[00:01.61] **LEO COCAR**
Hello, everyone. Welcome. My name is Leo. I'm a second year CCS student, and I'm pleased to introduce to you Dean Kissick, who's a curator writer, as well as the New York editor of "Spike Art" magazine, where he pens his monthly column, "The Downward Spiral." Sometimes pessimistic, but more often hopeful, "The Downward Spiral" traces the contours of the hysterical condition of modern life through pieces of fiction, cultural analysis, and art criticism. He holds a BA in Art History from the Courtauld Institute of Art, as well as an MA in Curating from the Royal College of Art in London. Recently, he's curated an exhibition with Eleanor Cayre titled "The Painter's New Tools," which was held in Nahmad Contemporary in New York. It was an inquiry into the ways in which technological developments have inflicted painterly practices. Other recent projects include a one-night only show in a park in the West Village, titled, "The New York Biennial;" a performance as part of Irena Haiduk's Cabaret Èconomique held at the Swiss Institute, as well as the Neue Galerie Kunstverein; as well as a piece of fiction published in the inaugural issue of "Heavy Traffic." He has written catalog essays for the likes of Walter Pfeiffer, Jamian Juliano-Villani, and Andy Warhol, and has also delivered talks of the Swiss Institute, Share Studio, and 17 Essex, among others. Recently, he was the subject of Blaketheman1000's appropriately named hit single, "Dean Kissick." And then, on a personal note, I invited Dean Kissick because in a landscape of exceedingly neutral art writing, he has instead chosen to lean into the criticality implied by the term "art critic." I've also been compelled by his expansive critical practice, which focuses not only on rarefied art objects, but the technological, economic, and social systems that contextualize them or bring them to existence. [inaudible 00:01:51]

[01:59.740] **DEAN KISSICK**
Hi everyone. Thanks for coming. If I'm not loud enough or you don't understand what I'm saying, just let me know. Wave a hand. Okay, I brought a few books. I'll just put this one in the audience now. Maybe you can pass it around. This is the catalog to the show Leo just mentioned.

[02:38.050]
Okay, so just to recap who I am briefly— I studied history of art at the Courtauld in London. It's a very traditional "history of art" place. And after that, I did some curatorial internships, and gallery internships at South London Gallery and Stephen Friedman gallery. And then I did a Master's in Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College in London. This was at the end of the Naughties— the early 2000's. And at that moment, the Royal College Curating course and the Bard Curating course were the two leading curatorial courses in the world, and were kind of, in a sense, like twins and rivals. I remember in 2008, we went on a Curating class trip to Guangzhou in South Korea to see the Guangzhou Biennial that was curated by Okwui Enweazor that year. It's a really good Biennial, and we were there at the same time as the Bard students, and Okwui took us and the Bard students and Hou Hanru out for a night of karaoke, which was quite intense, actually.

[03:58.970]
Okay. While I was doing that course, I kind of decided that life as an institutional curator was probably not going to be for me, and not going to be something that I would excel at. So I ended up going to working in magazines, and actually working more in style magazines, youth culture magazines, and eventually, after some time, kind of coming back to writing about art. I moved to Los Angeles. I lived there for three years, having grown up and studied in Britain, and I moved to New York about five years ago. In 2017, I started writing a column for "Spike" magazine, a monthly column called "The Downward Spiral," which was about art, but culture and social trends, and just just whatever I felt was going on. So I've been doing that for six years now, and I'm about to finish it at the end of this year. So I have two more columns left, and then I'll be done. I'm not really a curator, but I did curate this show, which we call the New York Biennale, which was really just a one night exhibition in a park in the West Village, and it was in October 2020.

[05:24.920]
So at the time, New York City was, like, pretty locked down. You couldn't really do

much, and there wasn't any stuff to go to. So we did this one night show in a park. This is Torey Thornton's intervention on a statue. We had some performances by Matt Hilvers, Amalia Ulman, installation by Aria Dean. Installation here in a car by Campbell Carolan. It's just a very low-fi, DIY get- together outside, during lockdown in New York, which was, I think, very good. I think it was a success. Then more recently, this summer, I did a show— not so critically acclaimed, but I worked on a show called "The Painter's New Tools," at Nahmad Contemporary. And the catalog is going around somewhere. If you want to look at it, you can flick through quickly. Essentially, though, it was just a show about painters or image makers using technology in some way to kind of create new images, or just find new ways of image making. And it was taking a very technological focused approach, because I think that's something that, as I'll talk about, art has turned against to some extent. And it was a summer show, a painting show, in a commercial gallery. So very accessible. Hopefully not a heavy, high curatorial concept show. The last thing about that show is that we did have a student, an art student from Bard in there. It's Jessica Wilson, who graduated in 2019, I think. And she makes these images all in 3D rendering, building a 3D set, essentially, and photographing it. I think she's very good.

[07:39.350]
All right, let's begin. I'm going to start my timer. So what I wanted to talk about is this idea of a crisis in art. My feeling, and we can discuss this, is that there's a variety of kind of crises or existential threats to art happening at the moment. And I'm writing a book at the moment. It's far from finished, but basically, what I'm going to do this talk about, is like a kind of version of the intro. This is the first time I've done it, so it's very much a work in progress. But I started writing this book at the very end of last year. And so, I thought I would go to the New Museum Triennial, in particular and the Greater New York Quincennial at MoMA PS1. I went to both of these shows twice, spent a lot of time there. And tried to just take from them a barometer for what is the view of contemporary art at big curated shows of major New York institutions at the moment?

[08:58.070]
And this is the New Museum Triennial, "Soft Water, Hard Stone." And at this show, I really kind of began to despair on my second visit here, because going around it, it made me feel like there's no new ideas in art. Or that we're kind of intentionally and deliberately turning away from the idea of newness or progress. The mode in this show, I felt, is to have new artists but using old mediums, and using old styles. And a lot of sculpture made from ceramics, textiles, dried flowers, paper lanterns, derelict found objects, junk— like a lot of this craft based approach, and always these weathered, old tasteful styles. So it felt to me that contemporary art was being remade to look like something older. And my gripe with this Triennial is that so many of the works in the show looked like they could have been made 10 or 20 years ago, or in some cases 40 or 80 years ago, or 160 years ago, or even thousands of years ago. My favorite works there by Gabriel Chaile looked like they were made like, a couple of thousand years ago. But, this kind of aesthetic felt jarring for me, for a survey of new artists from around the world.

[10:33.850]
Compare this to the 2018 edition of the New Museum Triennial where you had these kind of very dark blackly comic Wong Ping animations, or Janiva Ellis' kind of psychedelic paintings of these figures coming apart. This Anupam Roy installation of these bloody gothic scenes, these headless men and women, or Hardeep Pandhal's postcolonial frescoes. I was a lot more excited by what was going on in 2018. And it felt a lot more playful. It has a lot more life, a lot more force, for me. And going back another three years, to the 2015 edition, which was curated by Lauren Cornell, who you know, and Ryan Trecartin. In that edition, you have the likes of Juliana Huxtable. You have, like, Josh Kline, Avery Singer, Ed Atkins. You had a lot of what we'd call, like, post-Internet art or, like, technological art. You also had a lot of people from outside of the traditional confines of art, like Casey Jane Ellison, the comedian, Steve Roggenbuck, the poet, Ashland Mines, the musician Total Freedom, or K-Hole, the trend forecasters. It felt much broader and more experimental and more of its time.

[12:17.510]
And it feels to me that looking at these Triennials, it feels like with each subsequent one, we're going back in time rather than forwards. It's a very strange experience to me. It feels like we're falling back in time. So in this recent Triennial, as in pretty much every major show, I'd say, since the 2015 Triennial or the 2016 Berlin Biennale curated by DIS, it felt like there was a deliberate and considered rejection of the present, of the way we live now, of the technological environment. That was part of the prompt for this exhibition I mentioned we did this summer, "The Painter's New Tools." I think it came out of, like, me writing an article and my friend Eleanor liking it.

[13:25.890]
Alright, now I want to talk about Documenta. I want to talk about, like, what's happened across the last three Documentas. So it seems to me that there's been a huge shift over the last ten years, and I put it around 2015, 2016. I feel like there's been a huge shift over how we conceptualize art, what it's for, what it does, what its purpose should be, and how we approach curating shows.

[13:59.590]
Arthur Danto famously believed that we'd reached the end of art. And writing in the 1990s, he suggests that in the 70s or 80s, with conceptualism, with postmodernism, we reached the end of this linear progression, this modernist idea of new movement after new movement. And Danto said, and I quote, "all there is at the end is theory, art having finally become vaporized in a dazzle of pure thought about itself and remaining, as it were, solely as the object of its own theoretical consciousness." He thought art had become vaporized in a dazzle of pure thought and theory. And, that continued from the '80s on and on, right through to the 2010s or so. But I would say somewhere in the 2010s, it kind of stopped. It changed. This is a picture from Documenta 13 in 2012, which was curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. This is Pierre Huyghe's sculpture in the woods, installation. It's a famous sculpture featuring his dog Human, who recently passed away, sadly. That's Human. His installation in the woods in the park in Kassel.

[15:33.430]
I have an acquaintance that worked on this show. After working on this show, he became completely disillusioned with art, and he just completely changed careers. But he told me this exhibition was, quote, "peak art world theory. Word salad. Overweening ambition to expand into all fields of knowledge, and present art as an infinite research program. I found it infuriating, dilettantish, but maybe that's just because it cut too close to home."

[16:13.410]
As things turned out, though, that Documenta was, I think, the last gasp of a contemporary art world that was really running on philosophy and theory, predominantly European theory. At the time of the exhibition, Christov-Bakargiev wrote in a pamphlet that, quote, "Truthfully, I am not sure that the field of art will continue to exist in the 21st century." And, I don't think she meant that art as a whole would disappear, but that its current forms and concerns, its domination by Western artists well versed in theory, was coming to an end. That's what she thought, and she was right. And come Documenta 14, created by Adam Szymczyk, and taking place in Athens and Kassel, the exhibition had a very different set of concerns. And I think this exhibition introduced a set of concerns that in various ways continue to dominate to the present day, I'd say.

[17:21.600]
There was a real focus on placing old, forgotten, often unexpected obscure artists front and center. So, a huge amount of space was given to 20th century Albanian realism, such as this artist, Edi Hila, maybe the most represented artist in the whole of Documenta. He's a 20th century Albanian painter. In the '70s, he was ordered to work at a poultry breeding farm as punishment for making subversive art. And, in many ways, he was a spirit of Documenta 14 personified. He was a little known avant-garde painter working on a turkey farm, under duress, in 1970s socialist Albania. The opening room of the exhibition revolved around masks by the indigenous Canadian artist Beau Dick, from the Kwakwaka'wakw people, who happened to pass away a few months before

the exhibition opened. He had the main room, the first room of the EMST. This is the official opening day. You have the German and Greek presidents going to look at his mask, stare into these masks of monsters, essentially. The following month, Venice opened. That was 2017. Christine Macel's Venice Biennale, which included a "Pavilion of Shamans." At its heart, Ernesto Neto installed a sort of shaman-tent installation in the Giardini.

[19:23.080]
And he invited some Huni Kuin indigenous peoples of South America to come and inhabit this sacred space he'd built. And during the opening days, they were leading these procession dances through the Giardini. It's a very odd scene. But part of the message of this fantasy, this Documenta, was that now, or then, in 2017, would be a good time to rediscover the past. That the last century's outsiders might be today's new insiders. And it's amazing to me, looking back at the jump between the 2012 and 2017 edition, how quickly this moment, this kind of Hans Ulrich Obrist mode of 2000's curating, this kind of overwhelming ambition to research everything, and to connect up every single discipline in the world under the aegis of art, and kind of essentially try to solve everything through contemporary art. That whole project was very quickly abandoned and rejected, turned to something else. So from this time to the present, I feel like there's been a kind of progressive politics going on. But in terms of, like, the art itself, it's essentially a retreat into very conservative forms of painting and sculpture, particularly ceramics and textiles.

[21:16.240]
To an extent, that kind of makes sense now, but would have seemed absolutely baffling, and psychedelic, just seven years ago, say. The first time I saw contemporary art exhibitions full of that kind of work, it was really surprising. Now it's what I've come to expect. But we find ourselves in this weird situation where the curators, artists, the people who you might expect to be championing the new, are looking backwards. Those who are on the cutting edge are most invested in the archives. And not only do we not have, like, avant-garde, the idea of an avant-garde seems in many ways

impossible. But people are kind of fashioning themselves as an "arriere-garde," like moving backwards, showing us what to rediscover and find in the past. And it feels to me that so much of art and culture at the moment really seeks to return to tradition. The idea of "return to tradition" is a kind of conservative meme, like a right wing desire to go back to the 1950's or whatever. But actually we're returning to tradition all across the board, across different ideologies, different world views. It's just a matter of what tradition, how far back people want to go.

[22:44.320]
But there is a real backwards looking tendency everywhere. So many of these surveys or exhibitions I see seem afraid of the present in some way, or seem to wholeheartedly reject the present, reject the society we live in. And that's a shame, I think, particularly given that the modern art biennial began in part as a celebration of the present and a promise of a better future.

[23:14.760]
Okay, so this was in 2017, we have this huge upwelling of what I call almost a fetishization of Indigenous art and of kind of Indigenous knowledge as an alternative to the society we've built ourselves, which seems to be failing. But come 2021, it's still going on. And I went to the São Paulo biennial last year, "Though it's dark, still I sing." And this Biennial placed Indigenous artists very prominently, front and center, kind of explicitly so. And on the opening day, the kind of face of the exhibition was this artist of the Tukano people, Daiara Tukano. And here she is. She sat inside her installation. It's a very incredible scene to see this in real life. Like, she's been interviewed by Brazilian TV, her tribal gear, everyone's kneeling at her, and she's surrounded by her artworks.

[24:29.440]
She was the face of the exhibition. Diara Tukano. She doesn't consider her paintings to be artworks in the Western sense. She considers them to be messages about the plight of her people, her ancestral homeland. She's not an artist in the sense that we would have called someone an artist, and she doesn't want to be an artist, but she was the

face of this Biennial. The other face of the Biennial was her partner, Jaider Esbell, who probably had the most exciting works in the show. He had a big series of these paintings of what are called Kanaimés, which are a kind of malevolent forest spirits from folklore. He's a Macuxi activist, artist, and organizer. So they were at the heart of the show. Jaider Esbell was also in Venice this year; you've probably seen him in the room with the Delcy Morelos huge earthwork made of cocoa and spices. And his paintings were around the edge. This was a good room. So he was one of a number of Indigenous artists in Venice as well, and one of many artists there, taking spirits, magical beings, folklore, metamorphosis, ancient forms of magic as subject matter.

[26:07.670]
Him and his partner were only really discovered five years ago, but in Brazil, five years on, from that, they were the stars of the Biennale. And he had these huge, huge sculptures of serpents installed in the central lake in the central park in São Paulo. You could see these things, the biggest exhibition in South America, and you could see these in the lake, in the park, like, coming in and out of the city on airplanes. He's basically risen from nothing to stardom in five years. And then, in November 2021, before the exhibition even closed, he committed suicide in São Paulo, in his apartment. A lot of interesting stuff has been written about this. But he kind of gave statements to the effect that he felt let down, and cheated, and exploited by the art world. He felt like he was just brought in to kind of be this face— and then after that, no one's there for him. No one's going to help him or, like, answer his calls. It's a really shocking turn of events, but it's really kind of just telling one, I think, for the kind of complexities of how these kind of gestures are made.

[27:49.850]
I'm not just going to talk about biennials or institutions, but the first half is about that. So, it felt to me that every major exhibition biennial I've visited over the past five years has been about the same kind of themes. Like diversity, identity, resistance, decolonial theory, the 20th century, magic, folk art, ancient beliefs, craft, the various combinations thereof, weighted in different ways. I think that's true of Documenta 14, Venice 2017. I

think it's true of Gabi Ngcobo's Berlin Biennale, and Gary Carrion-Murayari and Alex Gartenfeld's New Museum triennial in 2018, of Jane Panetta and Rujeko Hockley's Whitney Biennial, and Zoe Butt, Omar Kholeif and Claire Tancons' Sharjah Biennial in 2019. Jacopo Crivelli Visconti's São Paulo Biennial, Margot Norton and Jamillah James' New Museum Triennial, and Ruba Katrib and Serubi Moses' Greater New York Quincennial in 2021. David Breslin and Adrienne Edwards' Whitney Biennial, and Cecilia Alemani's Venice Biennale this year. I wasn't able to go to Kader Attia's Berlin Biennale or ruangrupa's Documenta for this year. I'd very much have liked to have gone, but they seem to have had similar concerns from the outside. There doesn't seem to be enough diversity of idea to me.

[29:37.370]
So, the 2021 New Museum Triennial was titled "Soft Water, Hard Stone." It takes its name from a Brazilian proverb: "Soft water on hard stone hits until it bores a hole." And we're told that this concept speaks to ideas of resilience and perseverance and provides a metaphor for resistance. Next year we'll have the 2023 Guangzhou Biennial. South Korea. "Soft and weak like water." And it takes this title from the classic Chinese philosophical text "Tao Te Ching," and the idea is that there is nothing softer and weaker than water, and yet there is nothing better for attacking hard and strong things. It speaks of water's capacity to embrace contradictions and paradoxes and quote,"It proposes to imagine our shared planet as a site of resistance, coexistence, solidarity, and care by thinking through the transformative and restorative potential of water as a metaphor of force and method and so forth." It feels like most of these concepts are very vague, and most of these exhibitions feel to me more alike than different. After a while, they feel in many ways to feel the same, and at heart they're all based on a rejection, I think a rejection of the existing art world, a rejection of the Western model of contemporary art, of its canon, its mediums, its theory, and a desire to replace it with something better.

[31:30.990]
So that desire for change would suggest to me that there's a crisis in art, or more

specifically, there's a crisis in Western art, that that model seems to have failed, and there's a desperate desire to transform it, to rebuild it somehow. As well as rejections of the present, there have also been essentially rejections of art. So in 2021 in Britain, we have the Turner Prize, our leading art prize. In 2021, they decided not to nominate any artists, but just to nominate five different social practice collectives. This is the installation by Array Collective who won. They also nominated Gentle/Radical, Project Art Works, Black Obsidian Sound System and Cooking Sections. These are all social practice groups from Britain and very obscure, I think, like, very obscure. After this, no artists were nominated for the art prize. The New York Times art critic Jason Farago has since deleted this. But he said, "even our museums are now terrified of art. Too stunted for aesthetic engagement, too scared to model life beyond the lowest plane of utility. We are going to be social workers, and art will be our excuse for doing social work badly."

[33:01.790]
Okay, that's my alarm. I got to hurry through the institutional bit, but I'm nearly done. Well, I have a whole other section. So the desire to have all these social practice groups in the art prize is very similar, I think, to what went on with Documenta this year and ruangrupa, and them inviting a lot of art activists, like non-art collectives, to make the biggest exhibition in the world. I think you will probably all know a lot about Documenta this summer. Probably more than me, because I wasn't able to go. But just a couple of quick points. They, more radically than other recent Documentas, proposed a new organizational structure for making exhibitions. They tried to turn the institution on its head, to break it into pieces. And in many ways, I'd say what they did, it's like an anti-curatorial approach, or alternatively, like a curatorially revolutionary approach. They also brought new ideas about what kinds of things can be included in shows like this. And rather than by challenging the definition of art as people have been doing for a long time, it's more about opening space for collaborative environments and events that, again, are not trying to be art or not supposed to be art. They're not that focused on art, in a way.

[34:35.930]
And their slogan for the exhibition was "make friends, not art." So there's a kind of implicit rejection of art in there. They're also not interested in the new. Like Reza Afisina, one of the core members of ruangrupa, said, "In Kassel, we're doing what we have done in Jakarta for the past 22 years. There is no new in our practice." Then there was a big scandal, as you'll know, with Taring Padi, another Indonesian collective, and their installation "People's Justice." This installation contained antisemitic depictions and caused a big controversy. The mayor demanded it was covered over with a black cloak, which it was, and then that was considered not enough. The German Culture Minister, Monika Grütters, called for it to be removed entirely, which it was. This is right at the heart of Documenta. So it's a sad spectacle, I think, even if you completely agree with what was done, to have the biggest exhibition in the world, and right at its heart, right by the Documenta gate, you have this kind of dismantled skeleton of an artwork. Ironically, this actually looks more like something that would have been in Documenta 2012. But that's by the by.

[36:19.290]
This summer. Documenta Director General, Sabine Schormann, resigned. And now the exhibition itself, which is the biggest exhibition, my favorite exhibition, is imperiled. The government wants to slash its funding significantly, maybe a lot. So on that level, at least, the show is something of a catastrophe. Last kind of institutional thing. There's kind of a decolonial movement that wants to go a lot further than Documenta, in terms of institutional change, and seeks to kind of abolish museums, both "Hyperallergic" and "The Nation" have recently published pieces, making the case for abolishing museums entirely. So, again, that to me suggests that the art system is in crisis. There's a crisis of identity and meaning, and there's a lot of people within art moving against art.

[37:25.890]
Alright, now I'm going to talk more briefly about what's going on on the other side, like in the markets, and in technology. So, in 2021, I wrote a piece about bad figurative painting that ended up going quite viral. My idea was that the market is awash with

paintings that look like they've been designed by algorithm. I said that bad figurative painting is today's hottest trend, and my editor chose to use this Emily Mae Smith painting as the image.

[38:14.270]
So Mae Smith paints, often, historical paintings, repaints them, but with the protagonist, the main figure, replaced with a broom. And she just broke her record last week, I think. This painting, "The Riddle," was sold at auction for 1.6 million. And she's just one of a wave of new kind of millennial figurative painting stars who are now the hottest thing in the market, and very dominant in the New York gallery scene. A lot of these people have shows up at the moment. She has a show that just opened up at Petzel. So, Anna Weyan, she paints portraits of women in the style of Chinese cynical realists of the 1990s. She trained in China and also a bit with John Currin, I think. She went to auction for the first time this summer, and she opened the auctions at all three houses. She sold for more than a million at two, just under a million at one. From Britain, we have Flora Yukhnovich. This is the repainting of François Boucher's "Triumph of Venus," sold for 630,000. Another British artist, Jadé Fadojutimi. This is called "Myths of Pleasure." She had a room at Venice. She makes these kind of abstract paintings which feel like de Kooning paintings for me. This sold for 1,650,000 last year. Christina Quarles. This has a show at Hauser & Wirth at the moment. She smashed her record this summer, selling this painting. "Night Fell Upon Us," for four and a half million at Sotheby's. Her work doesn't really look like anyone else's to me. Amoako Boafo paints these kind of finger paintings, Freud-like figurative painting, and was a real phenomenon of 2021, I think. This painting sold for 3,420,000. His market is in decline at the moment, but he was a real boom artist. Jeff Bezos commissioned him to paint like, three paintings which they stuck to the nose of the rocket ship and sent into to space. And the paintings like parachuted. They're like heat proof paint. They parachuted back to earth. It's kind of like an old ship, like a beautiful woman carved, stuck to the front of a ship, sent into space. And Ewa Juszkiewicz shows with Gagosian Gallery. The painting on the right is called "Portrait of a Lady (After Louis Leopold Boilly)," and it's a remake of 19th century France genre painting, but with fabric wrapped around its protagonist's head. This went for 1.56

million.

[41:32.220]
So all of these kind of new market superstars, to me, their work seems very kitsch. It seems very decorative, and again, very backwards facing. It's always about remakes of styles from the past. These images were made to be hung on the walls of the very wealthy, or made to be stored in storage facilities. And at heart, I think they're just copies of copies. They're not really representational painting, because they don't really represent anything. And the abstract paintings aren't necessarily abstract paintings, because they're more like representations of abstract paintings from the past. It's all just these kind of kitsch copies of copies. It always seems to be about building a recognizable brand for the artist. And, deeper matters of form, of line and color, deeper matters of form which might allow art to move us more profoundly do not seem to be given any consideration. It feels like a renunciation of art's radical avant-garde potential, but it's also a renunciation of the conservative view of [inaudible 42:48], but it's also a renunciation of traditional ideas of sublime or transcendental beauty. And what's left is just this kind of polite, unremarkable, inoffensive, middle of the road, quite mediocre art.

[43:03.050]
This worries me a lot more than what's going on in the institutions, because I can understand why biennials would be like that. There's kind of a logical sense, but it's a lot harder for me to trace why contemporary art in its market manifestation has ended up like this. There's a term for this, which is "ultra contemporary." "Ultra contemporary" refers to artists born after 1974, in definition, but in practice, it really just refers to a few dozen bad painters who are market superstars at auction, who emerged in the last five, six years. And it's an interesting term, because "ultra contemporary" suggests that the contemporary has been moved into the past, that we're now somewhere beyond the contemporary. And this place beyond the contemporary we have is made of remakes of the past. It's more bland and more conservative than the kind of contemporary art that came before. So it's a strange set of affairs, okay, I won't do this next one. But

"Salvator Mundi," we don't need to go into too much, just to say this painting was recently denounced by the Prado last summer.

[44:30.930]
They say in their catalog that this is not a Da Vinci. It's essentially a forgery. What's interesting is, it's the most expensive painting in history. Sold at Christie's for 450,000,000. It was sold in the postwar and contemporary evening sale. So it was sold among contemporary artworks. And it is essentially another kind of zombie figurative painting because it's not a real Da Vinci. It's just a fake copy of an idea of a DA Vinci from the past. It's now disappeared, and we're probably never going to see it again. But it's worrying that this painting was authenticated at the National Gallery in London and in a studio above the National Gallery in 2008, even though a lot of people who worked there didn't really believe it's real. And it's worrying that the Louvre wanted to put this in their 2019 Da Vinci show. Because, these institutions are entrusted with safeguarding the history of art and the history of beauty, and whatnot.

[45:50.930]
Finally, the KAWS album. This was sold on April Fool's Day 2019, for 14.8 million. Beeple,"The First 5000 Days" sold for 69.3 million in 2021, making it the third most expensive work by a living artist, after David Hockney's. "Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)," and Jeff Koons' "Rabbit." And Beeple— I went to his first gallery show, a Jack Hanley Gallery, this summer. He had this painting, "Toxic Masculinity." This was probably the best painting in the show. I went to his opening, and the day of his opening, like, four artists from Jack Hanley resigned in protest, left the gallery. The gallerist let them leave, of course. And then there was a dinner after in Frenchette, and there were like all these auctioneers, like just auctioneer bros, like streetwear and trucker caps, just like roaming this kind of Tribeca restaurant. There's so much money in that room. And Adam Lindemann of Venus Over Manhattan Gallery, he got up and he gave a speech about how "we in the art world are scared of you, Beeple, before we're scared of because of, like, what you represent." Okay. Just finish. But it's kind of true because NFTs, Beeple, and stuff, it does represent a threat to the art world. It's kind of a

rejection of everything I and some of you might hold dear, such as museums and galleries and physical work. Criticism, elitism, ideas of taste and meaning, aesthetics, beauty, the idea that it's important to make art, rather than just images.

[47:54.070]
Lastly, NFTs again, and this is a picture from Jon Rafman's show, that just opened at Sprüth Magers in Berlin, and it was made with Midjourney, the text to Image AI software. So kind of new forms of image making I find very interesting. But they also pose on some level a kind of an existential threat to the idea of the artist, the idea of the idea of self expression. Because now you can make an image like this just by typing in some words or just like feeding in some reference images. This is an image made with Dall-e, by Holly Herndon and Matthew Dryhurst. And they believe, Holly believes, that, like text, image AI is a bigger and more significant innovation than the camera, than photography, and that it will have, like, more far reaching consequences to art, to visual culture. Lastly, social media. Social media has just transformed the whole idea of self expression over the last ten years or so. And the kind of new forms of new forms of self expression online, I think, have come to occupy a lot of the roles that traditionally we would have given over to art.

[49:23.930]
So, in conclusion, it's a funny situation we're in now, in which the most expensive artist under 67 is, you could question whether he's even an artist. It's Beeple. The new stars of the auctions, you could say, are worse, completely unremarkable. The most expensive painting in history is missing, and is fake. The most influential art prize is no longer awarded to artists. The most important exhibition in the world's, Documenta, contains very little art, and has caused the national scandal in Germany, and is maybe on the brink of being discontinued. The dominant forces in today's art world, I'd say, are institutional and art historical forms of decolonization, and NFTs, a kind of technological insurgency. Those two movements are almost as kind of different and opposed as you could imagine. But they're both kind of attacking old ideas of art or established ideas from different sides. They both represent concerted attempts to leave behind

established categories of art, and historical conceptions of artistic meaning. At times, they tip over into a desire to abandon art altogether. Over the last six years, art has been pulled asunder by novel, social and technological forces.

[51:02.630]
And I think art, because of these reasons, is going through a deep crisis, a crisis of purpose and identity. And this is fine. This is not a bad thing. This is what we want. We want, like, an art world that is continually remaking itself, that is open to change, that can be transformed. We want these things to be up in the air. Crises can be productive and they can lead to great change. And art and culture have gone through many crises in the past. More dramatic ones than this one, certainly. But, I think we are in the midst of various crises, and I think it's important to acknowledge those, and to debate them, to complain about them, or celebrate them, or whatever, but to talk about them, and to dig into them. Because, otherwise, this opportunity to seize this moment of change, will be lost. Thank you.