomes something important later. "It suggests that this absence is neutralized by the continuum of these relationships that exist outside and beyond the grasp of these photographs." So that's a lot there. I just wanted to throw that out.

00:06:59:20 Then I'm going to show just a couple of recent pictures. This one's actually in a show that's up in New York, in the city right now, at Team. It's called "The Conditions." And I'm really interested in this idea of the conditions, both the verb and the noun. What is required, sort of set up, for a certain set of things to unfold; or to train or work a material to do the thing that you want it to do. But I do want to say that portraiture is the foundation of all of my projects, going back to 2005. We'll get to those. But so anyways, between these four pictures, I'm interested in showing kind of like all the aspects that go into the work. We have the studio portrait, we have these sort of observations of material that I bring into the space, and then we have these kind of like reworkings on the mirror surface. Which later on, if someone has, like, technical questions about them, we can get more into that.

00:07:59:16 And a couple of installation views, just to give a context, because it can be very strange to look at all these projections and not get a sense of the scale and the materiality of photographs. And so scale is also real important for me because, like, the pictures you see up on the left in this installation—this is *Darkroom Mirror Studies*—their dimensions are thirty-four by fifty-one, at which point, my reflected body in the images is reproduced one to one. I'm really interested in a lot of— with these constructions made with the mirror, that the viewer is standing in front

of an apparatus that has both kind of like already created an internal loop, but also sort of like implicates the viewer on the outside.

00:08:50:26 And these are installation views from a show in Chicago last April. And so if anyone gets a chance to make it down to the city, the show that's up right now is sort of the third part of this project that I'm interested in, which has been called *Darkroom*. And where it comes from sort of relates to what I'm going to show you next. These exposures sort of like give a little hint at it. I'm really interested in, like, both the playful overlap of language and photography—darkroom and exposure, apertures, orifices, all of these things. And so I have an image here of a photographer's darkroom, with lovely red light. And then this is a darkroom at a sauna, a sex club, in England. And I'm really into this thing. And I'm going to read a note, actually, from a couple summers ago. Okay.

00:10:02:06 I was really interested— So in the summer of 2017, I started really thinking a lot about this. And I was thinking of— This is a note from my journal. "I'm asking myself, what does it mean to look at touch in photography?" And perhaps I'll go back to this. "What is this limit between viewer and image, and how do sight and touch vie in competition with an image? What is the proper spectatorial distance from pleasure. I'm currently sitting in my friend's apartment, reading Kelly Dennis' 2009 book, *Art/Porn: A History of Seeing and Touching*, and thinking I should revisit Glenn Ligon's *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book*. I'll get back to that later. But now I'm working on a series of darkroom pictures and thinking about the possibilities of a specific kind of knowledge that requires darkness to grow itself into a lead. The darkness of black and brown velvet or bodies that make visible the traces on the mirror's surface."

00:10:53:13 And so I'm making, like, my first introduction to photography in the black of my darkroom, of this sort of like processing and seeing an image that you then have to develop. Sort of the premonition of how you'll handle that in the light, right? But the final viewer does not know that initial experience of you working this material. And I've been thinking about also, in terms of darkrooms of social spaces, where queer, where brown people, have generally been— You know, you have to go behind the curtain at the end of the bar, right? And how those sort of like primary social, creative, sexual experiences, which can be the foundations of relationships, then get handled in the light. And so when I think about this, I go back to literature in the 1920s. And this is this one magazine called *Fire* includes, like, the first publicly— As far as I can tell, the first publicly acknowledged writing by, like, a black gay man, named Richard Bruce Nugent. And I also love that this cover has this beautiful interplay of this red and this black. And this text that he has in it is a short story called *Smoke, Lilies, and Jade*, where he's sort of this— It's a stream-of-consciousness sort of like first-person perspective, which I also think is interesting in terms of photography, right? Point perspective. Of him just wandering the streets of Harlem at night at odd hours, cruising, going into and out of jazz clubs, and really— his character's only grounded by him naming names.

00:12:27:05 I'm actually going to read something from that, too. I said I was going to not read so much, but I think it might be important to do so. This is an excerpt from *Smoke, Lilies, and Jade*. And so what we're looking at here is a photograph of him by Carl Van Vechten. If you don't know Carl Van Vechten, look him up, because we could have a symposium on him. Okay. "Alex wondered more and more why he liked Adrian so... he liked many people... Wallie... Zora...Clement... Gloria... Langston... John... Gwenny... oh many people... and they were friends... but Beauty... it was different... once Alex had admired Beauty's strength... and Beauty's eyes had grown soft and he had said... I like you more than anyone, Dulce... Adrian always called him Dulce...and Alex had become confused... was it that he was so susceptible to beauty that Alex liked Adrian

so much... but no... he knew other people who were beautiful... Fania and Gloria... Monty and Bunny... but he was never confused before by them... while Beauty... Beauty could make him believe in Buddha... or imps... and no one else could do that... that is... no one but Melva... but he was in love with Melva... and that explained that... he would like Beauty to know Melva... they were both so perfect... such compliments... yes he would like Beauty to know Melva because he loved them both... there... he had thought it.” It’s a great little short story.

00:13:49:20 And I keep really coming back to that, because one of the things that I really found when I was beginning my work is that literature, particularly like, early twentieth century Modernist, queer, like, really thinking about the medium of writing, was more fulfilling than a lot of just sort of like writing around portraiture, which is very, like, ethnographic and anthropological. Because I’m starting from a point of like, why do I need to make pictures of these people who are close to me? Anyways, I’m going to skip ahead from Van Vechten, but I just want to note his use of sort of staging his own apartment in this sort of like cheap fabric, and the way in which through, like, tricks like this, you turn work into looking like art, right? And also the complications of his position and the sort of record, historical record that it provides, which is complicated by his position as this patron and sort of like lustful figure, as a white man in the Harlem Renaissance.

00:14:47:15 And the [inaudible] photographs, Again, thinking about this use of these kind of like Surrealist tropes to again, turn to sort of like what could just be like tacky gay studio photographs into, like, art, right? We know how to turn things into art. Mapplethorpe was the best at it, right? And it’s like again, I kind of like this picture with this— You know, sort of like, where are we in relation to the subject of the work? And I think a lot about the viewing relationship of black gallery goers and museum visitors to Mapplethorpe’s work, and this sort of like feeling that I always have of never quite being autonomous, always thrown back into the image, right? Especially in mixed or majority-white spaces. And this sort of like orifice, this aperture, kind of like provides an escape. And then, you know, we have figures like Rotimi Fani-Kayode, who are getting their due now. But right? It’s like he’s a contemporary of Mapplethorpe, their work is in dialog; but like, who rises to prominence and who doesn’t? And he’s literally turning his camera back on us. And also, I like this picture, too, because I didn’t know this work until I started making pictures like this. And I was like, ‘Oh, all these wonderful accidental ancestors, right?’ Like, no one is doing anything new. And I don’t really believe this thing. But like, I just came up with this, like, wonderful thing, right? We’re all just building off of, like, this culture, even if we don’t know it yet.

00:16:10:19 And then going back to literature. Like, Virginia Woolf, like, my favorite, right? And I love, also, this plays so much into portraiture and also the sort of like Modernist working of text kind of like breaks down disciplines, right? So it’s like *Orlando* is a response to this sort of like beautiful affair and relationship with her friend Vita, which is then sort of negotiated by undoing biography, because Woolf’s father is a biographer. And she sort of like wraps Vita into this text as *Orlando*, and then further doubles down on that with this collaboration with her sister Vanessa, in creating portraits of Vita as Orlando. And I love that just all of these things collapse. I mean, we could do a symposium on that, too; I could talk for days.

00:16:54:15 Or work like this Jean Weisinger photograph of Alice Walker, which she writes about, you know, needing to go out and make a body of work photographing gay and bisexual women in the seventies—queer women, [we] say now—and her insecurity around it. And when she approached Alice Walker, Alice sort of flipped the script and was like, “Well, let me photograph you.” And we don’t think of Alice Walker as a photographer, but Jean Weisinger writes about how it was actually seeing herself through Alice Walker’s eyes that gave her sort of like the push to continue making work. So again, it’s like this coming together around why we make portraits that I find

really inspiring.

- 00:17:38:07 And then the work of, again, because I like [inaudible] complicated people, and Larry Rivers, and this idea of like, how does art work, and the making of artwork, and the function of the studio, like, really disclose types of information that otherwise would be excluded from art history? Or sort of like the proper things that we're supposed to recount or whatever. Like a painting like this—this is a detail of "The Studio," from '56, but it's made at this point where he's having this affair with Frank O'Hara, and their entwined figures are on the left here. And it's, like, complicated by not only the sort of nature of Larry Rivers' own practice, but O'Hara's position as the curator of painting and drawing at MoMA at the time.
- 00:18:24:15 And then of course, Lyle Ashton Harris was super important in thinking about the ways in which he is able to continually bring work from his entire practice always into the current, into the present. I'm interested in, like, this idea of studio time. If anyone's read that O'Doherty's *Studio and Cube*, he talks about, that space as like a place of collaged tenses of, like, everything within the reach of the author, of the artist, is always available to be something new. And so this is what I think about when I'm— So collage, for me, is about that precise thing, right? It's kind of like it developed after many years of figuring, how do I deal with the work that I have made?
- 00:19:12:04 And then I've just got to go back and kind of give a little context of, like, where I kind of got my start, because it's funny to be in museums and stuff now. But like, really, no one was looking at this work before, outside of, like, zines, queer zines. And it was like this work— Well, to give a context, like, these portraits were first seen and really distributed, you know, in the early- mid-2000s, through all of this stuff which has now become these never ending art book fairs, right? But there was something about these portraits that I was doing that also coincided with, like, the emergence of Friendster and like, really having this, like— I mean, now it seems so quaint, but like really being rapidly sort of like spiraling out of control of, like, the currency of portraiture and, like, how it was used going back— You know. So it was kind of important to figure out, like, a figure like Van Vechten, right? For me. These were some these zines. We can talk more about that later. But I just wanted to sort of give a sense because also, for me, working this way was really— was sort of like really freeing to make things that were sort of like easily distributable, right? But you kind of get stuck up on, like, the preciousness of making really nice darkroom prints when you're in school. You have to make all these portfolios or whatever. But I was just, like, scanning using the laser printer at my office job, right, and I was just, like, doing these things. And it was, like, one way I could share work. And I was interested in how, like, the reproduction of the medium was, like, actually about communication. It's about, like, extending points of contact, right? So everything that kind of happened afterwards came from this space.
- 00:20:59:13 Here's just straight up, like, one of these portraits. This one— Only in the last two years, has this work ever been shown. This was in a show in Louisville. But it lived in a box in my apartment in Brooklyn, and then in my studio in L.A. And it's, like, really interesting, now that it's coming out, and it's also included in this article in Artforum. But one thing I also want to say about works like this is, I came to making photographs with this idea that, like, I could use my, like, nice trusty Mamiya RZ and my film and my controlled lighting, whatever, to give— You know, that fantasy, like the photograph tends to, like— or could possibly stabilize all of these things that are otherwise unstable. It's like a fiction; it's a fantasy. And so for me, it was about figuring out who these friends were. It was like the first time I had, like, gay friends after, like, hanging out with too many straight people in undergrad. And it was like we all were sort of like related to art in some way. And it's, like, we're at parties or whatever, and you're like, "Are we going to be collaborators? Are we going to, like, date? Are we going to, like, become just friends or roommates?" Like, I thought

I was, like, solving the problem by making this work. But it's interesting, because like, in having conversations— Like, I was talking with my friend Michael, who's in this one, or my friend Joshua, whose hand is in this image. We were talking about this the other week. And it was like, "Oh, yeah, we thought the work was being done then, but like, the real work has been the maintaining of these friendships. And it's interesting to have to come back to them." He was so mad at me when I took this picture. I was like, "We're gonna do this. And it's like, it's going to solve all this, like, weird conflict in our friendship. Are we dating or not? Or what's going on?" You know, and it's like, now we know who we are, but I think it's kind of important to admit why you started making something and actually have to deal with what it actually becomes, you know. And I didn't know, like, these would be my closest friends, like so many— a decade and a half later, you know?

00:23:00:28 But then I guess— Oh, yeah, this is where we jump ahead in time. So you know, I don't make photographs with models. I did when I was in school, like trying to get people off of the art school bulletin board to just, like, be in projects. But it wasn't fulfilling and I kind of had to really restrict myself to people who had, also, a mutual interest in the making of the work and where it would continue to live, you know? So then it's like, you know, I think in 2006, this is maybe the second portrait series I've done with Darren. You know, but then we jump ahead to 2011, where I'm doing this residency at the Studio Museum, and then he becomes— he continues to be a subject of the work. I think actually, every portrait that I've shown you here, the people in the work have continued to exist across the projects. And so this is where sort of this of studio time also comes into it. It's not only, like, the material in the studio, but it's the people who come into the studio and how all of these sort of like time collapses.

00:24:12:13 This one is also interesting. It's from 2011. And sometimes— You know, I'd started doing a lot of this current work with, like, the drapery and stuff like that, this like, black drapery and velvets and stuff. And I was making these pictures in the Studio Museum, but I hadn't figured out what it was for, what I was doing. And I was actually just talking to Lauren earlier— I was like, "Oh, yeah, this is—" I was still photographing this fabric, like, but it hadn't really become what it is now. And I actually kind of really want to think about that. But with work like this, it kind of— How do I say it? No, I could go on and on, but I'm going to kind of just say that, like, think about all of the fragments of images within this work as, like— This is timestamped, March 2nd, 2011, but it extends from years before to years later. And it's an interesting thing for me because I can sort of like point out a lot of information that I'm really still interested in, like, how does the— Again, this idea of, like, how does the final viewer make sense of it, right? It's like, I see Tony in this. I see Jeffrey's boots. I see this fragment of my self-portrait from December 4th the previous year. And then I'm seeing something that I didn't even realize I'm continuing to work with, in that fabric. But then also [inaudible] mirroring starting happening. Like, once there was enough portraits out there, even though like, you know, this portrait of Daniel, which incorporates, like, a prior portrait of Ryan in there— There's an interesting thing that happens in a portrait practice, where when you first start off, everyone is just like, "What are we going to do? How's this going to turn out? Okay, we don't have prior examples." Like, even your closest friends will have, like, a pre-existing image of what your image is going to be. And like, there's this weird subtle mirroring that happens. And so I like to think— You know, at first I was just thinking, oh, this is really interesting in the context of Ryan and Daniel's friendship, right, and the fact that they're both simultaneously present in the space, in sort of contrast or complement to this one, where it is actually bringing two friends into a space where that kind of like bridges a kind of like distance that had happened between them. I happened to run into them and I was like, "Oh, wait, now we're back in this space, like—" But this is really about Lars and Stewart's relationship from much prior. So again, the studio does this, like, interesting thing. And again, I want to sort of like jump ahead.

- 00:26:46:12 But I also love these ones where, like, the second subject in unfinished work becomes a figure alongside. So we have Tony here, who there's a fragment of Tony back there. You know, part of— you can sort of see this, of an earlier unworked or in-edit fragment of him down here, becomes a little bit more complete next to Katy. But then I also want to jump ahead to another work that's in the show down in the city, where now we have— This is actually incorrectly dated, I just realized. This is actually 2018, because her baby's now almost a year old, not two years old. But again, this, like, continuum of relationships. And also something like when I was talking about those, like, smudges that you could only see against the black rim of the reflector, those make an appearance again here, over my face and looking through the camera. These surfaces became really laden with latent information, with all this trace. And that's something I want to talk about later, but I really— One of the things I really love about this one is, like, even the— Because the type of representation or inclusion doesn't have to be like an actual portrait of someone, but like, this is actually the trace of all these other people who come through the studio space. But it requires me to make it visible, or something that is black or dark. Otherwise, in the light against the white walls, it's like, obliterated. But more on that later.
- 00:28:26:15 Here's another recent sort of studio portrait. But I'm thinking about, like, the implication of myself in the production. So these are recent. But they go back to these images from ten years prior, where I began making photographs in the spaces where friends were also making portraits. Not necessarily photographs, right? But I was interested in the fact that, like, there's this painting in progress by this painter TM Davy of our friend Keaton. And we don't see either of them, but we see my own involvement in this sort of like creative circle of production. Here's another version of that work, in this triptych.
- 00:29:16:07 But then I want to jump ahead and kind of introduce the things that set off the work that I'm doing right now. And this is like an installation view of the resulting project I did at the Studio Museum. So I showed some of those images in the studio, but what the project actually was, was like, five bakers boxes full of, like, all the notes and scraps that I had, outtakes, like twenty-cent Adorama prints that I was using for editing, laser printouts, like, things that friends brought and left in the studio. And I was interested in that it is sort of like a repository, like an archive that's not set, right? So I've done maybe four installations of this work. At any given moment, I reopen those boxes and I sort of, on one or two surfaces, make a— I just spend a few days kind of going through and making like an edit or a presentation of a selection of that work. But the reason why I really wanted to do that was that it wouldn't be something that was fixed back in 2011, when the project was done; but that because there's this ongoing relationship to the subjects outside of that work, that any time it's brought back together, it's going to be informed or changed by— Or something that I made yesterday will inform something that I didn't even realize was there. In the same way that I pointed out, oh, I'm still photographing a cloth that's, like, in this picture from nine years ago.
- 00:30:33:20 And so one of the things that also happened after that is, because a lot of that just dealt with these, like, test materials and things that you would typically throw away, the three years following that, from 2011 to 2014, I didn't have access to a studio or a darkroom. And I was thinking, oh, well, all of this in-between material could still be work. Like, maybe that could be my studio. And the way I could make photographs during that time was by— I got, like, my first good little digital camera, and I got a color laser printer from Staples. They're really— It was like ninety-nine bucks. I was like, way better than, like, a day at the darkroom. And I just, like, put it under my bed in Brooklyn, and I just printed up everything. And kind of I let go of, like, oh, my God, I can only make photographs if I can, like, afford my medium-format film and, like, the darkroom and all this paper, right? So my work really became these, like, bundles of material,

similar to those boxes, those bankers boxes. And like, this is a photograph from when my friend Brendan[sp?] was going on a residency and I, like, subletted[sic] his studio for a month. So at these moments, these bundles will become, like, unbound. And I would then, like, re-photograph them as arrangements on the wall.

00:31:31:032 So you know, this is work that includes— I think of as sort of like a portrait of four people and two different projects, and really kind of like is an interesting timestamp for all these multiple things that I was doing at the same time. But what that work has turned into is these books. And so there's a projects called Summaries of Pictures that is the kind of like background for everything that I'm doings now. And I start— I found a bookbinder in Red Hook—in Brooklyn Red Hook, not up here Red Hook—and she's really amazing. And I just, like, sometimes go and take them to her, or I FedEx her, like a package of stuff, and she's binding them as volumes. And it's sort of this way of being able to put this material away. But it contains all of the things arounds my current work. Which becomes important when these new mirror studies and stuff comes in and people are tied to like abstraction or like, concealing and all this stuff. Like, it's important to me that no figures are actually really concealed in the fullness of all of the work, and that there's sort of like— Yeah. That's maybe the easiest way of saying it.

00:32:35:07 So this is a tabletop installation where you see two of the finished ones and two in progress and a bunch of unsorted material on a table at Sikkema Jenkins, October[?] 17. And here's another. Pictures like this, I didn't know if they were going to be work or not. It was just like me kind of like documenting what was, like, on my table. Like, have you ever had that experience like you are trying to be like a good roommate or something, so you're like, every time you finish making work, you like, pack it up and it's, like, nice and neat and you're going to be like, okay? And then when you finally have a studio, you're like, I can make a mess. And it's like everything's out, and then you start to see these things happen. And like, that's— I was just sort of like interested in those notes. And then they became work later.

00:33:25:18 But then what happened is like, after fourteen years in New York, I was like, "No, no, no," packing up, and I went back to California, with a plan to go to grad school. And that gave me a studio for the first time, and also— But then the material that I had to work with was all the little, like, unresolved stuff from New York, right? So I had all these boxes of unbound material. And this is where the mirrors came in in the current work. So I was thinking about what happened at the Studio Museum, where the space itself became the recurring backdrop that would slowly change in relationship to these figures, the people either making portraits of or the objects I was photographing, but that there was sort of like a figure/ground relationship, but it being about different rates of time passing. So I went to Home Depot and I got these mirrors and I started filling my studio with them, and then just unbinding these things and just, like, pasting them to the surface so I could kind of like make sense. So I had to look at it, physically deal with it, and then photograph myself through the gaps in the reflection, if that makes sense. So again, it's like all of these formal things came from, like, actually needing to figure something out physically. Because people were like, "Well, why don't you just make it easier and, like, do it on Photoshop and like, make nice little arrangements." I was like, "Well, no, I actually need to be in the space." It was also interesting that, like, something that I keep in my notes is the fact of, like, composing an image on a mirror surface, you are formally incorporated into the work. And it's like at a certain moment, I could either, like, in a picture like this, set it on a timer and walk away and come back to see the image. But like, during its making, I'm always within it, inescapably.

00:35:04:12 And then the curtain is that thing that keeps coming back. And these— What I'm interested in with the curtain was to two things. By using that, like, cheap photo studio trick—your drapery, your velvet or whatever—you're establishing a place between that and the camera, of what's

meant to be seen. But it's by extension, creating a space that is not meant to be seen, right? And like, what is the possibility of that space? And then the same thing happens again in this image, where that surface of the mirror, which is covered in all the smudges, which are the result of me doing all these collage things or just portraits, again, we see those latent traces where that brown—what do you call it—studio backdrop roll makes it visible, right? And so two things happened. One was kind of like the idea of, like, moving into that space. What is the possibility of making, again, with this double entendre of the darkroom, of a space— composing an image of a space, that is sort of like not meant to be seen. And sort of where does the viewer find himself in relationship to that? And also, the possibility of photographing that space necessitated not only going behind the backdrop— Like, this was the first attempt to make a photograph of the mirror surface. So for example, like this is a composition with two figures, a scene for the mirror that is obstructed. You know, you can only see the top of it, right? But when you're in that space, it's like all this stuff comes up, right? And I was like, "How do I actually make a photograph of this?" And I began constructing, literally, like a dark cloth around the mirrors, and then putting the camera inside of it, pulling back the fabric just enough to let the light in so you could start to see its surface.

00:36:58:29 Which leads to me completely entering into the space and really— And so when I was talking about this idea of, like, what is the potential for kind of reversing some of those priorities of photography, right, rather than— Basically, like what— So all this material is, like, really interesting to me, right? It's not just, like, effects. People thought, like, oh, is this smoke? Like, when they saw this in the [inaudible] show. I'm like, "No, this is my hands, this is my body, this is the bodies that come through the space." In a funny way, it's like the only indexical information that I really kind of like am super interested in, right? But that if we— You know, against the whiteness of those studio walls, against the brightness of the space, it's rendered invisible. And then rather than thinking about, like, maybe agendas of representation, in terms of really, like, defining what a black subject is, thinking about, well, if we flip the priorities of photography to having to stay in that space and have it be a ground of making work, what is revealed that is otherwise obliterated? Anyways. It's kind of wordy. I think I worked out that idea. I hope it makes sense.

00:38:13:09 So anyways, that's where this current work exists, and then— But making it playful. Like, so I'm interested in not only kind of like that, but then like, working off these compositions that are based on kind of like the, like, peekaboo and like, you know, how many people are present and what's sort of like going on. And sort of— Again, one thing I also find really sort of, for me, interesting is the balancing of these very sort of like formal images with a kind of like impos— They're, like, really, really hard to make because I'm so anal about them being so formal, right? It's like this— Like, how do I say it? There's something about the balancing of, like, the apparatus itself with sort of like irrational kind of excess that happens. You know. And then I've been thinking about sort of like literally, the staging and like, these I was doing with Mickey[sp?], about kind of like— Well, I don't need to describe all these in too much detail. I'll just, like, let you kind of see these final ones, because we're getting to this point where, like, I'm showing you the most recent work and I don't even have it all resolved. So we just need to look at it.

00:39:43:27 Yeah. So yeah, I think these are kind of really about that. You know, the balancing of control, of what is rational, what is like, impossible. And then back to those ideas of touch and control. Like, I was actually really interested in the fact that, like, you know, you look at those Mapplethorpe photos and you're like, he's not in them, but like, that control is really intense, right? And so part of the reason why I entered into images like this is that I was like, "Let's just, like—" I'm interested in actually being like the manipulative force within these, even though I'm, like, working with friends. It's like, all really fun, but like, sometimes they end up looking way

more intense than they are. And then introducing these sort of like multiple-point perspectives, through multiple cameras, in which friends are making photographs alongside me in the studio. Well, I think I just have one or two more. Yeah. And so we'll just end on maybe this image. Yeah. So thank you.

[APPLAUSE]