

sheddingsomethingshedding

Brandon Perdomo, 2021

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Columbia University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Oral History

PLACEMENT

This community-driven work was initially conceived in New York City as the COVID-19 pandemic had both arrived and driven the city to its closure in March, 2020. At the time, I had lost my job as an educator delivering anti-bias and media literacy trainings, as well as coordinating exhibitions for an education center. My work had been focused on the story of Anne Frank, the Jewish child-author of the famed Diary who, along with most of her family, met her fate at the hands of the Nazis at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Northern Germany in the mid-1940's after their discovery in the attic of a pectin and spice company, where they were in hiding for two years. A lesser-known fact is that the Dutch government, while in exile, aired a radio broadcast asking for diaries and written testimony concerning first-hand accounts of the ordeal that had faced its people. This prompted young Anne to revise and edit her diary to be better suited for publishing. The diary was found and saved by an accomplice of the Franks, Miep Gies, who returned the writings to Anne's father, Otto, upon his return to Amsterdam as the sole survivor of the family. The work was published to preserve the memory and vision of his precocious daughter.

At the very beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I created a group on Facebook titled "Co-Living in the Time of Health Crisis" where I shared how my roommates and I were taking care of health and safety-minded chores in our shared space in hopes that others may also share how they are taking care of one another during those early days. On 25 March 2020, Nicholas DiValerio, an Italian artist and friend based in Rome, which had the highest global rates of COVID-related infections at the time, had shared a post with the group which read as both a poem and journal entry. A passage reads:

Today, we are a box of windows, walls, and sounds.
It's like something shedding. A living thing made of living things, all changing at once.

Driven by the focus of my work from the past year, and the power of testimony found in Nico's unexpected post, I turned to *community* - I composed an *Open Call* for artists to send in both work and pedestrian thoughts recorded during this early time of quarantine:

At this time, humanity finds itself joined by these situations of closeness and distance, of loss, of resilience, of observation and of manipulation of space and of time - perhaps whimsy. The world is speaking the same language, "corona." Stories of both same-and-different are shared the world over - the intention is to arrive through our narratives to a place of commonality through this storytelling, in whatever way you might have to share. Together, we will synthesize an experience so these documents can be shared.

With the permission of my friend, I called the project ***somethingshedding***. After having received visual works, music, dance videos, and poetry from across the world, I paused the project while maintaining the Open Call.

Now, at the time of the first anniversary, independent artists rally and organize to share their truths, advocate and uplift one another, and share visions for a sustainable, equitable balance in the cultural sector, all while global social solidarity movements call for land-back, and fights for social, professional, economic equity. To best reflect these circumstances and contemporary issues as many historical moments happening in tandem, I found it appropriate to evolve the scope of the project:

Exploring both **creative process and the embodied experiences that informs their practices**, this multicultural and intergenerational project aims to encourage curiosity & wonder, and *reclamation of narrative power* to communities often both unheard and negotiated as *other*.

FORM & CONTENT

This work is presented in-part as *advocacy* as a collaborative and ever-evolving *body*, and may soon incorporate its original collected materials (pertinent to the original *open call*), however, as a public-facing project, it is now met with more of a narrative-based focus. With a definition of increased clarity, the work is described:

SHEDDINGSOMETHINGSHEDDING is a space where practice meets testimony, as independent artists share their *stories of becoming* in a reimagining of a salon-style gathering in a digital space.

Themes explored in this work include ancestry, prejudice & discrimination, sex, LGBTQ+, anger, violence, trauma, community organizing and advocacy, prejudice & racism, fear, longing, love, solidarity, experience of being in a body, *art & creation*.

Creative process for the purpose of this work concerns makers of performance, visual, and social practice works, including community advocacy, building, and organizing.

Consumption is not advised on an empty stomach. Recommended settings include but are not limited to: an accompaniment of tea, legs upright on the wall, a walk along a familiar road or nature path or body of water.

COLLECTIONS

Drawing Rooms feature three artists, collectives, or practices. Each feature is accompanied by audio from the interview session and accompanying media.

In the first of the Drawing Room Sessions, viewers “meet” painter Lazarus Nazario, multi-media artist Sara Meghdari, and cross-disciplinary performer Mx. Sugar Mamasota, who each contextualize their work considering our contemporary moment and their place therewithin, considering the manners in which bodies are perceived in the public and private spheres, ancestral reflection, and *processes of becoming* stemming from the embodiment of the artist themselves.

Each feature may be listened to as a single audio piece, or in parts, with accompanying transcription.

Each drawing room is accompanied by **Printed Matter** in the form of zines, each containing the transcript and art prints from the recorded sessions. They are available for purchase, with percentages of proceeds benefiting the narrator and select mutual aid groups.

Encore Sessions are recordings of related public presentations.

A single pervading disappointment during this process was that I could not present these testimonies with digital portraits made in a shared studio. By the time of the initial public viewing of this project, I had improvised individual artworks particular to the narrator. I sent a prompt common to *somatic movement* practices - movement practices that maintain focus on the internal experience, often prompted by imagery, or as elaborated by Sylviane Pagès, “practices which explore intensely minute perception, developing knowledge through feeling to intensify movement.”¹ This particular exercise came from an image of how I imagine my face contorts itself when I am trying a sweet smoothie during a lazy and hazy Summer day. I guided my narrators:

(You may choose to use a prop, or a fabric, or not.)
Go to a window, with your phone on selfie-mode.

Imagine your head is filled with water - there are two waves forming inside. One hand may be on one side of your face, and the other maybe under, holding your jaw - one under, one over. Your hands follow where the ocean waves drag them, the two waves are working in opposite directions on either side of your head. Maybe one hand is *shmooshing* your face, the other may be pulling your cheek away. The water fills your face, your eyes are wide, or small, or both growing and shrinking. How do your eyes respond to the water? Are they carried open, do you flinch? How does a single wave grow, and does the other shrink?

I created digital composites made with both the selfies produced from this prompt and text from our interviews. If any narrator found themselves unable to join this exercise, a portrait would be sourced from either their social media or a separate submission with credit to the original photographer. The Printed Matter features this work as the front cover of each zine – the immediate backside of the cover is met with an inverted color scheme and mirrored image, adding another aspect of dimensionality to the intended experience of this particular series of artwork.

APPROACH & PROCESS

In consideration of a product of service, my thoughts turn to: *Why? What is the purpose of this? To what extent and to whom is it useful? Who is being marketed to?* These considerations are channels to navigate the nuances of morals driving marketing tactics and motivations of public-facing initiatives.

I often wonder of the many factors that defines a *moment* in history. As a culture in a time when social solidarities are forged in multicultural kinship, or skirted around as social nicety, community advocacy, building, and organizing are commonly considered integral to the forging of tools for empathy-building, bridging differences in understanding, and ultimately, a sense of *being a good neighbor*.

Social niceties such as aesthetic motions toward *othered* communities are observable in a social-scape – while these aesthetics may point toward representation, these gestures reverberate more as a response to the query, *Who is being marketed to?* Just the same, pride and visibility met with camaraderie, advocacy, and overall decency and dignity, are not limited to single days out of a calendar year. Such gestures may include a company's promotional material featuring LGBTQIA+ flags only

exclusive to Pride Month, or the output of public-facing content featuring BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) individuals exclusively during Black History Month or U.S.-based federal holidays in November.

In the collection of testimony, the interviewer assumes the labor of the processing of materials created, but no responsibility is greater than what I owe to my narrators: collaboration. Informed by ethics of *informed consent*, I am afforded continued relationships led by care – updates have been provided to my narrators during every step of the process, including visual and text-based editing in order to best frame and highlight the content. In my work, either in curation of testimony, artwork or performance, I understand my responsibility as a community-builder whose role is to be taking care of whomever I bring together into a shared space - in this instance, not explicitly bound by physical place, but shared experience. I am convinced that community is what comes first, and last.

As grandchild to Colombia, and earlier people: the Ch'orti'/Maya of Honduras, as well as Greece – living and working in Williamsburg Brooklyn, formerly known as Los Sures, in the occupied territories of Lenapehoking in the city currently known as New York, I am driven by negotiation of ancestry and histories (familial, social/political or personal) in the public sphere. This informs my approach to my work and a deep sensitivity to the nuances of language, experience, and *a knowing* that in the end, the work is led by *them*, the narrators - to be in service of *them*.

We know: *no one peoples is a monolith* – meaning that there is no static uniformity to any one culture's presentation to the world, and individuals and the cultures they make up experience both growth and evolutions. A visualization can be imagined as the form assumed by a flora as it slowly dances through the day, pulsating, sometimes stretching, chasing the light. During her feature in a 2019 TEDxMarrakesh feature, *Building Identity: A Creative Process*, Moroccan musician Oum El Ghaït Benessahraoui, better known as Oum, gave voice to her understandings of the experience of identity. She says that she herself is of a plurality, made up of many things and that this collection of *several-*

parts-of-self is actually the foundation of the *process of becoming*:

Idem. In Latin, idem means the same.

idem > the same
identitas > sameness
identity

In philosophy, identity is defined as the fact of being the same, and staying the same through time.

Well, reading this makes me want to challenge it. What makes us unique is our ability to be *plural* – to be many things. Identity can not be identified once and for all, because it is about the long creative process, which is a lifetime's work.

I am a collection of several parts of myself: some, I have been given - others, I've chosen - and all I've experienced so far. I am also *what I am in process of becoming*. My personal identity is still a work in process. I have the same essence, the same core, but I am not continuously the same person.²

At the time of building this body of work and hearing stories the collection of *many-selves*, I found there were observable commonalities which presented themselves focused on negotiation of ancestry, the perception of bodies, and the creative drives these experiences inspire. I was reminded of a scene from the longtime BBC series Doctor Who: in this scenario, the humanoid hero questions a wealthy Victorian figure accused of hosting public festivities to fuel his continued generational wealth.

The Doctor: Well, that would explain the lack of humanity. What makes you so sure your life is worth more than those people out there on the ice? Is it the money? The accident of birth, that puts you inside the big, fancy house.

Sutcliffe: I help move this country forward. I move this Empire forward.

The Doctor: Human progress isn't measured by industry. It's measured by the value you place on a life. An unimportant life. A life without privilege. The boy who died on the river, that boy's value is your value. That's what defines an age, that's... what defines a species.³

In considering the *accidental births* which place us in the geographic, political, and socio-

economic circumstances in which we are born, I also recall a poem by Rudy Francisco, titled *Mercy*:

She asked me to kill the spider.
Instead, I get the most
peaceful weapons I can find.
I take a cup & a napkin,
I catch the spider, put it outside
and allow it to walk away.
If I am ever caught in the wrong place
at the wrong time, just being alive
and not bothering anyone
I hope I am greeted
with the same kind
of mercy.

Points that I have come to understand as integral to the *collection of selves* which we find in pedestrian life include relationalities we encounter as individuals parallel to: other individuals, circumstance, events, creation with thought to how language is used, the subjectivity of practice, and contexts of relationship. Ximena Garnica and Shige Moriya, co-directors of the multidisciplinary arts company LEIMAY, presented for the Watermill Center during a Facebook live-stream on 27 January 2021. Discussing these nuances of language and relationalities, Ximena speaks:

Chowa is a Japanese word - it is translated as *harmony* - but a better way to translate it is *search for balance*. Euro-centric views of the West associate harmony with something being pleasant, tuneful, non-discouraging, free from disagreement or dissent - but the way of our *chowa* - and I want to clarify that this is the way – our *chowa* is subjective - but we also clarify the conditions that are determining our subjectivity, because this is the way we can make choices and decisions. And, of course, *chowa* is subjective, but in the way Shige and I search for balance - disruption and stability are in constant circulation. Death is a birth, a beginning is also an ending – dissent and agreement simultaneously exist, binaries are transgressed, and space and time are layered - there are woven singularities creating sensorial multidimensionalities - and even contradictions.

And this is happening at the level of each element - the way we work with the performer - what is happening inside their minds and their bodies - also like the way we work together - how we are processing and how we are encountering the materials – and also it's happening in *the materiality of the material* as well. So, the *chowa* in our work has to lead to a good *ma*.

Ma is also a Japanese word and a spatial temporal concept - a kind of space – in Japanese, the word *space* has multiple words - that are spaces - that are understood as extensions of relationalities and extensions of culture and values, rather than just *places to be occupied* or locations where the relationship of culture happens – This is a little bit difference of, like, *I'm entering the space* - this is where something happened as a space that is an extension of the rationality.

Our own agency as individuals, something we value tremendously. But in this process we have to let go of the agency of the *I*.

- and it is that *I* that works in isolation or only for: *my- his- her's- their-* desires or aims.

I'm going to explain a little bit about this *I* because I think it's important - because you can say, well, we can all do *chowa* - but from which *I* are you making *chowa*? Which *I* you are approaching *ma*?

So, there are other words in other languages that could be helpful to perceive this kind of *I*.

At one time in Japanese history, the Japanese language didn't have a word for *individual* - instead, *nin-gen*, which literally means *person-place* or *person-in-relationship*, was used.

Nin-gen: *nin* represents a human being, and *gen* represents a space, or *the in-between*. So the human is seen as a person, place, or as a person in relationship.

It's similar to also some indigenous Andean languages:

In – *Aymara*: *I* is also approached in its multiple relationalities.

Naka-naka: *I* in plural, inclusive of the environment and excluding another group or person. Naka-nti: another person and I with me, united for action. Naka-ru: to my person, repercussion or the action of another person towards my persona.

*These are examples offered by other languages where the possibility for human, or I to exist - is only because of the other and because of its immersion in the environment, and - basically because of his relationalities.*⁴

IN-PRACTICE

During my collection of testimony, dialogue is organic: largely candid and non-clinical, and always collaborative. My usual opening question of *What have you been up to lately?* would often turn to *What is that you have behind you?* or a topic previously agreed upon. Despite where we arrive, I

stress a *removal-of-self* in my process - the ultimate agency concerning how the work is presented, the meaning-making of the subject matter as it pertains to the narrator, and a shaping of *what-goes-where* remains in the hands of my collaborators, as is the way they may choose to illustrate how and to what they *relate*.

The transcriptions have taken their form each likened to an amorphic sculpture, as this is largely how I perceive my approach to each interview. Paired with audio, I have broken the shortened transcriptions into sections highlighting both practice and backstory, often to specific instances of *happenings*. In this shape of its presentation, any viewer experiencing the printed matter or digital website may take a *John Cage*: “*Begin anywhere*” type of approach.

My intended audience is broad, including: artists in any stage of their career, artists who have felt disempowered by a dominant ethnic identity in their shared field, students, curious people outside of the arts, people who find these by accident, workers in anti-bias education, scholars searching for resources based on social justice, creatives looking to explore alternate narratives beyond their own bubbles of social activity, anyone of any and every shade of socio-political / socio-economic influence – and beyond.

PROGRAMMING ONWARDS

My intention for this work is to maintain its accessibility not only by the accessibility of the materials, but also the maintenance of its social digestibility. I understand that not all writing that is accessible by the public is meant for everyone, as much of it is centered on academic-style of information dissemination and consumption. This consideration has greatly influenced my interviewing style, in which I stress an un-clinical approach as possible, affording the greatest sense of pedestrian-familiarity as I can to my narrators so that they feel they are communicating less with a student of the institution and more with a peer or confidant – because in the most earnest sense of my standing with an intention of collaborative integrity, they are.

The production of these collections is not intended to be the final event. The expansion and continued evolution of this project has already and will continue to feature public programming, from live performances, screenings, and discussions – and in the future, the possibility of traveling exhibitions. This experience can be taken into institutions and community centers, hosted by universities and mutual aid groups alike – as well as incorporating local storytelling circles. An initial related event has already taken place. The official report reads:

Madison Ogletree and Brandon Perdomo held a session of *Campus Conversations* on the evening of Monday, March 29, 2021, supported by the Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusion of Columbia University. This hybrid session hosted civil rights leader and Columbia alumna Angeline Butler. Angeline offered surprise performances of *movement* songs, recounted her historic role in organizing the Student Nonviolent Movement, and reflected on the blending of art and activism throughout her life.

With the surprise of her keyboard, Angeline played *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* (instrumental) as attendees “arrived” into the Zoom session. Angeline then opened the event with *Woke Up This Morning*. “*Woke up this morning with my mind - Stayed on freedom // We’re gonna walk, walk - We’re gonna walk, talk.*” After this striking prelude, Angeline began her presentation with a nod to the conclusion of Women’s History Month, reciting the names of women devoted to civil rights like Harriet Tubman and Mary McLeod Bethune. She presented a survey of great feats of Black artists and performers during a pivotal point in American History commonly referred to as *the* civil rights movement. Butler stressed that it is more accurate to think about efforts across the South—such as the sit-in movement, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the Mississippi Freedom movement—as separate movements happening in tandem, as opposed to a single civil rights movement. She bridged civil rights movement action like non-violence trainings and the movements of today by stressing the need to prepare for practical situations. In doing so, she shed light on what went into organizing the nonviolent movements for change of the 1950s and 1960s. We were also joined by Muriel Tillinghast, a fellow member of SNCC, who gave voice to her experience as part of the Mississippi Summer in 1964. Following a Q&A with a broad spectrum of attendees from New York City to the U.S. South to the United Kingdom, Butler led us out with a final tune, singing “*Great day, the righteous watching - God’s gonna build up Zion’s Wall.*”

Madison and I were awarded a Diversity Project Grant through Columbia’s Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, which served as Professor Butler’s honorarium. This event was noted by the Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusion to be the best-attended *Campus Conversations* sessions they have had, and according to Student Affairs Officer Afiya Wilson, “nearly every school at CU [was]

represented.”

As of December 2020, a more “traditional” interview with Angeline Butler had been conducted. With her continued participation and collaboration, this presentation has made itself important to this work in the elaboration of meeting art with advocacy and social justice. Given the pandemic occurring at the time of writing this piece, urging home-based engagement and weather-dependent outdoor gatherings, I can foresee continuation of such programs with the site being host to their recordings.

Recognizing the U.S.-centric narrative that dominates the initial presentation of this project, I choose to view these early beginnings as *seeds* that may extend beyond borders of nations. Key elements of the narrations already do so, by means of the place of birth and ancestry of each narrator.

I am reminded of the shape of clouds: I understand my practice to be closely likened to an amorphous cloud, perhaps it is grey, or sometimes white, purple, green, or black - perhaps it is calm or dense or stormy, and filled with hail and angry wind. I am reminded of jazz as a musical form – the bandleader arrives to the piece as it is a skeleton, and the physical room and energy composes the shape of the soundscape – it is alive, and it breathes, and it is different at every approach. I am reminded of Antonin Artaud’s reflections in *The Theater and Its Double*:

“Theater of Cruelty means a theater difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And, on the level of performance, it is not the cruelty we can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other’s bodies, carving up our personal anatomies, or, like Assyrian emperors, sending parcels of human ears, noses, or neatly detached nostrils through the mail, but the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us. We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theater has been created to teach us that first of all.”⁵

¹Pagès, Solimanto, & Baird (2019). *A history of French fascination with butoh* (Sherwood Chen, Trans.). In *The Routledge Companion to Butoh Performance*. New York: Routledge.

²Oum. (2019) *Building identity: a creative process*. TedxMarrakesh, TED
<https://www.ted.com/talks/oum_el_ghait_benessahraoui_building_identity_a_creative_process>

³Dollard. (Writer) Anderson. (Director) & Wilson, Moffat, & Minchin (Producers). (2017). Doctor Who: Thin Ice [Transcript, Television series episode]. BBC. U.K.

⁴Garnica. & Moria. LEIMAY (2021) *Viewpoints with Ximena Garnica and Shige Moriya / The Power of Rising*. The Watermill Center
<<https://www.facebook.com/watermillcenter>>

⁵Artaud. (1958). *The Theater and its Double: (Richards, Trans.)* New York: Grove Pr.

The following is the physical component to the Social Practice work

sheddingsomethingshedding

The website can be found at:

www.sheddingsomethingshedding.com





LEARN THEM. BUT - AND MY GRANDMOTHER, - MY DAD'S MOTHER, ACTUALLY LIVED FIVE MINUTES FROM
IN STATE ISLAND. MY MOM'S MOTHER LIVES IN PUERTO RICO. MY MOM'S PARENTS WERE SPLIT UP. HER
HER WAYS IN PERU, AND HER MOM SAW MOM WAS IN PUERTO RICO. MY DAD'S PARENTS WERE RIGHT
ROUND THE CORNER. WHICH WAS SO ODD BECAUSE MY FATHER DIDN'T SPEAK SPANISH, BUT THEY DID, AND
AS VERY ODD. - YEAH, I JUST GOT REALLY ANGST-RIDDEN. LIKE, MY MOTHER WOULD LOOK AT ME FUNNY
- DON'T TALK FAST ENOUGH, OR IF I SAY SOMETHING WRONG, SO I HAVE THIS COMPLETE BLOCK ABOUT IT
THIS, YOU KNOW, I START SHAKING AND, LIKE, IT'S AWFUL, BECAUSE I DON'T SPEAK SPANISH. AND IT'S
E, PEOPLE - OH YOU'RE PUERTO RICAN - DO YOU SPEAK SPANISH? - OH, HERE YOU GO. YOU KNOW, IT'S
E, YOU'RE SOME SECOND RATE, WHATEVER, YOU KNOW. SO I KIND OF TURNED THAT AROUND TO MAKING
- ART. YOU KNOW, I'LL SPEAK TO IT THROUGH MY ART. YOU KNOW, THAT'LL BE MY WAY. MAYBE - I CAN'T -
E, SURE. I'M NOT ABLE TO FOR WHATEVER REASON, AND I'M STILL - NOT SAYING THAT I CAN'T EVER - I'LL
- BACK THERE. BECAUSE IT FELT GOOD. BUT - THERE IS A BLOCK, I CAN FEEL IT. YOU KNOW, IT'S
SOMETHING. I'LL FIGURE IT OUT ONE DAY. BUT - IT'S MORE IMPORTANT TO ME, I THINK, TO MAKE THE
STINGS ANYWAY. SO THAT'S PART OF WHAT I DO. SO I'M MAKING THIS ALTARPIECE AND IT'S BASED OFF OF
SPRIBED BY ROGIER VAN DER WAYDEN'S THE LAST JUDGEMENT, AND VAN EYCK'S GHEALT ALTARPIECE. SO
ERE'S THE CENTER PANEL, AND THEN THE LEFT AND RIGHT, WE HAVE MARY AND JOHN. IT'S MY MOM
MY DAD. SO IT'S GOING TO BE ME, MY MOM, MY DAD, - ME, MY PARENTS, MY GRANDPARENTS, - AND I LIKE
FRIDA KAHLO PAINTING - MY, ME, MY GRANDPARENTS, MY PARENTS AND I OR WHATEVER, - MY
AND PARENTS, MY PARENTS AND I, THAT'S SORT OF LIKE THAT AS WELL, I GUESS YOU COULD SAY
ALL THOSE SMASHED TOGETHER. AND IT'S ALL ON FOUND OBJECTS. AND IT'S SEVEN PANELS. AND I HAVE
M SITTING HERE. WELL, I DON'T HAVE ALL - [COUNTING] - I HAVE 5 OF THEM. AND I JUST MADE THE BIG
ETER ONE DURING COVID. BECAUSE - I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO BE ABLE TO USE A BIG DOOR FOR IT.
CAUSE I USE THESE FOUND OBJECTS - BIG WOODEN DOORS, THAT I SCRAPED DOWN - I REALIZED I WAS
KING DEVOTIONAL IMAGES OF WHAT THAT WAS - AND WHAT THOSE ARE DEVOTIONAL IMAGES, BECAUSE
H DEVOTIONAL IMAGES, YOU SEE ALL THESE - LIKE YOU SEE IN MEXICO, AND ALL THIS SORT OF
EDDING-JESUS IMAGES, AND YOU CAN BE AS GORY AS THEY WANT IF THEY'RE IN THE NAME OF
AT DEVOTION, SOMEHOW. SO I ME, I THOUGHT, HMM, SO CAN I - I HUNGKED IT, I BASICALLY FLACKED
AT IDEA, AND CAME UP WITH UNDERGROUND BLACK MARKET PROPAGANDA. THAT IS WHAT I CAN
S IS, I'M GOING STRAIGHT UP TELL YOU, THAT'S WHAT THIS IS. BECAUSE IF I NAME IT THAT, THEN I CAN
WHAT EVER I WANT, IN THAT IT GIVES ME CARTE BLANCHE TO DO WHATEVER I WANT - TO BE GORY OR
JOH OR WHATEVER. AND I REMEMBER ALSO, BECAUSE OF THE FACT THAT - I DO THOSE, THE
JOURNEMENT - ALL OF THE BRANDS - THE COP OUT AND ALL THAT, BUT THEN I'LL JUST SOMETHING LIKE
- SHAKING AND THEN I'LL - MAKE THIS SWEET LITTLE, YOU KNOW, IMAGE OF A LITTLE GIRL WITH
WERS COMING OUT OF HER HAIR, YOU KNOW, LIKE, EVERYTHING IS SO DIFFERENT THAT I COULDN'T - MY
RK DIDN'T FIT INTO ONE GENRE. IT DIDN'T - I COULDN'T PIGEONHOLE IT ENOUGH TO SELL IT TO A GALLERY.
AW I SAW I TRY TO DO YOU KNOW - GET OUT THERE AND A GALLERY - I COULD NEVER FIND A GALLERY THAT I
E, OKAY, THEY WOULD. THEY WOULD KIND OF WANT - MAYBE MY WORK WOULD FIT IN THERE, YOU KNOW
CAUSE EVERYTHING WAS SO DIFFERENT, THAT I JUST INVENTED MY OWN GENRE. AND THAT'S WHAT
UNDERGROUND BLACK MARKET PROPAGANDA IS. IT WAS LIKE, YOU KNOW WHAT, BLOOM
T'S WHAT IT IS. I'M JUST GOING TO NAME IT THAT, AND THE END. I DON'T HAVE TO CALL IT ANYTHING ELSE.
LISM, THERE'S EXPRESSIONISM, THERE'S WHATEVER, IN ALL OF THAT. THIS ONE TIME YOU MENTIONED
T THERE'S A LINK - OR MAYBE IN MY HEART - THERE'S A LINK BETWEEN COP OUT AND THE ORIGINAL
SPORATE. OH YEAH. OH YEAH, DEFINITELY, DEFINITELY A LINK THERE. AND THEY HAPPENED
TTY MUCH RIGHT AT THE SAME TIME. BECAUSE AS SOON AS COP OUT HAPPENED - I WASN'T EVEN AWARE
THE TERM DETERMINEMENT UNTIL ACTUALLY LATER ON. BUT THEN I JUST - MY EYES KIND OF OPENED, YOU
W, THE FILES GO - THAT ARE IN YOUR HEAD, THEY KIND OF OPEN UP TO WHAT'S OUT THERE ALL THE TIME
T YOU CAN KIND OF, YOU KNOW, - I - I - I STARTED KIND OF PUTTING THE FEELERS OUT. AND THE NEXT THING I
W. I WAS LIKE, OKAY, COLUMBUS. - COLUMBUS. - COLUMBUS. - DROP
UMBUS INTO CHIGUATILLO. AND THAT'S LIKE A BOMB. THAT'S LIKE A LITTLE HISTORY LESSON IN A PILL.
HT THERE - ORIGINAL CORPORATE TAKEOVER, YOU KNOW, LIKE, QUEEN ISABELLA OF SPAIN FUNDING
UMBUS TO GO LAND-GRAB, ESSENTIALLY, YOU KNOW, - I WAS BORN ON COLUMBUS DAY, AND THE GREAT
TUNE OF BEING BORN - BORN ON COLUMBUS DAY. SO GROWING UP, THAT'S LIKE, GREAT, I GET A YOU
W, THREE DAY WEEKEND, EVERY YEAR FROM MY BIRTHDAY, FANTASTIC. AND THEN LATER ON, YOU
LIZE THE ACTUAL HISTORY, THE GENOCIDE OF YOUR ANCESTORS, IT'S NOT SO FUN ANYMORE TO LEARN
M. BUT - AND MY GRANDMOTHER, - MY DAD'S MOTHER, ACTUALLY LIVED FIVE MINUTES FROM US IN
TEN ISLAND. MY MOM'S MOTHER LIVES IN PUERTO RICO. MY MOM'S PARENTS WERE SPLIT UP. HER FATHER
IN PERU - WENT TO PERU, AND HER MOM WAS IN PUERTO RICO. MY DAD'S PARENTS WERE RIGHT
ROUND THE CORNER. WHICH WAS SO ODD BECAUSE MY FATHER DIDN'T SPEAK SPANISH, BUT THEY DID, AND
AS VERY ODD. - YEAH, I JUST GOT REALLY ANGST-RIDDEN. LIKE, MY MOTHER WOULD LOOK AT ME FUNNY
- DON'T TALK FAST ENOUGH, OR IF I SAY SOMETHING WRONG, SO I HAVE THIS COMPLETE BLOCK ABOUT IT
THIS, YOU KNOW, I START SHAKING AND, LIKE, IT'S AWFUL, BECAUSE I DON'T SPEAK SPANISH. AND IT'S
E, PEOPLE - OH YOU'RE PUERTO RICAN - DO YOU SPEAK SPANISH? - OH, HERE YOU GO. YOU KNOW, IT'S
E, YOU'RE SOME SECOND RATE, WHATEVER, YOU KNOW. SO I KIND OF TURNED THAT AROUND TO MAKING
- ART. YOU KNOW, I'LL SPEAK TO IT THROUGH MY ART. YOU KNOW, THAT'LL BE MY WAY. MAYBE - I CAN'T -
E, SURE. I'M NOT ABLE TO FOR WHATEVER REASON, AND I'M STILL - NOT SAYING THAT I CAN'T EVER - I'LL
- BACK THERE. BECAUSE IT FELT GOOD. BUT - THERE IS A BLOCK, I CAN FEEL IT. YOU KNOW, IT'S
SOMETHING. I'LL FIGURE IT OUT ONE DAY. BUT - IT'S MORE IMPORTANT TO ME, I THINK, TO MAKE THE
STINGS ANYWAY. SO THAT'S PART OF WHAT I DO. SO I'M MAKING THIS ALTARPIECE AND IT'S BASED OFF OF
SPRIBED BY ROGIER VAN DER WAYDEN'S THE LAST JUDGEMENT, AND VAN EYCK'S GHEALT ALTARPIECE. SO
ERE'S THE CENTER PANEL, AND THEN THE LEFT AND RIGHT, WE HAVE MARY AND JOHN. IT'S MY MOM
MY DAD. SO IT'S GOING TO BE ME, MY MOM, MY DAD, - ME, MY PARENTS, MY GRANDPARENTS, - AND I LIKE



Date

23 October 2020

Brandon Perdomo
Lazarus Nazario
Session Conducted

Interviewer
Narrator
Zoom / Online

Brooklyn, NY
Bronx, NY

B

- you're over in the Bronx?

L

I am in the Bronx. I'm in the boogie-down for about a decade now.

B

- can we start out - as much as you'd like - tell me what you've been up to these days?

L

Well, yeah, COVID, huh? How about that COVID, man. Yeah, it's - it's been rough. It's been rough, I'm not gonna lie. Um- I live across the street from a hospital. So I got to hear lots of sirens, 24-seven, for a long time.

Um, so that was kind of rough. And I was painting - I was pretty much into like this series of paintings that I was working on, called *Great Expectations*, which is a series of works where nature takes the earth back.- they are meant to be found photographs from a time when nature took the earth back. So it's a sort of Future/Past thing.

And - when COVID hit, and I remember, it started to get all infused into the work. I was working on one particular painting called *The East River Gardenia Visits the Brooklyn Bridge* - and suddenly - the waves just started getting bigger - the water got rougher.

And everything just started to get really overwhelming. Like I could sense - the waves in the painting, sort of turned into this - the big crest of the wave that we were climbing in New York, with COVID, and how - the numbers were climbing and we went into lockdown and all of this stuff - I was in the middle of painting that, as that was happening. So it got to the point where, what was going on around me [came] out through the work. But - it got overwhelming. - the numbers just got staggering. I found myself every morning - like clockwork, putting on Cuomo just to find out what was happening around town and what was going on and what I should do and what have you-

I had to put that painting down-
I had to put it down.

So I went through a bit of a time when - I call it -

- I guess it's called a block, but it's where nothing would come out of my hands. That's kind of the best way I can put it. Like things - nothing will come out of my hands. You know, because that's physically how it feels for me, you know, it comes out of the ends of my fingertips somehow, - that spills out of my hands.

And I just couldn't do it. And, - and that was rough. And I kind of had to just let myself go through that - because it's a *global pandemic*. And all this stuff's going on - there's sirens outside the window, and I kept trying to get my mind off of it. And there were -



I'm watching all these painters that I know that would just kind of go on and paint the same things that they were painting - just kind of goes as normal and, really a lot of - in a lot of ways for a painter, it is kind of normal, because I do sit here all alone in the studio and it really shouldn't be any different except for the fact that you can't leave the house, then that became, you know, very, obvious - you couldn't get out of your head really anyway because you only have your four walls - and you only have what's going on around you.

B

Is Cop-Out [a message] that popped in your head?

L

Yeah. Oh, yeah. There's a whole story for that one. See - backstory. I was on my way to *Governor's Island* for the first time that they opened it up, And they had all these spaces that they were opening up to artists, and they were going to give grants and let artists put up shows there. So they were inviting everybody in. And - it was the first time I was going to take the ferry that went there, which is interesting, because I was born in Staten Island. So I'm used to going down there to take that ferry, so I was like, *Woah! So weird, I'm going to go to Governors Island. How strange is that?*

So I'm walking across the street, and I see a guy heading there.

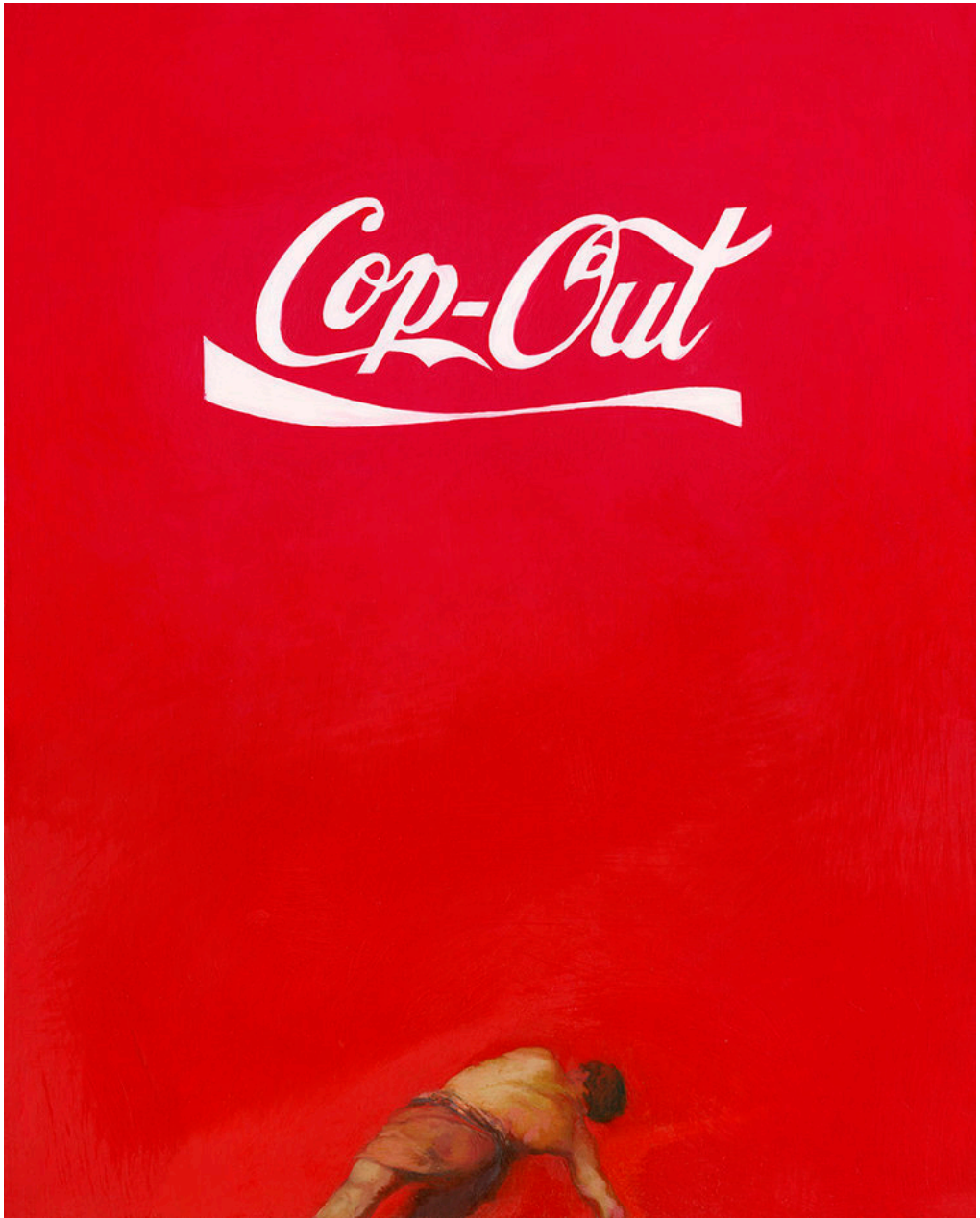
To the - to that Ferry Terminal carrying these folded up *Coca Cola* boxes. And to me, you know, - I thought he was one of the artists - it looked like it said, cop out. *Wow, that's awesome. You know, like, that's so smart.* Because that's exactly what we do. When we give-into advertising. You know, you kind of buy into it, you buy into it, and you cop-out. It's like, that's it, you know, you don't think for yourself, right? *Damn, that's really cool. I wonder what I would do.* So I'm walking and walking. And I was like, *hmm that's interesting.* And I watched the guy and he's walking - and he's walking and he walks back to the Coca Cola truck, and gets in - but he was a delivery guy. It really was Coca Cola boxes. It didn't say cop out. I saw a cop out! It just said, you know, it was a Coca Cola box! So right there. And then it was like, DING! - go home - I had to Google it. I had to Google it. Because I was like, *there's no way someone hasn't done this already. No way someone hasn't done this already.* And I was like, *okay, doesn't look like it.* And I went home and made Cop-Out. I like handcrafted the logo because the logo wasn't available. So it wasn't like I had a program that - had those fonts or whatever - handcrafted the logo.

B

So you - were a sign painter, right then.

L

Yeah - and threw the guy in, to look as though he was, sort of someone that just threw a rock at this giant lit-up Billboard. Like the idea of like breaking - break that - idea. You know, *think for yourself, show up. Don't just let someone tell you how to think, feel.* But yeah, I was a sign painter. Yeah. Existential sign painter, in a way. It was very strange. But - it was really funny because once I made that, everyone and their mother told me I was gonna get sued. Like, You're gonna get sued, you can't use that - you're gonna get a cease and desist order. And the font wasn't available at the time, but years later, - the font became available. I



Cop-Out
16x20 in.
Oil on board



remember seeing something like *BuzzFeed* where they're like, *Top five fonts you should start using right now!* One of them was Coca Cola. I laughed, like *I guess I'm not gonna get in trouble now*. Even though - it's not *exact*. Like if you really look at the logo. You can see it's different. But - to me, it was just, like that - that's just one of those things that just kind of came down - it came to me - it walked down the street right in front of my face, like that's what it was, completely.

B

And how did *Zero Cop-Out* come out of that?

L

Zero Cop-Out was born straight from that, which was interesting because the original painting - there is a painting to it. It never got made - it kind of got messed up, and one day, I'll go back and make it. But it was actually a portrait of *Lolita Lebrón*, the Puerto Rican nationalist who shot-up Congress over an immigration bill - she brought a gun and shot into the ceiling of Congress over an immigration bill. - It's an insane story. - and I used *zero cop out*, and I had this portrait of her - looked like a mug shot. And the background of it was - gold leaf. But you can't - there aren't any good pictures of her from then - because it was 1950 -, the pictures are all distorted.

So it was hard to work on it - But that was always in my brain, - there's no stopping, you know, - *You are not going to-not do this. All in, you're all in, you know, zero cop-out*. That's part of what I call - *the détournement pieces*, which is - French for hijacking, which is a form of parody, where you take a public service announcement or an ad, and you hijack it for a different meaning - for your own meaning. And even better - an opposite, the opposite to what it says - that's like, that's the way to do it.

The sort of rated [rated-] R version of that became *Fuck Cop-Out*. And I'm actually currently working on what that painting is. Which harkens back to me experiencing racism and an early age. So I'm a painter, and - I'm a big fan of *Frida Kahlo*. - the way I started painting was that - I actually started out as a singer-songwriter. And I saw this documentary - a point of view about the painter, Leon Golub. And I was blown away. - he's an existential activist painter. - he died - now, but -

he makes these giant paintings - giant acrylic paintings of like mercenaries and like, you know, just all these big, horrific war-time paintings. And he makes other types of paintings too, but he's scraping them on the floor with a meat cleaver. Like just - that's part of his technique. He like sort of paints everything on, scrapes it off, and like, *I want to be doing what that guy is doing*. I was a singer-songwriter, but I wanted to be doing what he was doing. And I wrote a song for him. Or poem, I guess you could call it, *I Pray I feel It Too*.

Which is interesting. And it was very, sort of, it kind of foreshadowed that, I guess - I wished I was a painter. And it was the fire in the belly. You know, that was more of what - I pray I feel it too was, like a little prayer - *the fire in the belly*.

- that same year, I think this was '91. That same year, I was reading one of my favorite comics *Love and Rockets* - by Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez, and they did this little bio on *Frida Kahlo*. And at the end, it said, taken - you know, *such and such story* - taken from the biography by - Hayden Herrera - I went straight to the library. Then went to Barnes and Noble and bought that book - *Frida Kahlo, The Paintings*. And that was it. That was the end of that - I was a painter. I was not a singer-song writer. I was a painter. So I was like this one-two punch of Leon Golub, which is interesting, because it's this man that paints these gigantic paintings. And this woman that paints these tiny sort of, very personal, very intimate images - but the two kind of smashed



YouTube: *NYC ZCO Public Art Project*

Five Zero Cop-Out posters were hand painted and installed in all five boroughs of NYC on or nearby the five Black Lives Matter mural streets.



together for me, and I came out of that.

L

I was self-taught in acrylics for like 10 years - a good decade before I even was just - gonna, like, - because it took somebody else - *Like, go!* - pushing me - *Okay, all right. Okay, now I can do this*, you know, and I did - I took to it like a duck out of water and I had a great teacher. Sharon Sprung taught me all about color - and I guess - I mean a colorist. There's no way around it - like I just can't - can't stand it. Color is just too much It's too gorgeous, and vivid and beautiful, and I have to use all of it and I have to find a way to get it even more vivid sometimes - it's funny - I look at some of my older work. And - the work I'm doing now looks something like, like one of the *peonies girl explosions*, - and it's so much brighter than the earlier flowers I was painting, I was like, *No! More! More intense color!*

But, it came way later, the whole - *all bets are off kind of attitude*. And it's really - a moment where my work changed, and everything changed. And the reason why I worked changed - because I realized I wasn't gonna have children. That's it, - guess what, that whole dream, we think, *you know, let me wait till I get married*. And I got married, and I timed-out, I got married late. And I guess I just didn't - didn't have it in me anymore. And I kind of got timed-out by it. So realized that - what I create is all I'm gonna leave - the paintings I create is all I'm gonna leave in this world. - that's my legacy. I don't have - a child or something to leave something to, that will, remember me by *bla bla bla bla bla*, like, a lot of people have. And, you know, some people don't want that. But *I did*, I really did. So the moment that happened, - when that *all bets are off* moment.

That's kind of when I realized, *okay*,
I curate everything I do,
because I know it's gonna be around when I'm gone.

So I'm very aware of that. And I'm very aware of my place in time. And history. And my moment. That's why also, - I've sort of, sort of reclaimed my ethnicity, which I shunned when I was younger because of the racism. And I never, - it was never an easy fit, because I am not Puerto Rican enough for Puerto Ricans. And I'm not white enough for white people - there's always, you know, I don't fit in either world. So I never really felt right. And much like Frida did for Mexican painting, I wanted to kind of espouse my, you know, Puerto Rican ethnicity in my work. So I would - I started going to the library on 42nd Street, right, that - big giant library where all the art books are. And just - would come home - I was living in Staten Island at the time, and I would just take out all these giant books and go across the street to the express bus and like, pretty much sit them on the seat next to me - a pile of books almost as big as me, and just pour over them. It was interesting, because I sought out - *what, what is Puerto Rican art?* I wanted to know really deeply what it was. And I - aside from sort of, say, the, - folk tradition of the kind of Indian *Taíno*, - kind of art experience, I couldn't find the contemporary version, - couldn't find it, like a cohesive, you know, contemporary version. And I just put all the books down, and decided that what I make *is* - it is because *I am* - you know, and if I make something that speaks to that, then that is, Puerto Rican art.

So I started to make works - almost like history paintings - in the same way as Frida and Diego - I kind of - take on all these little things, you know, you kind of take on the things that are around you.

Like you put it on, like a sweater and a coat and you kind of see how it fits. So I would grab - I



started reading up on Puerto Rican history and pulling stories out of that, - and I'm making works that speak to that.

The biggest one that I'm doing that speaks to that, for me, is an altarpiece which also speaks to my ancestry. And this is something that has been in my brain for about 20 years. But it's an altarpiece called *Birth of a Nuyorican: All The Stigma, None of the Romance* - because that's how it felt to me - - it's always felt to me, I've always had that stigma of being Puerto Rican without the - you know, all that romance being Puerto Rican - of - the dancing, the language, I would try to speak Spanish - I've spoken Spanish fluently, not fluently, but like *I was trying real hard, getting in there*. In Guatemala. For six weeks, I went to Guatemala to learn Spanish. But they speak it very slow there. - they do not speak it like Puerto Ricans - very .. slow .. - and everybody's very relaxed - it was Antigua, Guatemala - - I have sort of a like brain block with it. Because - my family - my mother spoke Spanish. My father did not - it was not spoken at home - when I was little, my mother would try to teach me words and I would try to learn them. But - and my grandmother, - my dad's mother, actually lived five minutes from us in Staten Island. My mom's mother lived in Puerto Rico. My mom's parents were split up. Her father was in Peru - went to Peru, and her mom was in Puerto Rico. My dad's parents were right around the corner. Which was so odd because my father didn't speak Spanish, but they did - it was very odd.

- yeah, I just got really angst-ridden. Like, my mother would look at me funny if I - don't talk fast enough, or if I say something wrong, so I have this complete block about it - like this, you know, I start shaking and, like, it's awful, because I don't speak Spanish. And it's like, people - *Oh you're Puerto Rican - do you speak Spanish? - Oh, there you go*. You know, it's like, *you're some second rate, whatever*, you know. So I kind of turned that around to making the art. You know, *I'll speak to it through my art. You know, that'll be my way*. Maybe, - I can't - fine, Sure. I'm not able to for whatever reason, and I'm still - not saying that I can't ever - I'll get back there. Because it felt good.

But, - there is a block, I can feel it. You know, it's something. I'll figure it out one day. But -, it's more important to me, I think, to make the paintings anyway. So that's part of what I do. So I'm making this altarpiece and it's based off of - inspired by Rogier Van Der Wayden's *The Last Judgement*. And, Van Eyck's *Ghent* altarpiece. So - there's the center panel, and then to the left and right, we have Mary and John. It's my mom and my dad. So it's going to be me, my mom, my dad, -, me, my parents, my grandparents, - and I. Like the Frida Kahlo painting - my, - Me, my grandparents, my parents and I or whatever, - My Grandparents, My Parents and I, that's it. It's sort of like that as well, I guess you could say it's all those smashed together. And it's all on found objects. And it's seven panels. And I have them sitting here. Well, I don't have all 7 - [counting] - I have 5 of them. And I just made the big center one during COVID. Because - I thought I was going to be able to use a big door for it. Because I use these found objects - big wooden doors, that I scraped down -

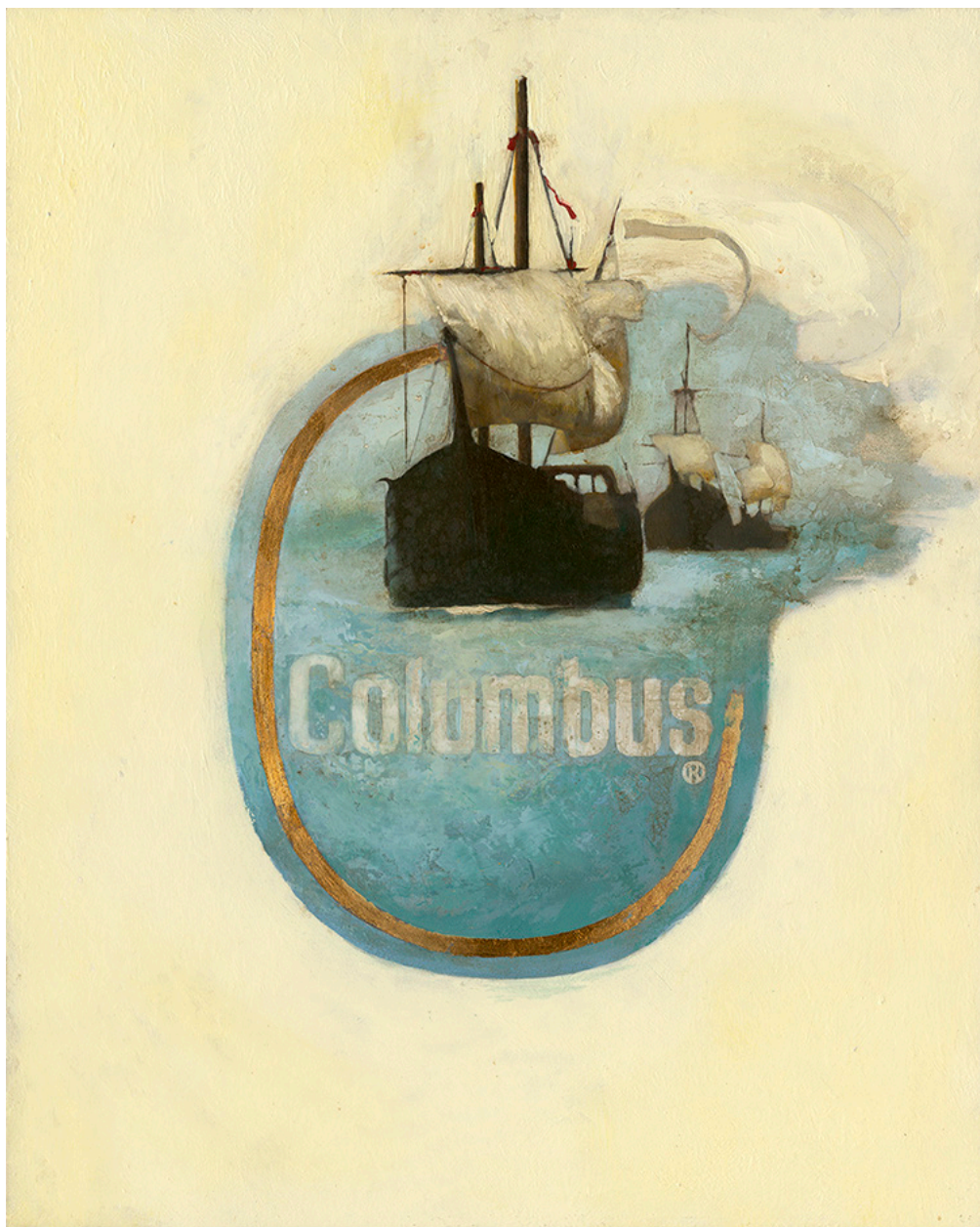
I realized I was making devotional images of what that was - and what those are devotional images. Because with devotional images, you see all these - like you see in Mexico, and all these sort of bleeding-Jesus images, and you can they can be as gory as they want, if they're in the name of that devotion, somehow. So to me, I thought, hmm, so can I. - I hijacked it, I basically hijacked that idea, and came up with Underground Black Market Devotional Propaganda. That is what this is, I'm going to straight up tell you, that's what this is. Because if I name it that, then I can do whatever I want in that, it gives me carte blanche to do whatever I want - to be gory or rough or whatever.

And I remember also, because of the fact that - I do those, the *détournement* - of the brands -



The Original Corporate Takeover
16x20 in
Oil & gold leaf on board







the *cop out* and all that, but then I'll just something like *The Shattering* and **then** I'll - make this sweet little, you know, image of a little girl with flowers coming out of her hair, you know, like, everything is so different that I couldn't - my work didn't fit into one genre. It didn't - I couldn't pigeonhole it enough to sell it to a gallery - to try to do you know - get out there and a gallery - I could never find a gallery that I was like, okay, they would, they would kind of want - *maybe my work would fit in there*, you know, because everything was so different, that I just invented my own genre. And that's what underground black market promotional propaganda is. It was like, You know what, boom, that's what it is. I'm just going to name it that. And, the end. I don't have to call it anything else. It's not you know, this or that. Or the other. I mean, there's Pop surrealism. There's magical realism, there's expressionism, there's whatever, *in all of that*.

B

This one time you mentioned that there's a link - or maybe in my heart - there's a link between *Cop Out* and *The Original Corporate Takeover*.

L

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Definitely, definitely a link there. And they happened pretty much right at the same time. Because as soon as *Cop Out* happened, - I wasn't even aware of the term *déterement until actually later on*. But then I just - my eyes kind of opened, you know, the files go - that are in your head, they kind of open up to what's out there all the time that you can kind of, you know, - I started kind of putting the feelers out. And the next thing I saw was the Chiquita logo.

And that just, I was like, okay,

Columbus, - Columbus - drop Columbus into that Chiquita logo. And that's like, a bomb. That's like a little history lesson in a pill. Right there - original corporate takeover, you know, like, Queen Isabella of Spain funding Columbus to go land-grab, essentially, you know, - I was born on Columbus Day, and the great fortune of being born - born on Columbus Day. So growing up, that's like, *great, I get a*, you know, *three day weekend, every year from my birthday, fantastic*. And then later on, you realize the actual history,

The genocide of your ancestors, it's not so fun anymore.

And it - with imperialism, kind of got wrapped up in that.

And that, that - that's another one that came to me, then I had to Google. I had to kind of like, look around like, *nobody put this together?* I remember how I googled it. But I remember thinking that that's because there's just - some of those, sometimes things just hit you like that. That one came to me. Because in your mind, you're thinking how you're going to put it together. And it isn't until you see something out in the world, that it can express itself fully - in a concise manner. And it happens rarely - doesn't happen often. And I remember thinking - I remember trying to keep my eyes open wide during this covid thing, but - I'm too much in this room, even though you can go online and all that, it's not - it's not the same. It's been hard.

But - that felt really good to make. Actually, that's another one of those that - there's a couple paintings that I made. Probably *corporate takeover, cop out, screen grab and shattering*. - if I die tomorrow, I'm okay. I'm okay, that those - those are out in the world, and I'm pretty sure they're going to be out in the world for a long time. You know, - -, because they do move you



- they move you to think or feel. Or, even if you don't like it, - I had the experience --

I was in one of the *Staten Island* shows where you kind of had to watch one of the - I don't know what - it was - - one of the big art shows they do every year.

Art By The Ferry - they asked you to come sit in a room for a while - to watch stuff. And I had *The Shattering* in there, I was like, *This is gonna be awesome*. I got to be a fly on the wall. Because people didn't know that I was the painter that painted it - got to be a fly on the wall. I watched people walk by and react to that one. That was a very interesting thing.

B

- What kinds of people. What kind of reactions?

L

Ah, some of them were like, *That's disgusting. That's disgusting. Why would you do that* - other people - were moved by it deeply. You know, like, ran the gamut - ran the gamut. And I'm like, I'm okay with all of it. I don't even care. Like my own mom said *it looked like somebody vomited* while I was packing it up to put in a show because Morley Safer chose it to be in a show called *In The News* at the *Pen and Brush* gallery in New York - packing it up. My mom was like - That looks like somebody threw up. Okay. Well, look, it was good enough for Morley Safer, so I don't mind. You can think that.

B

- Thanks, mom.

L

Yeah, I was like, I get it - -
I mean, I did - I threw it up, really -

it came the heck up, out of me.



The Shattering
24 x 48 in.
Encaustic, oil and ground glass on board





Lazarus Nazario
Bronx, NY
2020

www.lazarusnazario.com



shedding
somethingshedding

i.i

Lazarus Nazario



IS AS YOU EXPLORE IT, IT AS WE SAY, IN FARSI, THAT'S ANOTHER WORD FOR IT, ROUSARI. - I AM GOING THROUGH A SERIES OF EMOTIONS, REALLY SLOWLY AND CONSCIOUSLY. IT'S NOT DIGITALLY ALTERED, OR SLOWED DOWN AT ALL. SO IT'S ME GOING THROUGH THE EMOTIONS WITH MY FACE REALLY SLOWLY, - THE VIDEO IS ONLY A MINUTE AND A HALF LONG, BUT IT TOOK ME ABOUT FIVE HOURS TO SHOOT. - BECAUSE WHEN YOU TRY TO CONTROL YOUR FACE, YOUR FACE STARTS TWITCHING. AND IF YOU NOTICE, YOU CAN SEE SOME TWITCHES IN MY EYES. A LOT OF TIMES WHEN WE SEE IMAGES OF WOMEN, IN A HIJAB, MUSLIM WOMEN - WOMEN FROM THAT PART OF THE WORLD, IT'S USUALLY IMAGES OF WAR, SADNESS, OR REFUGEES OR, YOU KNOW, LIKE THESE PICTURES OF THE WORST MOMENTS OF THESE PEOPLE'S LIVES. LIKE, ANYBODY WHO WOULD BE IN THAT POSITION WOULD LOOK LIKE THAT. AND THAT'S THE IMAGE THAT IS GIVEN TO THE UNITED STATES OF PEOPLE FROM THAT PART OF THE WORLD. AND I JUST WANT TO SHOW THAT, YOU KNOW, THERE'S A LOT OF SIDES TO US AS HUMANS, BECAUSE - IT'S REALLY INTERESTING, THIS ONE LITTLE PIECE OF CLOTH CAN REALLY CHANGE SOMEONE'S WHOLE PERCEPTION OF YOU, AND - HOW THEY VALUE YOU AS A HUMAN LIFE. AND SO I WAS PLAYING WITH THAT LITTLE BIT AND TRYING TO APPEAL TO, YOU KNOW, BASIC HUMAN EMOTIONS THAT WE ALL FEEL AND GO THROUGH. CAN I ASK - WHAT'S YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HIJAB? SO I'M ORIGINALLY FROM IRAN, BUT I'M MIXED. MY MOTHER'S AMERICAN, MY FATHER IS IRANIAN. MY PARENTS - MY FATHER, ACTUALLY, THROUGH CRAZY CIRCUMSTANCES, WAS ABLE TO COME TO COLLEGE IN THE UNITED STATES, RIGHT BEFORE THE REVOLUTION HIT IN IRAN, AND EVERYTHING SHUT DOWN. AND HE MET MY MOM, AND THEY GOT MARRIED VERY QUICKLY, HAD CHILDREN - HAD MY SISTER AND THEN MOVED BACK TO IRAN. AND WE ENDED UP STAYING THERE - THEY STILL LIVE THERE. IRAN IS AN ISLAMIC REPUBLIC, AND IT IS REQUIRED BY LAW FOR YOU TO WEAR THE HIJAB. IF YOU'RE A WOMAN, TECHNICALLY, IT'S FROM THE AGE OF PUBERTY, AND THAT'S OBSERVED AS NINE YEARS OLD - FOR WOMEN IN IRAN. YOU USUALLY START WEARING IT WHEN YOU START SHOWING. AND YOU LOOK MORE WOMANLY. AND - SO IT'S SOMETHING I WORE, ALL MY LIFE. - IN SCHOOL, AND HOME AND PUBLIC EVERYWHERE. AND I COME FROM A REALLY, REALLY RELIGIOUS FAMILY. A VERY TRADITIONAL FAMILY. INSIDE HIJABS, WE WERE A HOUSEHOLD THAT WE ALWAYS WORE INSIDE HIJABS. AND I DON'T KNOW, IT'S JUST LIKE, YOU KNOW, MY RELATIONSHIP TO MY SHIRT. IT'S JUST SOMETHING YOU KNOW, IS ALWAYS THERE. LIKE, THERE SHOULD ALWAYS BE A CHOICE FOR SURE. BUT NOW - YOU KNOW, I HAVE A TON OF HIJABS. WHEN THINGS WERE OPENING UP A LITTLE BIT IN IRAN - CROWING UP, WE WEREN'T NECESSARILY ALLOWED TO WEAR COLORS - BRIGHT COLORS, BUT AT THE END THERE, YOU COULD WEAR ANYTHING. I HAVE LIKE - I COULD HAVE A WHOLE CLOSET DEDICATED TO THEM. AND WHEN I - SEE THEM NOW THEY MAKE ME HAPPY. ARE YOU THE ONLY ARTIST IN YOUR FAMILY? MY MOM PAINTS. AND IT GIVES ME LIKE THIS, FEELING OF NOSTALGIA AND LIKE - HISTORY, AND, INDEPENDENCE. ARE YOU THE ONLY ARTIST IN YOUR FAMILY? MY MOM PAINTS. I DON'T KNOW IF SHE WOULD CALL HERSELF AN ARTIST. BUT I REMEMBER WHEN, WHEN I WAS A KID IN IRAN, SHE USED TO TAKE OIL PAINTING CLASSES. AND SHE'S VERY VISUAL PERSON. BUT - HE'S A MECHANICAL ENGINEER. SHE'S VERY VISUAL PERSON. BUT - HE'S A MECHANICAL ENGINEER. SO HE'S VERY SCIENCE AND MATH MIND. BUT HE DOES HAVE A REALLY GREAT RELATIONSHIP WITH AESTHETICS. I REMEMBER AS A KID, HE ALWAYS - USED TO LOVE RUGS, WE ALWAYS - ANY RUG SHOW WE'D SEE - HE ALWAYS WANTED TO GO IN AND LOOK AND TOUCH - AND POETRY IS A HUGE THING IN IRAN, AND MY DAD ALWAYS HAD POETRY AROUND. HE ALSO ALWAYS HAD A CAMERA. I THINK MAYBE IT'S A SCIENCE-MIND TO KIND OF DOCUMENT THINGS. BUT HE ALWAYS TOOK PICTURES. AND HIS CURIOSITY TOWARDS THE CAMERA IS THE REASON WHY I COULD PROBABLY THINK ABOUT EVERYONE LIKE THAT, HONESTLY. - BUT MY SISTER, SHE'S GOT HER PHD IN BIOCHEMISTRY, SO - NOT PARTICULARLY LIKE, AS A CAREER PATH. THEY DIDN'T REALLY CHOOSE THAT. HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE PIECE? HOW DO I EXPLAIN IT? -, SO IT'S A MINUTE AND 47 SECONDS TOTAL - IT'S A PERFORMANCE FOR THE CAMERA OF ME IN MY HIJAB, OR ROUSARI. - I AM GOING THROUGH A SERIES OF EMOTIONS, REALLY SLOWLY AND CONSCIOUSLY. IT'S NOT DIGITALLY ALTERED, OR SLOWED DOWN AT ALL. SO IT'S ME GOING THROUGH THE EMOTIONS WITH MY FACE REALLY SLOWLY, - THE VIDEO IS ONLY A MINUTE AND A HALF LONG, BUT IT TOOK ME ABOUT FIVE HOURS TO SHOOT. - BECAUSE WHEN YOU TRY TO CONTROL YOUR FACE, YOUR FACE STARTS TWITCHING. AND IF YOU NOTICE, YOU CAN SEE SOME TWITCHES IN MY EYES. A LOT OF TIMES WHEN WE SEE IMAGES OF WOMEN, IN A HIJAB, MUSLIM WOMEN - WOMEN FROM THAT PART OF THE WORLD, IT'S USUALLY IMAGES OF WAR, SADNESS, OR REFUGEES OR, YOU KNOW, LIKE THESE PICTURES OF THE WORST MOMENTS OF THESE PEOPLE'S LIVES. LIKE, ANYBODY WHO WOULD BE IN THAT POSITION WOULD LOOK LIKE THAT. AND THAT'S THE IMAGE THAT IS GIVEN TO THE UNITED STATES OF PEOPLE FROM THAT PART OF THE WORLD. AND I JUST WANT TO SHOW THAT, YOU KNOW, THERE'S A LOT OF SIDES TO US AS HUMANS, BECAUSE - IT'S REALLY INTERESTING, THIS ONE LITTLE PIECE OF CLOTH CAN REALLY CHANGE SOMEONE'S WHOLE PERCEPTION OF YOU, AND - HOW THEY VALUE YOU AS A HUMAN LIFE. AND SO I WAS PLAYING WITH THAT LITTLE BIT AND TRYING TO APPEAL TO, YOU KNOW, BASIC HUMAN EMOTIONS THAT WE ALL FEEL AND GO THROUGH. CAN I ASK - WHAT'S YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HIJAB? SO I'M ORIGINALLY FROM IRAN, BUT I'M MIXED. MY MOTHER'S AMERICAN, MY FATHER IS IRANIAN. MY PARENTS - MY FATHER, ACTUALLY, THROUGH CRAZY CIRCUMSTANCES, WAS ABLE TO COME TO COLLEGE IN THE UNITED STATES, RIGHT BEFORE THE REVOLUTION HIT IN IRAN, AND EVERYTHING SHUT DOWN. AND HE MET MY MOM, AND THEY GOT MARRIED VERY QUICKLY, HAD CHILDREN - HAD MY SISTER AND THEN MOVED BACK TO IRAN, TO HAVE ME - AND WE ENDED UP STAYING THERE - THEY STILL LIVE THERE. IRAN IS AN ISLAMIC REPUBLIC, AND IT IS REQUIRED BY LAW FOR YOU TO WEAR THE HIJAB. IF YOU'RE A WOMAN, TECHNICALLY, IT'S FROM THE AGE OF PUBERTY, AND THAT'S OBSERVED AS NINE YEARS OLD - FOR WOMEN IN IRAN, YOU USUALLY START WEARING IT WHEN YOU START SHOWING. AND YOU LOOK MORE WOMANLY. AND - SO IT'S SOMETHING I WORE, ALL MY LIFE. - IN SCHOOL, A

[illegible]



Date

2 November 2020

Brandon Perdomo
Sara Meghdari
Session Conducted

Interviewer
Narrator
Zoom / Online

Brooklyn, NY
Brooklyn, NY

S

We're in 2020. So it's quarantine -

COVID.
Election year.

I recently have been trying to keep busy
to hustle and take advantage of this time
and - remind myself to keep going --

B

--, what happens in the studio lately?

S

- When I talk about the studio – it's not my studio, it's the studio I work in. There's a couple photographers that have rented the space out. All of them do major commercial work. And have little personal projects here and there. So when I go there, I'm 100% of the time usually working on somebody else's work. So it's like busy work, office work, archiving and things like that.

But it's nice to -,
go into a different space.

As a photographer, mostly videographer and - lens based - I don't really need a studio usually unless I'm planning a performance or an installation.

B

- when we met and you had that that piece
projected on the wall, - that piece is typically projected, is that right?

S

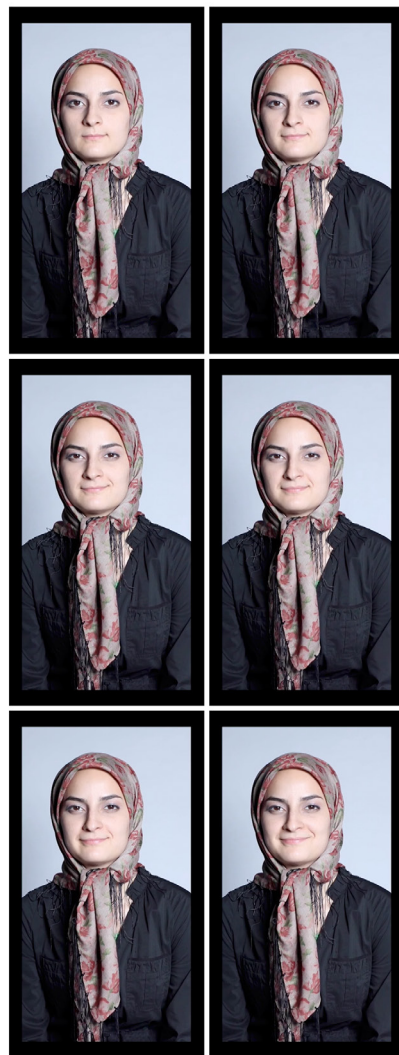
- No, not necessarily - originally made to be put on a vertical hanging screen as like a portrait - a moving portrait. It's changed in screen sizes and projection sizes. It really - at this point - doesn't really matter. As long as it's being seen, but originally it was on it was supposed to be on screen.

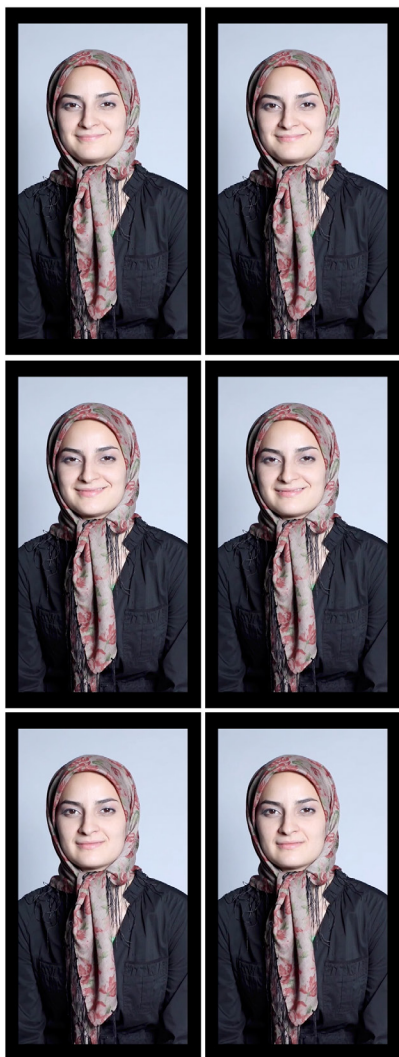
B

Can you remind me the name of it?

S

Silent Self.





Silent Self, performance for the camera, 2014





B

When - was that put together?

S

- I made that in 2014 actually, when I was in school, it was the first year I was in school. - I got so much shit for making that video. Since then, I talked to a lot of Muslim women artists or women who come from the same background. And they all kind of get the same feedback in these, white - centered schools that - you know, *hijab is so overplayed, like, everybody does this, why are you doing this? It's so overplayed* -

It's going back to the question of identity. It's like, they really don't like this portion of our identity. And don't like to see it. I don't know. And so when I was in school, I got a lot of that feedback from the Dean of the department, from my critique teacher at the time. But I wanted to make it anyway, so I made it anyway. And I've kind of like this great redemption, because it's one of my works that's been shown the most.

B

I love that that image of the of the piece being projected on the - wall of a building?

S

Yeah, that was this year. There's this group called *Straight Through the Wall* – they're kind of a guerrilla group of video artists that do this every year. And - it was an open call, I applied - the theme was portrait, so it seemed perfect. I got accepted - and I got to see this video bigger than I've ever seen before on a building – in New York city, in America. So it's kind of intense.



via: Straight Through the Wall
Instagram: @sttw_nyc



B

How do you explain the piece?

S

How do I explain it? -, so it's a minute and 47 seconds total - it's a performance for the camera of me in my hijab, or *rousari*, it as we say, in *Farsi*, that's another word for it, rousari. - I am going through a series of emotions, really slowly and consciously. It's not digitally altered, or slowed down at all. So it's me going through the emotions with my face really slowly, - the video is only a minute and a half long, but it took me about five hours to shoot. - Because when you try to control your face, your face starts twitching. And if you notice, you can see some twitches in my eyes.

A lot of times when we see images of women, in a hijab, Muslim women – or women from that part of the world, it's usually images of war, sadness, or refugees or, you know, like these pictures of the worst moments of these people's lives. Like, *Anybody who would be in that position would look like that*. And that's the image that is given to the United States of people from that part of the world. And I just want to show that, you know, there's a lot of sides to us as humans, because - it's really interesting, this *one little piece of cloth* can really change someone's whole perception of you, and - how they value you as a human life. And so I was playing with that a little bit and trying to appeal to, you know, basic human emotions that we all feel and go through.

B

Can I ask – what's your relationship with the hijab?

S

- So I'm originally from Iran, but I'm mixed. My mother's American, my father is Iranian. My parents - my father, actually, through crazy circumstances, was able to come to college in the United States, right before the revolution hit in Iran, and everything shut down. And he met my mom, and they got married very quickly, - had my sister and then moved back to Iran, to have me - and we ended up staying there - they still live there.

Iran is an Islamic Republic, and it is required by law for you to wear the hijab. If you're a woman, technically,

it's from the age of puberty, and that's observed as nine years old for women in Iran, you know, people - you usually start wearing it when you start showing. And you look more womanly. And - so it's something I wore, all my life, - in school, and home and public - everywhere - it's just such a big part of my human experience.

- And I come from a really, really religious family - very traditional family, an uneducated family that relied on tradition and religion.

And

it was always a part of our home.

There's inside cover-, inside hijabs and outside hijabs, we were a household that we always wore inside hijabs. And



I don't know, it's just like, you know,
my relationship to my shirt. It's just something you know, is always there.

There should always be a choice for sure. But now - you know, I have a ton of hijabs, scarves,
a ton from my years of life - as a girl, especially -

Especially right before I moved to the US when things were opening up a little bit in Iran. -
growing up, we weren't necessarily allowed to wear colors - bright colors, but at the
end there, you could wear anything. I have so many hijabs - I could have a whole closet dedi-
cated to them. And

when I -

see them now they make me happy. And they give me this, feeling of nostalgia and - history,
and, independence.

B

Are you the only artist in your family?

S

My mom paints. I don't know if she would call herself an artist. But I remember when, when I
was a kid in Iran, she used to take oil painting classes. And she's a really good painter. My dad
is also an artist, even though he doesn't know it.

- He's
- a very visual person.

But -

he's a mechanical engineer. So he's very *science and math minded*. But he does have a really
great relationship with aesthetics.

I remember as a kid, he always - used to love rugs, we always - any rug shop, we'd see - he
always wanted to go in and look and touch - and poetry is a huge thing in Iran, and my dad
always had poetry around.

He also always had a camera. I think maybe it's a science-mind to kind of document things.
But he always took pictures.

And his curiosity towards the camera is the reason why I had exposure to it. So - he has -
artness in him too - My little brother is studying architecture. So he also is a visual person. My
older sister, I think, is really creative, too. I think we're all probably art-minded. I could probably
think about everyone like that, honestly. - But my sister, she's got her PhD in biochemistry, so -
not particularly like, as a career path. They didn't really choose that.



S

I definitely feel way way more comfortable in New York City. I was actually having my anxiety - about going back to Colorado because in New York, you never really see Trump supporters - even if you do, they're not particularly - public about it. But in Colorado, apparently it's full of them. So - the last time I saw like an - a red hat Trump supporter was in the airport, like two years ago. And an immediate fear went down my heart, like, -

- *Oh, my God, can he tell? Can he tell I'm from Iran?*

- I don't know. It was just, this immediate, *Oh, hide!* - I definitely am feeling a little anxiety, about going back to Colorado, I definitely felt that way, my entire time in Colorado, it was always a matter for me to blend in. Especially when I stuck out so hard and - in the beginning, - and it was not - a fun experience. So my next five years of life was just like, *blend in - blend in - blend in*. And, you know, *don't attract attention*.

And I was very quiet.

I was really observing, I think, - I spent years observing - before I kind of found my voice and my power -

- to speak. And then

when, - New York City,-
you know, [it] is a huge result of that - living here.
and going to school - having to argue with these people.

B

- what really struck me when I really got to sit down and see [*Silent Self*] as, not just a static image on the wall - at - you know, our friend's wall in a party. - - it placed me, or invited me - and then placed me in this place of reflection. It's just -, *watch and understand and feel*. And I feel - with what I watch and hear from you, - your work tends to do that. And I was thinking about when you were talking about this *conversation archive* that you were facilitating between people - Can you can you talk about that?

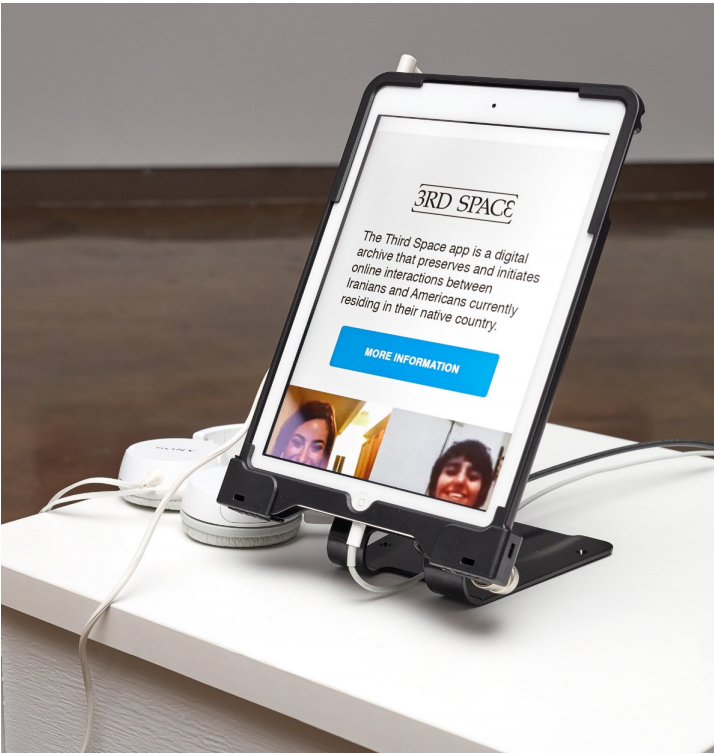
S

That piece is called *3rd Space*. - And it was my thesis project in school. And it ended up being - kind of an archival app of conversations between Iranians living in Iran and Americans living in America. And - - it was kind of an experiment, - it was kind of like, a social experiment.

I don't know. -

being mixed - being Iranian-American, one of my biggest dreams in life, was for my Iranian family, - extended family to meet my American extended family. How great would it be to have everybody in one space? And that is physically impossible. Not only because of the distance, but because of the politics. And, you know, there's no way that these people could get a visa either-way, you know, both ways. So I started thinking about, okay, what spaces can I find, for people to share, and the internet obviously, is like one of the only spaces - that - still - kinda - is borderless.

So - that's where that idea came from. And when I first started, I was experimenting with my friends, like, my high school friends from Iran, with my college friends from the US - having them talk. And it was just such a great, weird conversation of cultures and language, clashing.



The 3rd Space App, Sara Meghdari
Installed at the SVA Chelsea Gallery in 2006



And I started, you know, experimenting, really, and learning from my experiments and developing like a process and developing, - trying to develop a way that I can get these two people to connect with each other. Like, *how can I get in this space that we are?*

How can I get these two people to really see each other -

To really leave this conversation with, like a reflection, and that was really sweet, what you said, Thank you, I think that's my, that's the purpose of my work - is to kind of bridge the gap and to bring understanding. That's where the heart is and where it's really coming from. And so, *3rd Space* allowed me to kind of create like these little incubators of connection.

And it was a lot of work. But it was incredibly rewarding. Every connection was like a new baby being born. That's how I felt - like I had 50 babies. And some of the people still talk to each other to this day.

So - It was a really great experiment - it kind of lives in this historical space right now, in terms of idea - And one day, I would like to maybe try to reach out and get - the same people to have another conversation maybe like 10 years down the road or something.

But we'll see.

B

- if you can go back in any time of your - childhood or creative process or voice-finding process. If you could give yourself advice that you wish you had or would like - as a note - is there is there anything?

S

The feeling of hopelessness, does not last - that's probably what would have been something I would like to have heard when I was younger.

Yeah.
It's not forever.

So just -

- make it out of it.
just be patient.

Sara Meghdari
Brooklyn, NY
2020

www.sarameghdari.com



shedding
somethingshedding

i.ii

Sara Meghdari



[illegible]



Date

1 November 2020

Brandon Perdomo
Mx. Sugar Mamasota
Session Conducted

Interviewer
Narrator
Zoom / Online

Brooklyn, NY
Brooklyn, NY

B

- you're surrounded by a wonderful set piece that looks like -

S

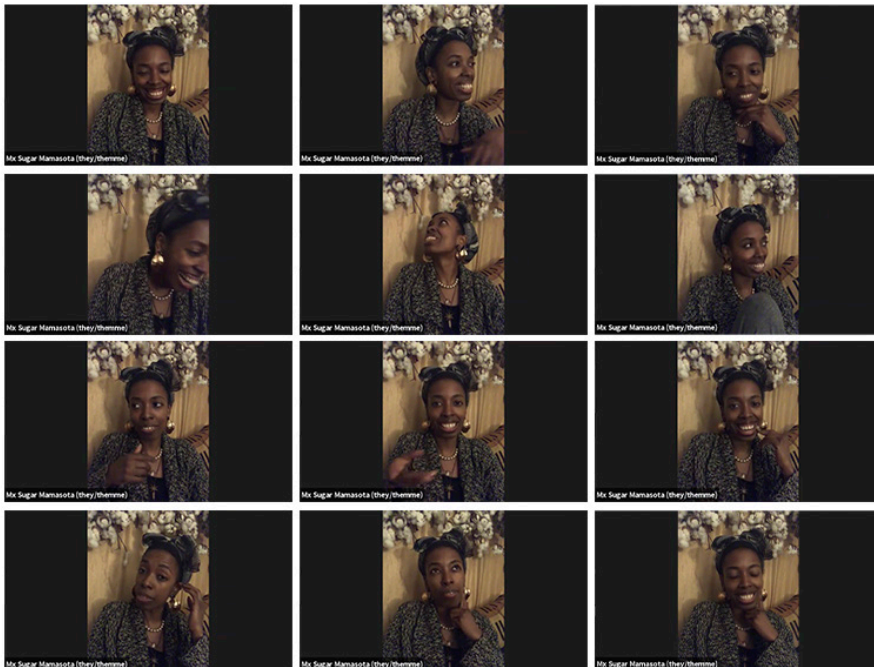
Oh, this set piece? My room! It's a bunch of bouquets of cotton - Well, There aren't the flowers - They're just cotton bulbs. This is like *after the flower* - so I guess these are *exploited seed pods*. But either way, I bought like six bouquets of them last year. And I'll probably buy six more. So I'll have a full cotton wall.

B

For for a set - was it for a gig?

S

No, it was just for me. I'm just *country* - and I miss the South. So - this isn't for anyone else but me.





B

Can you tell me your - venture from the South to New York?

S

Sure. Um, well, it was by way of Boston. I don't have a hometown anywhere. I grew up in three basic areas. Central North Carolina, Southern Massachusetts, and Southern Illinois. So my mother's family is from the Carolinas, my mom's first generation *Mass-hole*. And - half her siblings were born in Chester, South Carolina. And then her and her younger brother born in Boston. - my dad's the *Midwestern fella*. Anyway, so I lived in North Carolina when I was little. I learned how to talk when I was living in North Carolina. So that's why if I'm like, too sleepy or something, - there'll be the accent. But - after high school, - the third High School I went to was predominately white. I was one of five black femmes in my graduating class of over 400 kids. So basically, as soon as I graduated, I half-ass broke up with a guy I was half-ass dating and moved back down South for the summer, and then to Boston for college. And after a series of ridiculous events, I went from Boston to New York City. So - but I usually try to go - back home back to North Carolina, like once every year or every other year. Help out with the farm and stuff.

B

The farm?

S

Well, farm is a strong word, sorry. Farms involve animals. Mostly a garden. My aunt lives in the middle of nowhere, and there's like a big garden. My aunt, my uncle are getting older. So I'm teaching them how to restructure it so it's better for their abilities.

- So that's me being Southern.

B

- You told me once that that's where the name Sugar comes from.

S

Yeah, exactly. You don't know someone's name - yeah, *Sugar Darlin'*, *Sweetheart*. - I grew up with all those names. I'm Sugar - you're Sugar - doesn't matter. It's just like a placeholder. But yeah, that's been like one of my nicknames since I was little, or like any Southern person, that's what they call me automatically - *that'll be easy to toss that in*. - my first burlesque name was really bad - when I moved to New York City, I changed it.

B

Do you mind me asking what that name was?

S

I think it was *Veronica Vaudeville*. Just like - really campy and bad - you know - I did like one of those burlesque - *Learn-From-A-Burlesque-Queen-In-One-Day* bootcamps - spent like six hours learning how to *strip proper*, in a way that will be entertaining and - all that jazz.

Then I start teaching burlesque and then I was like, oh wait Boston's racist, I'm leaving, and



then I skedaddled.

B

Did you start performing burlesque in Boston?

S

Yeah, - my first show was - initially when I started burlesque, I wanted to only perform with live bands. Because at the time I was a musician, and I worked - as a bartender at a venue. And so everyone I knew was in the local music scene in Boston. So I was always making routines and stuff for local music. And me and two other performers - two artists that I knew - I kind of suckered them into becoming burlesque dancers, because I didn't know any. I was like, *Hey, I wanna start a burlesque troupe*. And one of them was like, *No, I don't like looking at people at all, let alone looking at me. Why would I do this?* But then once she saw that, *you know, you got a cool name*. And like, I was designing costumes for everybody. She's like, *wait, I want this thing. Fine. I'll do it*. So - she was like a child actress who was like, *No, no, I don't want to be involved in any of this*. But eventually, she came around, and I choreographed this whole chair routine, and made all these black and white costumes for me and the other two dancers. And then when we strip, we were all colors underneath. And my friend's band was playing. It was February, and at a place called *Church*. So I felt like it was really appropriate for me to start my stripping career at Church. Just felt right - my mom came. Yeah.

B

And what was there a response to this?

S

She was like, *you're really good at this. I don't know how that reflects on my parenting*. She's like - *you're a natural - I don't know that what that says about - one way or the other about me being a good mother. - but yeah. You're really good at stripping in front of people*. So - it was like my mom standing next to like this guy I had only been dating for like a week. I was like, *hey, just you know, starting yesterday, I'm a stripper - . So I hope that's okay with you. If not, dump me. Anyway, here's a show flyer*.

B

And his response?

S

He was like - I can't explain to him what burlesque was - and he's also from the south. He's from Tennessee. I had to explain to him what burlesque was, - I also had just told him that I was a witch. And he was staring at me like, *All my Mama's gonna hear is devil worshipping stripper*. I was like, *close enough!*

That's fine, All right. Well, you know, we'll see how this goes. So yeah, it was - It was something - he thought it was funny. So he had a good time. It was a good show. Yeah, I think everyone had a good time. Except for one kid who thought he was going to a fashion show. He's greatly disappointed. He was like, *I thought this is your fashion show*. I was like, *I don't know why he thought that - no one said that*.

I do enjoy the idea of someone being disappointed by seeing my half naked body - it's like like, *Oh, well, damn*. [Laughs]



That's really funny to me.

B

Were you ever shy? - What was that - *Coming-of-performing* for you?

S

Um, I am a really shy person by nature, which is why the career I picked - I have a fake name I have onstage so people can't touch me. There's lights, I can't see them. Or really hear them that well. So - you know, on stage you don't - The audience is just like, *you know they're there*. But if I'm like, at a certain angle, I can't actually see anybody. And I would never wear my glasses on stage. Because, I'm not trying to give myself a bad time. - when I was a kid - you know I grew up in a different time -

being an introvert was not the cool thing. No-one thought you were secretly a genius. So, also being quiet and goth and growing up during Columbine and all that stuff. It was very important for me to learn how to not seem shy and how to be extroverted. So I just kind of lived life like as opposite day like, *what would a shy person not do?* And I was like, *shy people wouldn't go on stage in their underwear*. And I like lingerie. I like being in my underpants at home. And I get a lot of anxiety around dressing myself because I have a lot of body dysmorphia and like - gender issues. So dressing myself was always stressful. So - any job where I didn't have to wear clothes just seemed like the best option - *nude modeling*. *Sure. I just have to wear lingerie. Sure, burlesque - clothes come off. Great.*

*Don't don't need em,
who needs em.*

- it wasn't much of a - for me - I'm shy to talk to people. I'm not shy for people to see what my body looks like. So it didn't really bother me at all. *Like my nudes*. Thank you.

B

It sounds - like burlesque helped to channel aspects of your life in a certain way. Is that true?

S

Yeah for me - when I first understood it burlesque was I think - I didn't understand how to - *how to be a woman* - like gender roles were very confusing for me growing up - later I obviously realized it's because I'm *non-binary* - plus, it was the 90s - everyone wore nail polish and had long hair and wore lace - I was a 90s goth kid. So gender made no sense to me regardless, and burlesque was a way for me to - as someone who was assigned female at birth, or I feel like - I think anybody - regardless of what your gender is - you're told what is attractive about you. - way before you can even think about your body or what you think of it, people tell you - *Oh, you have gorgeous eyes* - like how I complimented your hair earlier - people are always telling you what about you is *of-value* - whether like you ask them or not. And from what I gather, - People more femme-presenting kind of get that more incessantly than people who are more masc, but - I was sick of other people defining me. And then I was sick about people defining what about me has a value. And what I needed to do with that. I was a model when I was little - from 10 to 15 or something. And living your life where, you can never develop an opinion of yourself - because - everyone else's are so loud - was incredibly stressful. So when I saw a burlesque performer for the first time, which was like, on Halloween at a *Dresden Dolls*



show, and it was a Little Red Riding Hood act. And this was actually called *Grotesque Burlesque*, bras with teeth - not only do you strip - but an arm comes off or something like that. So yeah, - it was a *Little Red Riding Hood* act. And at the end, she gets like, ripped apart by the guy just like a wolf. I was like, *I don't know the name of whatever the hell she just did was, but I like that - I would do it*. And then I heard the word *burlesque*. And, - that's how I learned - this is a time in my life, where I get to control how I'm objectified - What about me is objectified, and how people are going to respond to me - I'm in control of my sexuality and of my image here. And so burlesque for me, it was a way to sort out the woman - the feminine ideas in my head - like oh, if I was a woman. What would I be? So, Mx. Sugar Mamasota is my version of like, if I was a woman, what would I be?

Apparently a clown slut. [Laughter]

B

How old are you when when you found burlesque?
Or when it found you.

S

I guess - 18 when I went to that show. But - some version of that existed in my head from very early-on. Because - Have you seen the movie *From Dusk Till Dawn*, Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez? [No?] We'll fix that. Basically - Quentin Tarantino had a movie - he was writing about two brothers who robbed a bank in Mexico. He didn't finish it. Robert Rodriguez had a movie about vampires in Mexico. He didn't finish it. They jam - the two together. And so it's like, *good movie, good movie - Now, there's demons somehow*. There's a very iconic scene of Salma Hayek walking across a table in a bikini and she puts her foot in Quentin Tarantino's mouth and pours whiskey down - into his mouth. And I saw that, like when I was seven. And I was like, *I don't know what this is*.

But I want that job.
Also girls are cute.

I was like that - don't know what else is going on here - Oh and I wanted to be a *fly girl* from *Living Color*. Like how like Jennifer Lopez started her career as a fly girl - I would put my roller-blades - knee pads and elbow pads on, and dance, and try to do all the dances to the opening of - *In Living Color*. So I was like six or seven when I first realized I wanted to do something - in being scantily clad, dancing around, and then I discovered burlesque when I was 18.



Sugar.i, Brandon Perdomo
2017







S

Burlesque at its core is stripping away something - stripping away layers - it's about being close - I think that right now, - especially since we've all been in quarantine - people are touch-starved, and they're missing community, and all that stuff. So, if just going for a walk in a park is a big deal, seeing someone covered in glitter with like, streamers shooting off their nipples - It's like massive - it's a bigger divide between that kind of glitz and glam and like where we are now - but I've adapted it. - I think it's so important to do shows - and - - also since, for me, - the biggest barrier with performing being is I don't particularly like to be around strangers. I don't know, like, you notice, when you've come to my shows, I always have like a *handler*. As soon as I'm off-stage - I go to a specific person who takes me somewhere where I'm not really engaging with people who I don't know - for me, what I get out of performing - I don't need to hear - I don't need to have the energy of the audience. I've tried - I want to present work to them, I want them to get something out of it, but I don't need the validation part of it. And when you're performing in person, and naked, - that validation quickly leads to a level of false familiarity, which leads to people thinking it's okay to like touch you, - touch your hair, or touch your earrings, or pull on your pasties. So I, you know, I love performing, I've been doing it for years. That was a huge barrier - every time I was getting ready to go to a show - having *too much of a pair* to deal from variables of strangers. Now that's taken away, I feel like I could be closer to them. Because - there's no risk of me being in danger. So I can be as close and as familiar as I want to and *show more*, because it's safer for me to do so - so that's also why I got into virtual stripping. Because I've always wanted to be a stripper but like, I don't have a fantastic temper. And if I get called *chocolate*, and someone - tries to grab my thong, *they will have a black eye* - so I'm like, - It won't work out well - I don't have a temperament to do it in person. - so I just started with these virtual shows - it's been really a great way for me to connect with people and a closer and more intimate way without as much fear or concern. That's where burlesque is for me these days.

B

You know, it's always amazing to me how much you put yourself in your work - you do so much and from, you know, fabrication to, thoughtfully even camera work with with the online stuff going on. Is there is there anything you're wearing now - did you make your sweater?

S

No. The funny thing is, -

B

You wouldn't surprise me if you're like, *Oh, this whole thing*.

S

The funny thing is - I made this, this is my summer blanket. So I've been knitting a lot. Because I'm always knitting, if I wear this sweater, people think that I made this sweater, but I didn't. This is a gift from my ex girlfriend. And - it's comfortable, so I kept it. It's actually got a huge burn on the back of the shoulder - from a show that I did at *Bizarre Bar* before they closed. Someone threw my sweater on top of a lightbulb at a cabaret show and I came downstairs - to grab some lipstick - and I was like, *What smells like - Oh! Dear!* And it was like - smoking and burning. So *Bizarre Bar* almost caught on fire. Due to this this weird sweater.



I have my waist beads on that I made – I have jewelry that I made. This is all like religious stuff, - jewelry that I made. - this necklace is from my great-grandmother, Trinidad. I never met her. But apparently she really loved my mom and heard a lot about me. So when she passed away, about a year ago, she left a box just for me. And it was all like, gloves and garter belts and costume jewelry. My family knows what I do. So she left me like, all these necklaces, and oh, and she knows that I'm a witch. So she left me like some spell books. And like she's a healer and she left me some of her old notes and potions, and then some - lingerie. So thanks. Thanks, Grandma, Trina, wherever you are, being awesome. Probably.

Twinking all the ancestors.

B

That's incredible that ancestral - that information being shared with you.

S

Yeah, I think like - black femmes - sex work and stripping, are things that are not stigmatized in the same way. Because - even if you're not involved – in life whatsoever, Black femmes do not get childhoods - we are immediately seen, by society as - being older and - facetious, - I started getting called – people started assuming that I was a sex worker when I was still a *child*. And it's kind of just assumed that black femmes are here for use, of any kind. And if that's what the kind of use you're interested in - like my mother - she's 60 - My mom would be walking down the street with some groceries and a guy will pull up and be like, *How much?* or something - because I don't know a black femme who has not experienced some level of the stigma around sex work -

talking openly about doing it is more common. Or like, it not being such a big deal. Oh, or the way that we see our bodies is very different. - I'll dress a certain way and not think it's sexual whatsoever. But then - a white friend of mine will think that I'm - being really like, vampy or something. I like - *No* – To me, twinking isn't sexual. Like, I have a bubble-but, - I have narrow hips, I have a bubble-butt - sticks out. *I'm okay with it. If you're not, don't look* – to me, It's like funny, or it's fun to do. I'm not like, trying to give boners over here - but I, you know, - being embodied and caring about our bodies and celebrating our bodies when we feel like it is really important to us because – it's something that we have to fight every single day to do. And so yeah, it's really nice that my great grandmother who never met me in person – ever – I don't think she saw me as baby - just was like, *Here, you too - you know the thing. Here you go.* So that was – yeah it's really special to me – like, so actually every time I do a strip show I wear my great grandmother's beads.

So,
cute in the family.





Sugar.ii, Brandon Perdomo
2017





B

Something you just said about how bodies are seen reminds me of what you were telling me the other day about this - an incident in the Rockaways.

S

Oh, the double-dutch thing?

Yeah.

Um, so

I don't know if you know this or not - but basically, when producers get allowed a first show, they only book enough diversity to not get *dragged* for *not* booking diversity. So usually, black burlesque performers don't get to see - meet each other. Because it's very, very rare that we'll get booked to the same show. And if we are, they book us back-to-back so you don't actually see each-other perform - so there's representation for the audience. But we don't get the representation, because we never get to see each other. And - so I think the Winter of 2018 or something, I did - a burlesque show and, surprisingly enough, this white producer booked four black performers on same show. And we were so excited. Brandon, you'd think that we did not realize anyone else was in the room - we took so many pictures with each other. There were so many hugs. And that's how I met three other performers. *Rain Supreme, Femme Fatale, and Stella Nova* - I met those three at that show. And last Summer, Rain, - or a different burlesque performer asked if I wanted to go to the Rockaways to do *double-dutch* because Rain Supreme was like getting all the black burlesque performers together for just - to have fun, and do double-dutch by the beach. I grew up in an all white town, so I did not get the privilege of learning double-dutch, like a lot of other little black girls do. And the other performers - were like, *don't worry about it, neither did I, they're gonna teach us*. It's like, half of the group knew how to double-dutch. The other half was like, *I'm disclosing my race card, can you please teach me*. So - we all met up, went to the boardwalk, and decided to set up there. So we had a little speaker playing music, and we were just trying to have fun. At some point, a crowd starts to form. And there are people everywhere playing games, and running around and doing all kinds of stuff. But we're drawing the attention. And it's predominately white people. And they're videotaping us and taking pictures without asking, - they're coming up and asking us what we're doing - *we're just playing double-dutch* - like, they're asking us what it's for - like, *Um, is this a show?* The fact that it's automatically assumed that black women, smiling in public is a show for you, for anyone who's walking by, is outrageous. And - we were laughing it off. Because we've all been through that so much - we start talking about how often that is that, we just cannot exist in public, and have joy without it being for the service of somebody else.

So like,

at some point, you can't laugh it off anymore.

This older white lady came up to me and asked when I was going next - because we were taking a break, because everyone was tired. Like, *oh, when are you guys gonna start up again?* - I don't know. - *Well, I have to leave soon*. Like, - we were supposed to be doing something for her. And she's a stranger. And I was like, *I don't care. No one is paying me to care about entertaining you*. And - this kind of messaging - like it's okay to be that pushy to demand entertainment, from black women for free. Like, *I don't know what's going on. But it's obviously for me. And now I get to make demands. And now I get to record this for whatever I want to do without asking any questions or anything*. I cannot imagine having that kind of confidence, perhaps with like, the assistance of hard drugs, but - it was wild - even when we went down to the beach, and we were just hanging out, talking to each other. If we start



hula-hooping, or someone's like, dancing, shaking a little shoulder – all of a sudden people are coming up like, *Oh, What're you girls doing? What's going on over here?* There were all types of people out there having fun dancing around, listening to music, playing hula hoops, doing more interesting things than us. - I'm so happy – they did not realize that the people they were harassing were *all* showgirls, because that would have just made it so much worse. But that was what we were getting from people thinking we were just regular black women on the street. Like, that's not with people thinking that we are performers. That was just - *this is how you talk to black femmes.*

S

These are replicas of *Fulani* earrings - the Fulani people. *Do you know who they are?* - It's a really big ethnic group in Nigeria and parts of West Africa. - they're nomadic - part of my family's Fulani - I think because that tribe is really nice to look at - they're really attractive people, and they make lots of really interesting jewelry - as far as like African tribes that get *ripped-off* a lot, the Fulani are one of them. So you can find earrings like this in a lot of places - like, I did not get these from an African person, I bought them from some site that makes replicas of tribal jewelry. - the past three years, I've been spending a lot of time working on finding out my ancestry and who my people were before slavery. And - luckily, my grandfather, on my mother's side, has a last name that is really unique and easy to track. And his family is Nigerian by way of Geechee Gullah people in the Carolinas. - these earrings are actually kind of funny, because I saw them on the website. And I really liked them. But they're like \$230, - they're not cheap. And I was already buying some other jewelry. And I thought of getting these, I decided not to. And I bought these big gold hoops with like honey bees in them instead. And when the package came in the mail - the septum ring I got, and the hoops were there, and all this stuff. And another box were these earrings. And there was a note from the person who packed the order. And they said, *Hey, thank you so much for ordering.* I did this, like in April. So, when business was very slow for everybody. I've wanted like all gold jewelry since I was a kid. This person wrote a note to me saying, *thank you so much for supporting us through this time, I throw in an extra pair of earrings because they seemed to match the other stuff that you got, I hope you like them.* And it was earrings from my ancestral people. So that's how I got these. I wear them a lot with other earrings that are handmade by an indigenous person who I met during quarantine via the internet. I met a lot of really good folks via the internet during this time. - I wear these with a bunch of my other ancestral jewelry. Just to remind myself, I'm not stuck here.

B

And when you say stuck here, what do you mean?

S

- it's hard living in Brooklyn, when you're from the south. The way people talk is really different. I think when even, - I grew up moving around so much, my word is really all I have for people. - If I say I'm going to do something, I have to do it. I don't get a lot of chances to make good connections and to build trust, because I never knew how long I'm staying in a spot. So having integrity and - saying what I mean and mean what I say, being as direct and honest as possible was important to me growing up. And when I talk to other southern people who live in Brooklyn, especially in nightlife - the community is really different - people up here get really weird about talking on the phone. Like you can't, just call. The level of care is different. - the culture is just really different in Brooklyn than it is in North Carolina. Or you know, something like the places that I'm familiar with. - My phone is perched on my altar right now, that has like



plants and skulls and my usual stuff, and some handmade baskets from *Cherokee* and *Geechee* folks and things that remind me of my family, my grandmother's ring box that my grandfather put her engagement ring in.

But it's just like stuff to remind me that at some point, I'm going to go back home. Brooklyn, Brooklyn's good. I like being a part of the community here. I like contributing. And I like the opportunities that I have here, but I know that this is not where I'm putting down roots permanently. And I kind of want to be where my blood is. And so until I get there, I just - dress up. I play dress up. And also that reminds me of where I'm going to be.

So that's *that* bit of mush.

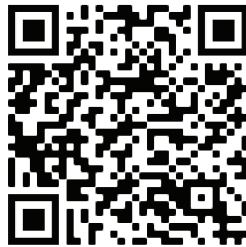




Mx. Sugar Mamasota
Brooklyn, NY
2020

IG: @Mx_Sugar_Mamasota





shedding
somethingshedding

i.iii

Mx. Sugar Mamasota

shedding somethingshedding

/ interdisciplinary storytelling
/ testimony of the body

/ DRAWING ROOM I
/ ENCORE SESSIONS

/ CALENDAR

/ CONTACT / GUESTBOOK

/ STATEMENT

/ LISTEN HERE...

ABOUT THE WORK

SHEDDINGSOMETHINGSHEDDING is space where practice meets testimony, as independent artists share their *stories of becoming* in a reimagining of a salon-style gathering in a digital space.

CONTENT AND CONSIDERATIONS

This community-driven work was conceived in New York City as the COVID-19 pandemic had both arrived and driven the city to its closure in March, 2020. Now, at the time of the first anniversary, independent artists rally and organize to share their truths, advocate & uplift one another, and share visions for a sustainable, equitable balance in the cultural sector, all while global social solidarity movements call for land-back, fights for social, professional, economic equity. Exploring both **creative process and the embodied experiences that informs their practices**, this multicultural and intergenerational project aims to encourage curiosity & wonder, and *reclamation of narrative power* to communities often both unheard and negotiated as *other*.

Themes explored in this work include ancestry, prejudice & discrimination, sex, LGBTQ+, anger, violence, trauma, community organizing and advocacy, prejudice & racism, fear, longing, love, solidarity, experience of being in a body, **art & creation**.

Creative process for the purpose of this work concerns makers of performance, visual, and social practice works, including community advocacy, building, and organizing.

Consumption is not advised on an empty stomach. Recommended settings include but are not limited to: an accompaniment of tea, legs upright on the wall, a walk along a familiar road or nature path or body of water.

COLLECTION

Drawing Rooms feature three artists, collectives, or practices. Each feature is accompanied by audio from the interview session and accompanying media.

Each feature may be listened to as a single audio piece, or in parts, with accompanying transcription.

Each drawing room is accompanied by **Printed Matter** in the form of zines, each containing the transcript and art prints from the recorded sessions. They are available for purchase, with percentages of proceeds benefiting the narrator and select mutual aid groups.

Encore Sessions are recordings of related public presentations.

CURATION

Brandon Perdomo is an interdisciplinary artist from the occupied territories of Lenapehoking, currently known as New York City - fascinated with self-reflection and alterity, which are the engines of his interventions. Interested in contemporary politics, ancestral negotiation, and the intricate manners in which the body is perceived in the public sphere, his social practice turns toward stories of radical self-ownership, and what it means to "become."

More -> www.brandonperdomo.com

/LISTEN HERE...

23 October 2020

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



Lazarus Nazario (Full)
Brandon Perdomo



The boogie-down, these days

B

- you're over in the Bronx?

L

I am in the Bronx. I'm in the boogie-down for about a decade now.

B

- can we start out - as much as you'd like - tell me what you've been up to these days?

L

Well, yeah, COVID, huh? How about that COVID, man. Yeah, it's - it's been rough. It's been rough, I'm not gonna lie. Um - I live across the street from a hospital. So I got to hear lots of sirens, 24-seven, for a long time.

Um, so that was kind of rough. And I was painting - I was pretty much into like this series of paintings that I was working on, called *Great Expectations*, which is a series of works where nature takes the earth back - they are meant to be found photographs from a time when nature took the earth back. So it's a sort of Future/Past thing.

And - when COVID hit, and I remember, it started to get all infused into the work. I was working on one particular painting called *The East River Gardenia Visits the Brooklyn Bridge* - and suddenly - the waves just started getting bigger - the water got rougher.

And everything just started to get really overwhelming. Like I could sense - the waves in the painting, sort of turned into this - the big crest of the wave that we were climbing in New York, with COVID, and how - the numbers were climbing and we went into lockdown and all of this stuff - I was in the middle of painting that, as that was happening. So it got to the point where, what was going on around me [came] out through the work. But - it got overwhelming. - the numbers just got staggering. I found myself every morning - like clockwork, putting on Cuomo just to find out what was happening around town and what was going on and what I should do and what have you -

I had to put that painting down -

I had to put it down.

So I went through a bit of a time when - I call it -

- I guess it's called a block, but it's where nothing would come out of my hands. That's kind of the best way I can put it. Like things - nothing will come out of my hands. You know, because that's physically how it feels for me, you know, it comes out of the ends of my fingertips somehow, - that spills out of my hands.

And I just couldn't do it. And, - and that was rough. And I kind of had to just let myself go through that - because it's a *global pandemic*. And all this stuff's going on - there's sirens outside the window, and I kept trying to get my mind off of it. And there were - I'm watching all all these painters that I know that

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

would just kind of go on and paint the same things that they were painting - just kind of goes as normal and, really a lot of - in a lot of ways for a painter, it is kind of normal, because I do sit here all alone in the studio and it really shouldn't be any different except for the fact that you can't leave the house, then that became, you know, very, obvious - you couldn't get out of your head really anyway because you only have your four walls - and you only have what's going on around you.



Cop-Out, Lazarus Nazario

16x20 in.

Oil on board



Cop-Out

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



Cop-Out

B

Is Cop-Out [a message] that popped in your head?

L

Yeah. Oh, yeah. There's a whole story for that one. See - backstory. I was on my way to *Governor's Island* for the first time that they opened it up. And they had all these spaces that they were opening up to artists, and they were going to give grants and let artists put up shows there. So they were inviting everybody in. And - it was the first time I was going to take the ferry that went there, which is interesting, because I was born in Staten Island. So I'm used to going down there to take that ferry, so I was like, *Woah! So weird, I'm going to go to Governor's Island. How strange is that?*

So I'm walking across the street, and I see a guy heading there.

To the - to that Ferry Terminal carrying these folded up *Coca Cola* boxes. And to me, you know, - I thought he was one of the artists - it looked like it said, *cop out*. Wow, *that's awesome*. You know, like, *that's so smart*. Because that's exactly what we do. When we give-into advertising. You know, you kind of buy into it, you buy into it, and you cop-out. It's like, that's it, you know, you don't think for yourself, right? *Damn, that's really cool. I wonder what I would do*. So I'm walking and walking. And I was like, *hmm that's interesting*. And I watched the guy and he's walking - and he's walking and he walks back to the *Coca Cola* truck, and gets in - but he was a delivery guy. It really was *Coca Cola* boxes. It didn't say *cop out*. I saw a *cop out*! It just said, you know, it was a *Coca Cola* box! So right there. And then it was like, *DING!* - go home - I had to Google it. I had to Google it. Because I was like, *there's no way someone hasn't done this already. No way someone hasn't done this already*. And I was like, *okay, doesn't look like it*. And I went home and made *Cop-Out*. I like handcrafted the logo because the logo wasn't available. So it wasn't like I had a program that - had those fonts or whatever - handcrafted the logo.

B

So you - were a sign painter, right then.

L

Yeah - and threw the guy in, to look as though he was, sort of someone that just threw a rock at this giant lit-up Billboard. Like the idea of like breaking - break that - idea. You know, *think for yourself, show up. Don't just let someone tell you how to think, feel*. But yeah, I was a sign painter. Yeah. Existential sign painter, in a way. It was very strange. But - it was really funny because once I made that, everyone and their mother told me I was gonna get sued. Like, *You're gonna get sued, you can't use that - you're gonna get a cease and desist order*. And the font wasn't available at the time, but years later, - the font became available. I remember seeing something like *BuzzFeed* where they're like, *Top five fonts you should start using right now!* One of them was *Coca Cola*. I laughed, like *I guess I'm not gonna get in trouble now*. Even though - it's not exact. Like if you really look at the logo. You can see it's different. But - to me, it was just, like that - that's just one of those things that just kind of came down - it came to me - it walked down the street right in front of my face, like that's what it was, completely.

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



YouTube: **NYC ZCO Public Art Project**

Five Zero Cop-Out posters were hand painted and installed in all five boroughs of NYC on or nearby the five Black Lives Matter mural streets.



Zero / Fuck Cop-Out

B

And how did Zero Cop-Out come out of that?

L

Zero Cop-Out was born straight from that, which was interesting because the original painting - there is a painting to it. It never got made - It kind of got messed up, and one day, I'll go back and make it. But it was actually a portrait of Lolita Lebrón, the Puerto Rican nationalist who shot-up Congress over an immigration bill - she brought a gun and shot into the ceiling of Congress over an immigration bill. - It's an insane story. - and I used zero cop out, and I had this portrait of her - looked like a mug shot. And the background of it was - gold leaf. But you can't - there aren't any good pictures of her from then - because it was 1950 -, the pictures are all distorted.

So it was hard to work on it - But that was always in my brain, - there's no stopping, you know, - You are not going to-not do this. All in, you're all in, you know, zero cop-out. That's part of what I call - the *détournement* pieces.

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I
//LAZARUS NAZARIO
//SARA MEGHDARI
//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA
[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR
/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK
/STATEMENT
/LISTEN HERE...

which is - French for hijacking, which is a form of parody, where you take a public service announcement or an ad, and you hijack it for a different meaning - for your own meaning. And even better - an opposite, the opposite to what it says - that's like, that's the way to do it.

The sort of rated [rated-] R version of that became *Fuck Cop-Out*. And I'm actually currently working on what that painting is. Which harkens back to me experiencing racism and an early age. So I'm a painter, and - I'm a big fan of *Frida Kahlo*. - the way I started painting was that - I actually started out as a singer-songwriter. And I saw this documentary - a point of view about the painter, Leon Golub. And I was blown away. - he's an existential activist painter. - he died - now, but -

he makes these giant paintings - giant acrylic paintings of like mercenaries and like, you know, just all these big, horrific war-time paintings. And he makes other types of paintings too, but he's scraping them on the floor with a meat cleaver. Like just - that's part of his technique. He like sort of paints everything on, scrapes it off, and like, *I want to be doing what that guy is doing*. I was a singer-songwriter, but I wanted to be doing what he was doing. And I wrote a song for him. Or poem, I guess you could call it, *I Pray I feel It Too*.

Which is interesting. And it was very, sort of, it kind of foreshadowed that, I guess - I wished I was a painter. And it was *the fire in the belly*. You know, that was more of what - I pray I feel it too was, like a little prayer - the fire in the belly.

- that same year, I think this was '91. That same year, I was reading one of my favorite comics *Love and Rockets* - by Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez, and they did this little bio on Frida Kahlo. And at the end, it said, taken - you know, *such and such story* - taken from the biography by - Hayden Herrera - I went straight to the library. Then went to Barnes and Noble and bought that book - *Frida Kahlo, The Paintings*. And that was it. That was the end of that - I was a painter. I was not a singer-song writer. I was a painter. So I was like this one-two punch of Leon Golub, which is interesting, because it's this man that paints these gigantic paintings. And this woman that paints these tiny sort of, very personal, very intimate images - but the two kind of smashed together for me, and I came out of that.



Pintura Acrilica

L

I was like self taught in acrylics for like 10 years - a good decade before I even was just - gonna, like, - because it took somebody else - *Like, go!* - pushing me - *Okay, all right. Okay, now I can do this*, you know, and I did I took to it like a duck out of water and I had a great teacher. Sharon Sprung taught me all about color - and I guess - I mean a colorist. There's no way around it - like I just can't - can't stand it. Color is just too much it's too gorgeous, and vivid and beautiful, and I have to use all of it and I have to find a way to get it even more vivid sometimes - it's funny - I look at some of my older work. And - the work I'm doing now looks something like, like one of the *peonies girl explosions*, - and it's so much brighter than the earlier flowers I was painting, I was like, No! More! More intense color!

But, it came way later, the whole - *all bets are off* kind of attitude. And it's

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

really - a moment where my work changed, and everything changed. And the reason why I worked changed - because I realized I wasn't gonna have children. That's it, - guess what, that whole dream, we think, you know, *let me wait till I get married*. And I got married, and I timed-out, I got married late. And I guess I just didn't - didn't have it in me anymore. And I kind of got timed-out by it. So realized that - what I create is all I'm gonna leave - the paintings I create is all I'm gonna leave in this world. - that's my legacy. I don't have - a child or something to leave something to, that will, remember me by *bla bla bla bla bla*, like, a lot of people have. And, you know, some people don't want that. But *I did*, I really did. So the moment that happened, - when that *all bets are off* moment.

That's kind of when I realized, *okay*,

I curate everything I do,

because I know it's gonna be around when I'm gone.

So I'm very aware of that. And I'm very aware of my place in time. And history. And my moment. That's why also, - I've sort of, sort of reclaimed my ethnicity, which I shunned when I was younger because of the racism. And I never, - it was never an easy fit, because I am not Puerto Rican enough for Puerto Ricans. And I'm not white enough for white people - there's always, you know, I don't fit in either world. So I never really felt right. And much like Frida did for Mexican painting, I wanted to kind of espouse my, you know, Puerto Rican ethnicity in my work. So I would - I started going to the library on 42nd Street, right, that - big giant library where all the art books are. And just - would come home - I was living in Staten Island at the time, and I would just take out all these giant books and go across the street to the express bus and like, pretty much sit them on the seat next to me - a pile of books almost as big as me, and just pour over them. It was interesting, because I sought out - what, *what is Puerto Rican art?* I wanted to know really deeply what it was. And I - aside from sort of, say, the, - folk tradition of the kind of Indian *Taíno*, - kind of art experience, I couldn't find the contemporary version, - couldn't find it, like a cohesive, you know, contemporary version. And I just put all the books down, and decided that what I make *is* - it is because *I am* - you know, and if I make something that speaks to that, then that is, Puerto Rican art.

So I started to make works - almost like history paintings - in the same way as Frida and Diego - I kind of - take on all these little things, you know, you kind of take on the things that are around you.

Like you put it on, like a sweater and a coat and you kind of see how it fits. So I would grab - I started reading up on Puerto Rican history and pulling stories out of that, - and I'm making works that speak to that.

The biggest one that I'm doing that speaks to that, for me, is an altarpiece which also speaks to my ancestry. And this is something that has been in my brain for about 20 years. But it's an altarpiece called *Birth of a Nuyorican: All The Stigma, None of the Romance* - because that's how it felt to me - it's always felt to me, I've always had that stigma of being Puerto Rican without the - you know, all that romance being Puerto Rican - of - the dancing, the language, I would try to speak Spanish - I've spoken Spanish fluently, not fluently, but like *I was trying real hard, getting in there*. In Guatemala. For six weeks, I went to Guatemala to learn Spanish. But they speak it very slow there. - they do not speak it like Puerto Ricans - very .. slow .. - and everybody's very relaxed - it was Antigua, Guatemala - I have sort of a like brain block with it. Because - my family - my mother spoke Spanish. My father did not - it was not spoken at home - when I was little, my mother would try to teach me words and I would try to learn them. But - and my grandmother, - my dad's mother, actually lived five minutes from us in Staten Island. My mom's mother lived in Puerto Rico. My mom's parents were split up. Her father was in

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I
//LAZARUS NAZARIO
//SARA MEGHDARI
//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA
[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR
/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK
/STATEMENT
/LISTEN HERE...

Peru - went to Peru, and her mom was in Puerto Rico. My dad's parents were right around the corner. Which was so odd because my father didn't speak Spanish, but they did - it was very odd.

- yeah, I just got really angst-ridden. Like, my mother would look at me funny if I - don't talk fast enough, or if I say something wrong, so I have this complete block about it - like this, you know, I start shaking and, like, it's awful, because I don't speak Spanish. And it's like, people - *Oh you're Puerto Rican - do you speak Spanish?* - *Oh, there you go.* You know, it's like, you're some *second rate, whatever*, you know. So I kind of turned that around to making the art. You know, *I'll speak to it through my art. You know, that'll be my way. Maybe.* - I can't - fine, Sure. I'm not able to for whatever reason, and I'm still - not saying that I can't ever - I'll get back there. Because it felt good.

But, - there is a block, I can feel it. You know, it's something. I'll figure it out one day. But -, it's more important to me, I think, to make the paintings anyway. So that's part of what I do. So I'm making this altarpiece and it's based off of - inspired by Rogier Van Der Weyden's *The Last Judgement*. And, Van Eyck's *Ghent altarpiece*. So - there's the center panel, and then to the left and right, we have Mary and John. It's my mom and my dad. So it's going to be me, my mom, my dad, -, me, my parents, my grandparents, - and I. Like the Frida Kahlo painting - my - Me, my grandparents, my parents and I or whatever. - My Grandparents, My Parents and I, that's it. It's sort of like that as well, I guess you could say it's all those smashed together. And it's all on found objects. And it's seven panels. And I have them sitting here. Well, I don't have all 7 - [counting] - I have 5 of them. And I just made the big center one during COVID. Because - I thought I was going to be able to use a big door for it. Because I use these found objects - big wooden doors, that I scraped down -



Underground Black Market Devotional Propaganda

I realized I was making devotional images of what that was - and what those are devotional images. Because with devotional images, you see all these - like you see in Mexico, and all these sort of *bleeding-Jesus* images, and you can they can be as gory as they want, if they're in the name of that devotion, somehow. So to me, I thought, *hmm, so can I.* - I hijacked it, I basically hijacked that idea, and came up with *Underground Black Market Devotional Propaganda*. *That is what this is, I'm going to straight up tell you, that's what this is.* Because if I name it that, then I can do whatever I want *in that*, it gives me carte blanche to do whatever I want - to be gory or rough or whatever.

And I remember also, because of the fact that - I do those, *the détournement* - of the brands - the *cop out* and all that, but then I'll just something like *The Shattering* and then I'll - make this sweet little, you know, image of a little girl with flowers coming out of her hair, you know, like, everything is so different that I couldn't - my work didn't fit into one genre. It didn't - I couldn't pigeonhole it enough to sell it to a gallery - to try to do you know - get out there and a gallery - I could never find a gallery that I was like, okay, they would, they would kind of want - *maybe my work would fit in there*, you know, because everything was so different, that I just invented my own genre. And that's what underground black market devotional propaganda is. It was like, You know what, boom, that's what it is. I'm just going to name it that. And, the end. I don't have to call it anything else. It's not you know, this or that. Or the other. I mean, there's Pop surrealism. There's magical realism, there's

shedding somethingshedding

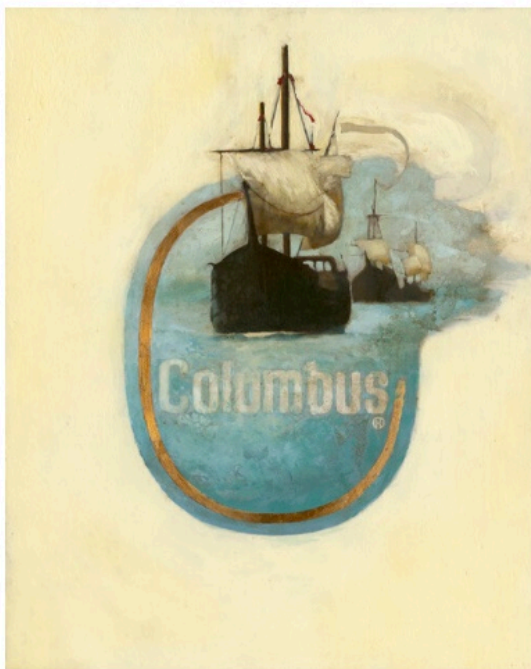
expressionism, there's whatever, *in all of that.*

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I
//LAZARUS NAZARIO
//SARA MEGHDARI
//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA
[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR
/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK
/STATEMENT
/LISTEN HERE...



The Original Corporate Takeover, Lazarus Nazario

16x20 in

Oil & gold leaf on board



Columbus, Disgusting - "Why would you do that?"

B

This one time you mentioned that there's a link - or maybe in my heart -
there's a link between *Cop Out* and *The Original Corporate Takeover*.

L

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Definitely, definitely a link there. And they happened pretty much right at the same time. Because as soon as *Cop Out* happened, - I wasn't even aware of the term *détournement* until actually later on. But then I just - my eyes kind of opened, you know, the files go - that are in your head, they kind of open up to what's out there all the time that you can kind of, you know, - I started kind of putting the feelers out. And the next thing I saw was the *Chiquita* logo.

And that just, I was like, okay,

Columbus, - Columbus - drop Columbus into that *Chiquita* logo. And that's like, a bomb. That's like a little history lesson in a pill. Right there - original corporate takeover, you know, like, Queen Isabella of Spain funding Columbus to go land-grab, essentially, you know, - I was born on Columbus Day, and the great fortune of being born - born on Columbus Day. So growing up, that's like, great, I get a, you know, three day weekend, every year from my birthday, fantastic. And then later on, you realize the actual history,

The genocide of your ancestors, it's not so fun anymore.

And it - with imperialism, kind of got wrapped up in that.

And that, that - that's another one that came to me, then I had to Google. I had to kind of like, look around like, *nobody put this together?* I remember how I googled it. But I remember thinking that that's because there's just - some of those, sometimes things just hit you like that. That one came to me. Because in your mind, you're thinking how you're going to put it together. And it isn't until you see something out in the world, that it can express itself fully - in a concise manner. And it happens rarely - doesn't happen often. And I remember thinking - I remember trying to keep my eyes open wide during this covid thing, but - I'm too *much in this room*, even though you can go online and all that, it's not - it's not the same. It's been hard.

But - that felt really good to make. Actually, that's another one of those that - there's a couple paintings that I made. Probably *corporate takeover, cop out, screen grab and shattering*. - If I die tomorrow, I'm okay. I'm okay, that those - those are out in the world, and I'm pretty sure they're going to be out in the world for a long time. You know, - -, because they do move you - they move you to think or feel. Or, even if you don't like it, - I had the experience --

I was in one of the *Staten Island* shows where you kind of had to watch one of the - I don't know what - it was - - one of the big art shows they do every year.

Art By The Ferry - they asked you to come sit in a room for a while - to watch stuff. And I had *The Shattering* in there, I was like, *This is gonna be awesome*. I got to be a fly on the wall. Because people didn't know that I was the painter that painted it - got to be a fly on the wall. I watched people walk by and react to that one. That was a very interesting thing.

B

- What kinds of people. What kind of reactions?

L

Ah, some of them were like, *That's disgusting. That's disgusting. Why would you do that* - other people - were moved by it deeply. You know, like, ran the gamut - ran the gamut. And I'm like, I'm okay with all of it. I don't even care. Like my own mom said *it looked like somebody vomited* while I was packing it up to put in a show because Morley Safer chose it to be in a show called *In The News* at the *Pen and Brush* gallery in New York - packing it up. My mom was like - That looks like somebody threw up. Okay. Well, look, it was good enough for Morley Safer, so I don't mind. You can think that.

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

the - I don't know what - it was - - one of the big art shows they do every year.

Art By The Ferry - they asked you to come sit in a room for a while - to watch stuff. And I had *The Shattering* in there, I was like, *This is gonna be awesome*. I got to be a fly on the wall. Because people didn't know that I was the painter that painted it - got to be a fly on the wall. I watched people walk by and react to that one. That was a very interesting thing.

B

- What kinds of people. What kind of reactions?

L

Ah, some of them were like, *That's disgusting. That's disgusting. Why would you do that* - other people - were moved by it deeply. You know, like, ran the gamut - ran the gamut. And I'm like, I'm okay with all of it. I don't even care. Like my own mom said *it looked like somebody vomited* while I was packing it up to put in a show because Morley Safer chose it to be in a show called *In The News* at the *Pen and Brush* gallery in New York - packing it up. My mom was like - That looks like somebody threw up. Okay. Well, look, it was good enough for Morley Safer, so I don't mind. You can think that.

B

- Thanks, mom.

L

Yeah, I was like, *I get it* - -

I mean, I did - I threw it up, really -

It came the heck up, out of me.



The Shattering, Lazarus Nazario

24 x 48 in.

Encaustic, oil and ground glass on board

LAZARUS NAZARIO

INSTAGRAM

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



Sara Z. Meghdari

Digital Composite, Brandon Perdomo 2021

Brandon Perdomo

Brooklyn, NY

Interviewer

Sara Meghdari

Brooklyn, NY

Narrator

Session Conducted:

Zoom / Online

2 November 2020



Sara Meghdari (Full)
Brandon Perdomo

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



Lately - In the studio - When we met

S

We're in 2020. So it's quarantine -

COVID.

Election year.

I recently have been trying to keep busy
to hustle and take advantage of this time
and - remind myself to keep going --

B

--, what happens in the studio lately?

S

- When I talk about the studio - It's not my studio, it's the studio I work in.
There's a couple photographers that have rented the space out. All of them do
major commercial work. And have little personal projects here and there. So
when I go there, I'm 100% of the time usually working on somebody else's
work. So it's like busy work, office work, archiving and things like that.

But it's nice to --,
go into a different space.

As a photographer, mostly videographer and - lens based - I don't really need a
studio usually unless I'm planning a performance or an installation.

B

- when we met and you had that that piece
projected on the wall, - that piece is typically projected, is that right?

S

- No, not necessarily - originally made to be put on a vertical hanging screen
as like a portrait - a moving portrait.

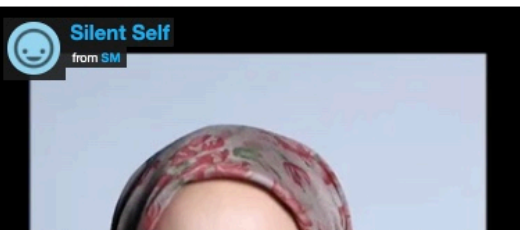
It's changed in screen sizes and projection sizes. It really - at this point -
doesn't really matter. As long as it's being seen, but originally it was on it was
supposed to be on screen.

B

Can you remind me the name of it?

S

Silent Self



shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



Silent Self, Sara Meghdari

Performance for the camera

2014



B

When - was that put together?

S

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

- I made that in 2014 actually, when I was in school, it was the first year I was in school. - I got so much shit for making that video. Since then, I talked to a lot of Muslim women artists or women who come from the same background. And they all kind of get the same feedback in these, white - centered schools that - you know, *hijab is so overplayed*, like, *everybody does this*, *why are you doing this? It's so overplayed* -

It's going back to the question of identity. It's like, they really don't like this portion of our identity. And don't like to see it. I don't know. And so when I was in school, I got a lot of that feedback from the Dean of the department, from my critique teacher at the time. But I wanted to make it anyway, so I made it anyway. And I've kind of like this great redemption, because it's one of my works that's been shown the most.

B

I love that that image of the of the piece being projected on the - wall of a building?

S

Yeah, that was this year. There's this group called ***Straight Through the Wall*** - they're kind of a guerrilla group of video artists that do this every year. And - it was an open call, I applied - the theme was *portrait*, so it seemed perfect. I got accepted - and I got to see this video bigger than I've ever seen before on a building - in New York city, in America. So it's kind of intense.



shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



via: Straight Through the Wall

Instagram: [#sttw_nyc](#)



Performance for the camera - the rousari, feeling of
nostalgia, history, and independence

B

How do you explain the piece?

S

How do I explain it? -, so it's a minute and 47 seconds total - it's a performance for the camera of me in my hijab, or *rousari*, it as we say, in *Farsi*, that's another word for it, *rousari*. - I am going through a series of emotions, really slowly and consciously. It's not digitally altered, or slowed down at all. So it's me going through the emotions with my face really slowly, - the video is only a minute and a half long, but it took me about five hours to shoot. - Because when you try to control your face, your face starts twitching. And if you notice,

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

you can see some twitches in my eyes.

A lot of times when we see images of women, in a hijab, Muslim women – or women from that part of the world, it's usually images of war, sadness, or refugees or, you know, like these pictures of the worst moments of these people's lives. Like, *Anybody who would be in that position would look like that*. And that's the image that is given to the United States of people from that part of the world. And I just want to show that, you know, there's a lot of sides to us as humans, because - it's really interesting, this *one little piece of cloth* can really change someone's whole perception of you, and - how they value you as a human life. And so I was playing with that little bit and trying to appeal to, you know, basic human emotions that we all feel and go through.

B

Can I ask – what's your relationship with the hijab?

S

- So I'm originally from Iran, but I'm mixed. My mother's American, my father is Iranian. My parents - my father, actually, through crazy circumstances, was able to come to college in the United States, right before the revolution hit in Iran, and everything shut down. And he met my mom, and they got married very quickly, - had my sister and then moved back to Iran, to have me - and we ended up staying there - they still live there.

Iran is an Islamic Republic, and it is required by law for you to wear the hijab. If you're a woman, technically,

it's from the age of puberty, and that's observed as nine years old for women in Iran, you know, people - you usually start wearing it when you start *showing*. And you look more *womanly*. And - so it's something I wore, all my life, - in school, and home and public - everywhere - it's just such a big part of my human experience.

- And I come from a really, really religious family - very traditional family, an uneducated family that relied on tradition and religion.

And

it was always a part of our home.

There's inside cover-, inside hijabs and outside hijabs, we were a household that we always wore inside hijabs. And

I don't know, it's just like, you know, my relationship to my shirt. It's just something you know, is always there.

There should always be a choice for sure. But now - you know, I have a ton of hijabs, scarves, a ton from my years of life - as a girl, especially -

Especially right before I moved to the US when things were opening up a little bit in Iran. - growing up, we weren't necessarily allowed to wear colors - bright colors, but at the end there, you could wear anything. I have so many hijabs - I could have a whole closet dedicated to them. And

when I -

see them now they make me happy. And they give me this, feeling of nostalgia and - history, and, independence.

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



Family

B

Are you the only artist in your family?

S

My mom paints. I don't know if she would call herself an artist. But I remember when, when I was a kid in Iran, she used to take oil painting classes. And she's a really good painter. My dad is also an artist, even though he doesn't know it.

- He's

- a very visual person.

But -

he's a mechanical engineer. So he's very *science and math minded*. But he does have a really great relationship with aesthetics.

I remember as a kid, he always - used to love rugs, we always - any rug shop, we'd see - he always wanted to go in and look and touch - and poetry is a huge thing in Iran, and my dad always had poetry around.

He also always had a camera. I think maybe it's a science-mind to kind of document things. But he always took pictures.

And his curiosity towards the camera is the reason why I had exposure to it. So - he has - *artness* in him too - My little brother is studying architecture. So he also is a visual person. My older sister, I think, is really creative, too. I think we're all probably art-minded. I could probably think about everyone like that, honestly. - But my sister, she's got her PhD in biochemistry, so - not particularly like, as a career path. They didn't really choose that.



NYC, 3rd Space, Experiments

S

I definitely feel way way more comfortable in New York City. I was actually having my anxiety - about going back to Colorado because in New York, you never really see Trump supporters - even if you do, they're not particularly - public about it. But in Colorado, apparently it's full of them. So - the last time I saw like an - a red hat Trump supporter was in the airport, like two years ago. And an immediate fear went down my heart, like, -

- Oh, my God, can he tell? Can he tell I'm from Iran?

- I don't know. It was just, this immediate, Oh, *hide!* - I definitely am feeling a little anxiety, about going back to Colorado, I definitely felt that way, my entire time in Colorado, it was always a matter for me to blend in. Especially when I stuck out so hard and - in the beginning, - and it was not - a fun experience. So my next five years of life was just like, *blend in - blend in - blend in*. And, you know, *don't attract attention*.

And I was very quiet.

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

I was really observing, I think, - I spent years observing - before I kind of found my voice and my power -

- to speak. And then

when, - New York City,-

you know, [It] is a huge result of that - living here.

and going to school - having to argue with these people.

B

- what really struck me when I really got to sit down and see [Silent Self] as, not just a static image on the wall - at - you know, our friend's wall in a party. - - It placed me, or invited me - and then placed me in this place of reflection. It's just -, watch and understand and feel. And I feel - with what I watch and hear from you, - your work tends to do that. And I was thinking about when you were talking about this conversation archive that you were facilitating between people - Can you can you talk about that?

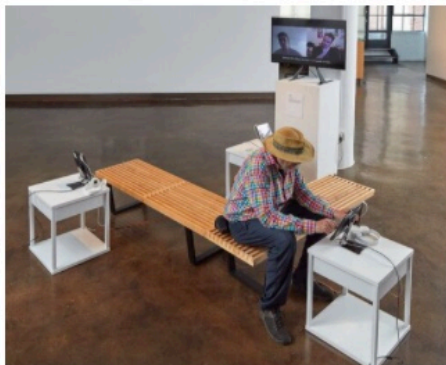
S

That piece is called 3rd Space. - And it was my thesis project in school. And it ended up being - kind of an archival app of conversations between Iranians living in Iran and Americans living in America. And - - it was kind of an experiment, - it was kind of like, a social experiment.

I don't know. -

being mixed - being Iranian-American, one of my biggest dreams in life, was for my Iranian family. - extended family to meet my American extended family. How great would it be to have everybody in one space? And that is physically impossible. Not only because of the distance, but because of the politics. And, you know, there's no way that these people could get a visa either-way, you know, both ways. So I started thinking about, okay, what spaces can I find, for people to share, and the Internet obviously, is like one of the only spaces - that - still - kinda - is borderless.

So - that's where that idea came from. And when I first started, I was experimenting with my friends, like, my high school friends from Iran, with my college friends from the US - having them talk. And it was just such a great, weird conversation of cultures and language, clashing. And I started, you know, experimenting, really, and learning from my experiments and developing like a process and developing, - trying to develop a way that I can get these two people to connect with each other. Like, how can I get in this space that we are?



shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

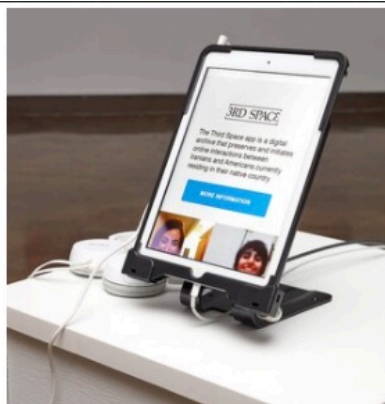
/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



The 3rd Space App. Sara Meghdari

Installed at the SVA Chelsea Gallery in 2006

How can I get these two people to really see each other -

To really leave this conversation with, like a reflection, and that was really sweet, what you said, Thank you, I think that's my, that's the purpose of my work - is to kind of bridge the gap and to bring understanding. That's where the heart is and where it's really coming from. And so, *3rd Space* allowed me to kind of create like these little incubators of connection.

And it was a lot of work. But it was incredibly rewarding. Every connection was like a new baby being born. That's how I felt - like I had 50 babies. And some of the people still talk to each other to this day.

So - It was a really great experiment - it kind of lives in this historical space right now, in terms of idea - And one day, I would like to maybe try to reach out and get - the same people to have another conversation maybe like 10 years down the road or something.

But we'll see.



Something I would like to have heard when I was younger

B

- if you can go back in any time of your - childhood or creative process or voice-finding process. If you could give yourself advice that you wish you had or would like - as a note - is there is there anything?

S

The feeling of hopelessness, does not last - that's probably what would have been something I would like to have heard when I was younger.

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

The 3rd Space App. Sara Meghdari

Installed at the SVA Chelsea Gallery in 2006

How can I get these two people to really see each other -

To really leave this conversation with, like a reflection, and that was really sweet, what you said, Thank you, I think that's my, that's the purpose of my work - is to kind of bridge the gap and to bring understanding. That's where the heart is and where it's really coming from. And so, *3rd Space* allowed me to kind of create like these little incubators of connection.

And it was a lot of work. But it was incredibly rewarding. Every connection was like a new baby being born. That's how I felt - like I had 50 babies. And some of the people still talk to each other to this day.

So - It was a really great experiment - it kind of lives in this historical space right now, in terms of idea - And one day, I would like to maybe try to reach out and get - the same people to have another conversation maybe like 10 years down the road or something.

But we'll see.



Something I would like to have heard when I was younger

B

- If you can go back in any time of your - childhood or creative process or voice-finding process. If you could give yourself advice that you wish you had or would like - as a note - is there is there anything?

S

The feeling of hopelessness, does not last - that's probably what would have been something I would like to have heard when I was younger.

Yeah.

It's not forever.

So just -

- make it out of it.

just be patient.

SARA Z. MEGHDARI

INSTAGRAM

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

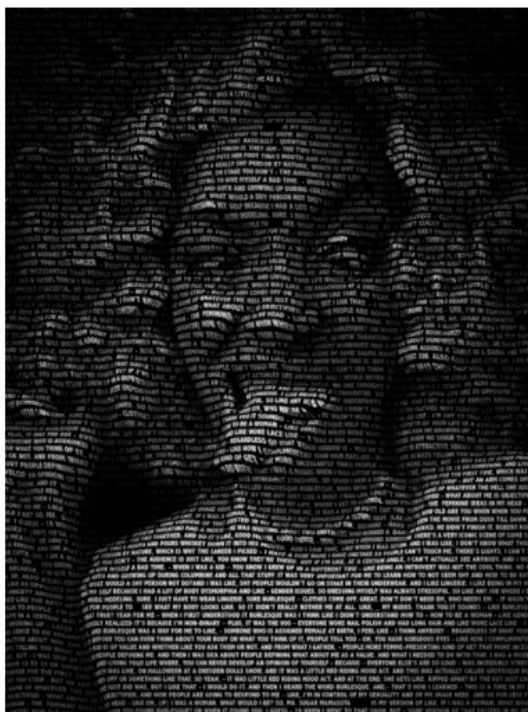
/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



Mx. Sugar Mamasota

Digital Composite, Brandon Perdomo 2021

Brandon Perdomo

Brooklyn, NY

Interviewer

Mx. Sugar Mamasota

Brooklyn, NY

Narrator

Session Conducted:

Zoom / Online

1 November 2020



Mx. Sugar Mamasota (Full)
Brandon Perdomo

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



Sugar, from the South

B

- you're surrounded by a wonderful set piece that looks like -

S

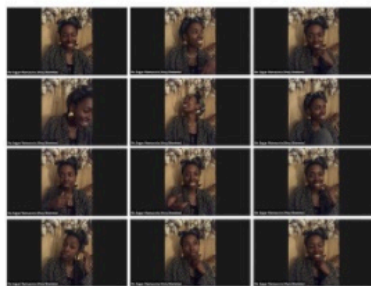
Oh, this set piece? My room! It's a bunch of bouquets of cotton - Well, There aren't the flowers - They're just cotton bulbs. This is like *after the flower* - so I guess these are *exploited seed pods*. But either way, I bought like six bouquets of them last year. And I'll probably buy six more. So I'll have a full cotton wall.

B

For for a set - was it for a gig?

S

No, it was just for me. I'm just *country* - and I miss the South. So - this isn't for anyone else but me.



B

Can you tell me your - venture from the South to New York?

S

Sure. Um, well, it was by way of Boston. I don't have a hometown anywhere. I grew up in three basic areas. Central North Carolina, Southern Massachusetts, and Southern Illinois. So my mother's family is from the Carolinas, my mom's first generation *Mass-hole*. And - half her siblings were born in Chester, South Carolina. And then her and her younger brother born in Boston. - my dad's the *Midwestern fella*. Anyway, so I lived in North Carolina when I was little. I learned how to talk when I was living in North Carolina. So that's why if I'm like, too sleepy or something, - there'll be the accent. But - after high school, - the third High School I went to was predominately white. I was one of five black femmes in my graduating class of over 400 kids. So basically, as soon as I graduated, I half-ass broke up with a guy I was half-ass dating and moved back down South for the summer, and then to Boston for college. And after a series of ridiculous events, I went from Boston to New York City. So - but I usually try to go - back home back to North Carolina, like once every year or every other year. Help out with the farm and stuff.

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

B

The farm?

S

Well, farm is a strong word, sorry. Farms involve animals. Mostly a garden. My aunt lives in the middle of nowhere, and there's like a big garden. My aunt, my uncle are getting older. So I'm teaching them how to restructure it so it's better for their abilities.

- So that's me being Southern.

B

- You told me once that that's where the name Sugar comes from.

S

Yeah, exactly. You don't know someone's name - yeah, *Sugar Darlin'*, *Sweetheart*. - I grew up with all those names. I'm Sugar - you're Sugar - doesn't matter. It's just like a placeholder. But yeah, that's been like one of my nicknames since I was little, or like any Southern person, that's what they call me automatically - *that'll be easy to toss that in*. - my first burlesque name was really bad - when I moved to New York City, I changed it.

B

Do you mind me asking what that name was?

S

I think it was *Veronica Vaudeville*. Just like - really campy and bad - you know - I did like one of those burlesque - *Learn-From-A-Burlesque-Queen-In-One-Day* bootcamps - spent like six hours learning how to *strip proper*, in a way that will be entertaining and - all that jazz.

Then I start teaching burlesque and then I was like, *oh wait Boston's racist, I'm leaving*, and then I skedaddled.



All my Mama's gonna hear is "devil-worshipping-stripper!"

B

Did you start performing burlesque in Boston?

S

Yeah, - my first show was - initially when I started burlesque, I wanted to only perform with live bands. Because at the time I was a musician, and I worked - as a bartender at a venue. And so everyone I knew was in the local music scene in Boston. So I was always making routines and stuff for local music. And me and two other performers - two artists that I knew - I kind of suckered them into becoming burlesque dancers, because I didn't know any. I was like, *Hey, I wanna start a burlesque troupe*. And one of them was like, *No, I don't like looking at people at all, let alone looking at me. Why would I do this?* But then once she saw that, *you know, you got a cool name*. And like, I was designing costumes for everybody. She's like, *wait, I want this thing. Fine. I'll do it*. So - she was like a child actress who was like, *No, no, I don't want to be involved in any of this*. But eventually, she came around, and I choreographed this whole

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

chair routine, and made all these black and white costumes for me and the other two dancers. And then when we strip, we were all colors underneath. And my friend's band was playing. It was February, and as a place called Church. So I felt like it was really appropriate for me to start my stripping career at Church. Just felt right - my mom came. Yeah.

B

And what was there a response to this?

S

She was like, *you're really good at this. I don't know how that reflects on my parenting.* She's like - *you're a natural - I don't know that what that says about - one way or the other about me being a good mother. Not but yeah. You're really good at stripping in front of people so - it was like my mom standing next to like this guy I had only been dating for like a week. I was like, hey, just you know, starting yesterday, I'm a stripper - . So I hope that's okay with you. If not, dump me. Anyway, here's a show flyer.*

B

And his response?

S

He was like - I can't explain to him what burlesque was - and he's also from the south. He's from Tennessee. I had to explain to him what burlesque was, - I also had just told him that I was a witch. And he was staring at me like, *All my Mama's gonna hear is devil worshipping stripper.* I was like, *close enough!*

That's fine, All right. Well, you know, we'll see how this goes. So yeah, it was - It was something - he thought it was funny. So he had a good time. It was a good show. Yeah, I think everyone had a good time. Except for one kid who thought he was going to a fashion show. He's greatly disappointed. He was like, *I thought this is your fashion show.* I was like, *I don't know why he thought that - no one said that.*

I do enjoy the idea of someone being disappointed by seeing my half naked body - It's like like, *Oh, well, damn.* [Laughs]

That's really funny to me.



On stage, gender assignments, Grotesque Burlesque, and Apparently a Clown Slut

B

Were you ever shy? - What was that - *Coming-of-performing* for you?

S

Um, I am a really shy person by nature, which is why the career I picked - I have a fake name I have onstage so people can't touch me. There's lights, I can't see them. Or really hear them that well. So - you know, on stage you don't - The audience is just like, *you know they're there.* But if I'm like, at a certain angle, I can't actually see anybody. And I would never wear my glasses on stage. Because, I'm not trying to give myself a bad time, - when I was a kid - you know I grew up in a different time -

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

being an introvert was not the cool thing. No-one thought you were secretly a genius. So, also being quiet and goth and growing up during Columbine and all that stuff. It was very important for me to learn how to not seem shy and how to be extroverted. So I just kind of lived life like as opposite day like, *what would a shy person not do?* And I was like, *shy people wouldn't go on stage in their underwear.* And I like lingerie. I like being in my underpants at home. And I get a lot of anxiety around dressing myself because I have a lot of body dysmorphia and like - gender issues. So dressing myself was always stressful. So - any job where I didn't have to wear clothes just seemed like the best option - *nude modeling. Sure. I just have to wear lingerie. Sure, burlesque - clothes come off. Great.*

*Don't don't need em,
who needs em.*

- it wasn't much of a - for me - i'm shy to talk to people. i'm not shy for people to see what my body looks like. So it didn't really bother me at all. *Like my nudes.* Thank you.

B

It sounds - like burlesque help to channel aspects of your life in a certain way. Is that true?

S

Yeah for me - when I first understood it burlesque was I think - I didn't understand how to - *how to be a woman* - like gender roles were very confusing for me growing up - later I obviously realized it's because I'm *non-binary* - plus, it was the 90s - everyone wore nail polish and had long hair and wore lace - I was a 90s goth kid. So gender made no sense to me regardless, and burlesque was a way for me to - AS someone who WAS assigned female at birth, or I feel like - I think anybody - regardless of what your gender is - you're told what is attractive about you. - way before you can even think about your body or what you think of it, people tell you - *Oh, you have gorgeous eyes* - like how I complimented your hair earlier - people are always telling you what about you is *of-value* - whether like you ask them or not. And from what I gather, - People more femme-presenting kind of get that more incessantly than people who are more masc, but - I was sick of other people defining me. And then I was sick about people defining what about me as a value. And what I needed to do with that. I was a model when I was little - from 10 to 15 or something. And living your life where, you can never develop an opinion of yourself - because - everyone else's are so loud - was incredibly stressful. So when I saw a burlesque performer for the first time, which was like, on Halloween at a *Dresden Dolls* show, and it was a Little Red Riding Hood act. And this was actually called *Grotesque Burlesque*, bras with teeth - not only do you strip - but an arm comes off or something like that. So yeah, - it was a *Little Red Riding Hood* act. And at the end, she gets like, ripped apart by the guy just like a wolf. I was like, *I don't know the name of whatever the hell she just did was, but I like that - I would do it.* And then I heard the word *burlesque*. And, - that's how I learned - this is a time in my life, where I get to control how I'm objectified - What about me is objectified, and how people are going to respond to me - I'm in control of my sexuality and of my image here. And so burlesque for me, it was a way to sort out the woman - the feminine ideas in my head - like oh, if I was a woman. What would I be? So, Mx. Sugar Mamasota is my version of like, if I was a woman, what would I be?

Apparently a clown slut. [Laughter]

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



Early-on

B

How old are you when when you found burlesque?
Or when it found you.

S

I guess - 18 when I went to that show. But - some version of that existed in my head from very early-on. Because - Have you seen the movie From Dusk Till Dawn, Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez? [No?] We'll fix that. Basically - Quentin Tarantino had a movie - he was writing about two brothers who robbed a bank in Mexico. He didn't finish it. Robert Rodriguez had a movie about vampires in Mexico. He didn't finish it. They jam - the two together. And so it's like, *good movie, good movie - Now, there's demons somehow*. There's a very iconic scene of Salma Hayek walking across a table in a bikini and she puts her foot Tina's mouth and pours whiskey down - into his mouth. And I saw that, like when I was seven. And I was like, *I don't know what this is*.

But I want that job.

Also girls are cute.

I was like that - don't know what else is going on here - Oh and I wanted to be a *fly girl* from *Living Color*. Like how like Jennifer Lopez started her career as a fly girl - I would put my rollerblades - knee pads and elbow pads on, and dance, and try to do all the dances to the opening of - *in Living Color*. So I was like six or seven when I first realized I wanted to do something - in being scantily clad, dancing around, and then I discovered burlesque when I was 18.



Stripping away layers & being close - where burlesque is for me these days

S

Burlesque at its core is stripping away something - stripping away layers - it's about being close - I think that right now, - especially since we've all been in quarantine - people are touch-starved, and they're missing community, and all that stuff. So, if just going for a walk in a park is a big deal, seeing someone covered in glitter with like, streamers shooting off their nipples - It's like massive - It's a bigger divide between that kind of glitz and glam and like where we are now - but I've adapted it. - I think it's so important to do shows - and - - also since, for me, - the biggest barrier with performing being is I don't particularly like to be around strangers. I don't know, like, you notice, when you've come to my shows, I always have like a *handler*. As soon as I'm off-stage - I go to a specific person is who takes me somewhere where I'm not really engaging with people who I don't know - for me, what I get out of performing - I don't need to hear - I don't need to have the energy of the audience. I've tried - I want to present work to them, I want them to get something out of it, but I don't need the validation part of it. And when you're performing in person, and naked, - that validation quickly leads to a level of false familiarity, which leads to people thinking it's okay to like touch you, - touch your hair, or touch your earrings, or pull on your pasties. So I, you

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

know, I love performing, I've been doing it for years. That was a huge barrier - every time I was getting ready to go to a show - having *too much of a pair* to deal from variables of strangers. Now that's taken away, I feel like I could be close to them. Because - there's no risk of me being in danger. So I can be as close and as familiar as I want to and *show more*, because it's safer for me to do so - so that's also why I got into virtual stripping. Because I've always wanted to be a stripper but like, I don't have a fantastic temper. And if I get called *chocolate*, and someone - tries to grab my thong, *they will have a black eye* - so I'm like, - It won't work out well - I don't have a temperament to do it in person. - so I just started with these virtual shows - It's been really a great way for me to connect with people and a closer and more intimate way without as much fear or concern. That's where burlesque is for me these days.



Sugar.i, **Brandon Perdomo**

2017



Knitting, Ancestors, Grandma's beads

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

B

You know, it's always amazing to me how much you put yourself in your work - you do so much and from, you know, fabrication to, thoughtfully even camera work with with the online stuff going on. Is there is there anything you're wearing now - did you make your sweater?

S

No. The funny thing is, -

B

You wouldn't surprise me if you're like, *Oh, this whole thing.*

S

The funny thing is - I made this, this is my summer blanket. So I've been knitting a lot. Because I'm always knitting, if I wear this sweater, people think that I made this sweater, but I didn't. This is a gift from my ex girlfriend. And - it's comfortable, so I kept it. It's actually got a huge burn on the back of the shoulder - from a show that I did at *Bizarre Bar* before they closed. Someone threw my sweater on top of a lightbulb at a cabaret show and I came downstairs - to grab some lipstick - and I was like, *What smells like - Oh! Dear!* And it was like - smoking and burning. So *Bizarre Bar* almost caught on fire. Due to this this weird sweater.

I have my waist beads on that I made - I have jewelry that I made. This is all like religious stuff, - jewelry that I made. - this necklace is from my great-grandmother, Trinidad. I never met her. But apparently she really loved my mom and heard a lot about me. So when she passed away, about a year ago, she left a box just for me. And it was all like, gloves and garter belts and costume jewelry. My family knows what I do. So she left me like, all these necklaces, and oh, and she knows that I'm a witch. So she left me like some spell books. And like she's a healer and she left me some of her old notes and potions, and then some - lingerie. So thanks. Thanks, Grandma, Trina, wherever you are, being awesome. Probably.

Twerking all the ancestors.

B

That's incredible that ancestral - that information being shared with you.

S

Yeah, I think like - black femmes - sex work and stripping, are things that are not stigmatized in the same way. Because - even if you're not involved - in life whatsoever, Black femmes do not get childhoods - we are immediately seen, by society as - being older and - facetious. - I started getting called - people started assuming that I was a sex worker when I was still a child. And it's kind of just assumed that black femmes are here for use, of any kind. And if that's what the kind of use you're interested in - like my mother - she's 60 - My mom would be walking down the street with some groceries and a guy will pull up and be like, *How much?* or something - because I don't know a black femme who has not experienced some level of the stigma around sex work -

talking openly about doing it is more common. Or like, it not being such a big deal. Oh, or the way that we see our bodies is very different. - I'll dress a certain way and not think it's sexual whatsoever. But then - a white friend of mine will think that I'm - being really like, vampy or something. I like - No - To me, twerking isn't sexual. Like, I have a bubble-but, - I have narrow hips, I have a bubble-but - sticks out. *I'm okay with it. If you're not, don't look -* to me, it's like funny, or it's fun to do. I'm not like, trying to give boners over here - but I,

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

you know, - being embodied and caring about our bodies and celebrating our bodies when we feel like it is really important to us because - it's something that we have to fight every single day to do. And so yeah, it's really nice that my great grandmother who never met me in person - ever - I don't think she saw me as baby - just was like, *Here, you too - you know the thing. Here you go.* So that was - yeah it's really special to me - like, so actually every time I do a strip show I wear my great grandmother's beads.

So,
cute in the family.



Double-dutch in the Rockaways

B

Something you just said about how bodies are seen reminds me of what you were telling me the other day about this - an incident in the Rockaways.

S

Oh, the double-dutch thing?

Yeah.

Um, so

I don't know if you know this or not - but basically, when producers get allowed a first show, they only book enough diversity to not get *dragged* for not booking diversity. So usually, black burlesque performers don't get to see - meet each other. Because it's very, very rare that we'll get booked to the same show. And if we are, they book us back-to-back so you don't actually see each other perform - so there's representation for the audience. But we don't get the representation, because we never get to see each other. And - so I think the Winter of 2018 or something, I did - a burlesque show and, surprisingly enough, this white producer booked four black performers on same show. And we were so excited, Brandon, you'd think that we did not realize anyone else was in the room - we took so many pictures with each other. There were so many hugs. And that's how I met three other performers. *Rain Supreme, Femme Fatale, and Stella Nova* - I met those three at that show. And last Summer, Rain, - or a different burlesque performer asked in I wanted to go to the Rockaways to do *double-dutch* because Rain Supreme was like getting all the black burlesque performers together for just - to have fun, and do double-dutch by the beach. I grew up in an all white town, so I did not get the privilege of learning double-dutch, like a lot of other little black girls do. And the other performers - were like, *don't worry about it, neither did I, they're gonna teach us.* It's like, half of the group knew how to double-dutch. The other half was like, *I'm disclosing my race card, can you please teach me.* So - we all met up, went to the boardwalk, and decided to set up there. So we had a little speaker playing music, and we were just trying to have fun. At some point, a crowd starts to form. And there are people everywhere playing games, and running around and doing all kinds of stuff. But we're drawing the attention. And it's predominately white people. And they're videotaping us and taking pictures without asking, - they're coming up and asking us what we're doing - *we're just playing double-dutch* - like, they're asking us what it's for - like, *Um, is this a show?* The fact that it's automatically assumed that black women, smiling in public is a show for you, for anyone who's walking by, is

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

outrageous. And - we were laughing it off. Because we've all been through that so much - we start talking about how often that is that, we just cannot exist in public, and have joy without it being for the service of somebody else.



Sugar.II. **Brandon Perdomo**

2017

So like,

at some point, you can't laugh it off anymore.

This older white lady came up to me and asked when I was going next - because we were taking a break, because everyone was tired. Like, oh, *why are you guys gonna start up again?* - I don't know. - *Well, I have to leave soon.* Like, - we were supposed to be doing something for her. And she's a stranger. And I was like, *I don't care. No one is paying me to care about entertaining you.* And - this kind of messaging - like it's okay to be that pushy to demand entertainment, from black women for free. Like, *I don't know what's going on. But it's obviously for me. And now I get to make demands. And now I get to record this for whatever I want to do without asking any questions or anything.* I cannot imagine having that kind of confidence, perhaps with like, the

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

assistance of hard drugs, but - it was wild - even when we went down to the beach, and we were just hanging out, talking to each other. If we start hula-hooping, or someone's like, dancing, shaking a little shoulder - all of a sudden people are coming up like, *Oh, What're you girls doing? What's going on over here?* There were all types of people out there having fun dancing around, listening to music, playing hula hoops, doing more interesting things than us. - I'm so happy - they did not realize that the people they were harassing were *all* showgirls, because that would have just made it so much worse. But that was what we were getting from people thinking we were just regular black women on the street. Like, that's not with people thinking that we are performers. That was just - *this is how you talk to black femmes*.



Ancestral jewelry, I'm not stuck here

S

These are replicas of Fulani earrings - the Fulani people, *Do you know who they are?* - It's a really big ethnic group in Nigeria and parts of West Africa. - they're nomadic - part of my family's Fulani - I think because that tribe is really nice to look at - they're really attractive people, and they make lots of really interesting jewelry - as far as like African tribes that get *ripped-off* a lot, the Fulani are one of them. So you can find earrings like this in a lot of places - like, I did not get these from an African person, I bought them from some site that makes replicas of tribal jewelry. - the past three years, I've been spending a lot of time working on finding out my ancestry and who my people were before slavery. And - luckily, my grandfather, on my mother's side, has a last name that is really unique and easy to track. And his family is Nigerian by way of Geechee Gullah people in the Carolinas. - these earrings are actually kind of funny, because I saw them on the website. And I really liked them. But they're like \$230, - they're not cheap. And I was already buying some other jewelry. And I thought of getting these, I decided not to. And I bought these big gold hoops with like honey bees in them instead. And when the package came in the mail - the septum ring I got, and the hoops were there, and all this stuff. And another box were these earrings. And there was a note from the person who packed the order. And they said, *Hey, thank you so much for ordering*. I did this, like in April. So, when business was very slow for everybody. I've wanted like all gold jewelry since I was a kid. This person wrote a note to me saying, *thank you so much for supporting us through this time, I throw in an extra pair of earrings because they seemed to match the other stuff that you got, I hope you like them*. And it was earrings from my ancestral people. So that's how I got these. I wear them a lot with other earrings that are handmade by an indigenous person who I met during quarantine via the internet. I met a lot of really good folks via the internet during this time. - I wear these with a bunch of my other ancestral jewelry. Just to remind myself, I'm not stuck here.

B

And when you say *stuck here*, what do you mean?

S

- It's hard living in Brooklyn, when you're from the south. The way people talk is really different. I think when even, - I grew up moving around so much, my word is really all I have for people. - If I say I'm going to do something, I have

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinary storytelling
/testimony of the body

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

were before slavery. And - luckily, my grandfather, on my mother's side, has a last name that is really unique and easy to track. And his family is Nigerian by way of Geechee Gullah people in the Carolinas. - these earrings are actually kind of funny, because I saw them on the website. And I really liked them. But they're like \$230, - they're not cheap. And I was already buying some other jewelry. And I thought of getting these, I decided not to. And I bought these big gold hoops with like honey bees in them instead. And when the package came in the mail - the septum ring I got, and the hoops were there, and all this stuff. And another box were these earrings. And there was a note from the person who packed the order. And they said, *Hey, thank you so much for ordering. I did this, like in April. So, when business was very slow for everybody. I've wanted like all gold jewelry since I was a kid. This person wrote a note to me saying, thank you so much for supporting us through this time, I throw in an extra pair of earrings because they seemed to match the other stuff that you got, I hope you like them.* And it was earrings from my ancestral people. So that's how I got these. I wear them a lot with other earrings that are handmade by an indigenous person who I met during quarantine via the internet. I met a lot of really good folks via the internet during this time. - I wear these with a bunch of my other ancestral jewelry. Just to remind myself, I'm not stuck here.

B

And when you say *stuck here*, what do you mean?

S

- It's hard living in Brooklyn, when you're from the south. The way people talk is really different. I think when even, - I grew up moving around so much, my word is really all I have for people. - If I say I'm going to do something, I have to do it. I don't get a lot of chances to make good connections and to build trust, because I never knew how long I'm staying in a spot. So having integrity and - saying what I mean and mean what I say, being as direct and honest as possible was important to me growing up. And when I talk to other southern people who live in Brooklyn, especially in nightlife - the community is really different - people up here get really weird about talking on the phone. Like you can't, just call. The level of care is different. - the culture is just really different in Brooklyn than it is in North Carolina. Or you know, something like the places that I'm familiar with. - My phone is perched on my altar right now, that has like plants and skulls and my usual stuff, and some handmade baskets from Cherokee and Geechee folks and things that remind me of my family, my grandmother's ring box that my grandfather put her engagement ring in.

But it's just like stuff to remind me that at some point, I'm going to go back home. Brooklyn, Brooklyn's good. I like being a part of the community here. I like contributing. And I like the opportunities that I have here, but I know that this is not where I'm putting down roots permanently. And I kind of want to be where my blood is. And so until I get there, I just - dress up. I play dress up. And also that reminds me of where I'm going to be.

So that's *that* bit of mush.

MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

INSTAGRAM

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I
/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

Lately

-Recipient of Diversity Project Grant - "Lift Every Voice: Racism, Power, and Activism in the Arts: A Conversation with Angeline Butler"
Office of Academic Diversity & Inclusion - Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, Columbia University

Upcoming

2021

APR

Wed 14, **Encore: Lift Every Voice: Racism, Power, and Activism in the Arts: A Conversation with Angeline Butler**

Online - Zoom

Columbia University - NYC, NY

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I

//LAZARUS NAZARIO

//SARA MEGHDARI

//MX. SUGAR MAMASOTA

[[PRINTED MATTER]]

/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...



This collection is available in print as part of a limited edition of 50.

*10% to collaborators

*10% to carbon-offsets

*30% to BIPOC & LGBTQ+ mutual-aid initiatives

Contact for more info.

shedding somethingshedding

/interdisciplinarystorytelling
/testimonyofthebody

/DRAWING ROOM I
/ENCORE SESSIONS

/CALENDAR

/CONTACT /GUESTBOOK

/STATEMENT

/LISTEN HERE...

Q'HUBO

NAME *

E-MAIL

SUBJECT

COLLABORATION - COMMENTS - PRINTED MATTER - OTHER

MESSAGE

SUBMIT