

2025 RESIDENT FACULTY LECTURE, June 27, 2025

Dineo Seshee Bopape: [applause, cheering, with title slide on screen behind the podium] Hi, everyone.

Audience member: Hello!

Bopape: I am Dineo Seshee Bopape.

Sandra Gamarra: And I'm Sandra.

Bopape: Great. So, um, we're here to introduce, uh, Anna Tsouhlarakis, and, uh, Anna was born on earth in Kansas, in 1977, in a town called Lawrence. Lawrence, that year, saw the full swing of Kansas seasons: icy, snowy winters, storms in crisp green springs, hot, humid summers, and cool, clear autumns. 1977 in particular was a year with colder than average winter, with hard freezes and snow giving way to humid, stormy summers typical of that part of the world.

Anna is of various descendants and ascensions. Both Navajo in nation, in the southwestern part of the USA, and Cretan, from the island of Crete, in Greece. She has lived in various places around the USA, and around the world, including New Hampshire, Italy, London, and also Colorado. She played rugby in her school years. She tackled very well. [laughter] She does not believe in the idea of the feminine as flimsy or waif-like. She believes the idea of femininity to be inclusive of physical strength, an idea which is anal, analogous to the perspectives of various indigenous cultures around the world. She enjoys drinking Dr. Pepper, [laughter] she loves sailing. She takes the idea of respect very seriously. The respect of being on native land, specifically. Wabanaki territory land, specifically. Respect towards the land, and also respect to our collective endeavor. She takes the sense of respect so seriously that she widens the circle, she widened the circle, she opened the circle by calling on Chris Newell, a friend of hers and ambassador of the Wabanaki people, who drove four hours to come and welcome us the other day. Us who have arrived from many parts of the world, onto the land of the first dawn. That is something very special.

This gesture tells a lot about who this person is. What she thinks about herself, and her role in the world. What she thinks about us. What she thinks about the history of this part of the world. What she thinks about the people who first inhabited these parts. These woods, these lakes, and their descendants, also. And also, what she thinks about what is needed for the times to come.

This gesture, seemingly singular, ripples outwards, echoing various timelines, also tells us something about what grounds her work. I feel blessed to share this time here at Skowhegan with you all, and honored as [PHRASE UNCLEAR]. Together with Sandra Gamarra, to introduce Anna Tsouhlarakis. [applause, cheering]

Gamarra: [laughs] Hi. [clears throat] Sorry. Um, when I arrived in Madrid, I encountered Latin American musicians playing Indian music in parks and squares. Sometimes, there were traditional Indian costumes from the highland villages of Peru, but often, most of the time, they were native North American costumes. Once, I asked them why they wore the, those outfits. And they replied that their traditional attire wasn't appealing enough to catch the attention of passer-by. They weren't recognized as Indians.

That image mess with my head. I wondered, is this putting strategic essentialism into practice for survival? The truth is, much of the clothing worn in indigenous communities today are variations of the traditional Spanish attire imposed during the campaigns to erect, eradicate the idolatry and customs of the conquered regions in Latin America. And nowadays, they do not question their authenticity.

How do you claim belonging to a culture that has been conquered, mixed, and stripped of the ecosystem it once thrive in? The concept of purity is a cultural idea root in monotheistic ways of understanding the world, where a single god created man separate from the earth, to mold it to his needs. Under this premise, an entire system was built that, under that mandate of progress, decides which group of people is considered new, are admissible, using the idea of belonging as a [WORD UNCLEAR]. Other civilizations don't understand their existence without the creative, the credited forces of the earth itself. Through customs and rituals, they reveal knowledge that emerged from the land, knowledge that prioritized life over development. And no, it is not just about defending life, when you are on the brink of extermination. I know it's unnecessary to point this out, but I will: I'm not saying monotheistic-based organizations, civilizations are better or worse than others. I am not measuring them. Just laying out those difference, because in the world system we live in, the table is a Western one, and we tend to serve ourselves directly from it. That's what is different, the other, the minority, is often seen as an aggression to the system, or, in other cases, viewed with condescension.

America doesn't exist in the Bible, which, for Christian Europe, at a time, was a source of knowledge. How could they explain the existence of people and animals after the red flood if Noah hadn't saved them? How could they reconcile lands never mentioned before? News of Columbus arriving in the Indies spread like gunpowder across Europe. But it was the discovery not of America, but of the ignorance that truly ignited it, leaving behind [WORD UNCLEAR], terror, and challenges to the Spanish Order.

We, in this room, can imagine what the arrival of those ships meant for civilizations, we were taught to see bad part. [?] But what did it mean for our own collectivity? What did the emergence of a third of the world signify? The only way to integrate that continent was to call it new, to relegate its animals to the realm of the fantastical. And to question the humanity of the people who lived there.

This doubt is crucial, because it splits human history in half. And lingers today through racial, social, economical, economic, cultural, and sexual divisions that continue to subjugate more and more people, whether from the new world or the old.

When I think about Anna's work, I ask myself them same questions. I picture her standing before me, slowly raising a mirror between her face and mine. Thank you, Anna. [applause, cheering]

Bopape: [bumping into Gamarra leaving the stage] Oh, sorry. [00:09:42]

Anna Tsouhlarakis: Thank you all for being here, taking your Friday night to spend with me. Absolutely.

First, I just wanted to tell you all about these photos. It was really exciting, about two or three years ago I was moving into a new studio, and found some boxes, you know, you have the junk that you've been carrying around forever, like, for decades, and I found a sack that had undeveloped film in it. And these photos came from that roll. And it was just like this Skowhegan, like, treasure chest, to kind of discover, which was really exciting. So, not all of them turned out, cause the film was really old, but it was really just, like, a nice variety of shots. And, I thought, perfect for opening tonight. [switches slide]

So, um, the talk I'm gonna give tonight is a little bit different than what I usually give when I do visiting artist gigs, like, I'm usually, like, talking more about, like, my practice as a whole, very quickly, and like, about, uh, recent projects, but I kind of wanted to, um, touch on a lot of different, um, kind of areas that I've worked in, and a lot of thoughts – because I think, because we have so many people working on so many disciplines here, that I feel like there's been a lot of conversations, in different studio visits, and just, like, across, like, dinner, and breakfast, and stuff, that I wanted to share these things with you.

Um, I think one of the most important ways to kind of start is it, to know that my dad is an artist. He was a tradition, or is a traditional Navajo silversmith, makes jewelry, like silver and turquoise, but also uses other semi-precious gems, and so that's how I was raised. Growing up, going to these art markets, going to, with him, to sell, for, you know, to collectors, to museums, and whatnot. So I was always surrounded by Native artists, and by Native artwork. Um, it was just a part of who we were. And I started making things at an early age, without really knowing what I was doing, like, I just, I liked to build. I knew that. I was a builder. Um, he was a construction worker during the day, and he'd bring back, like, offcuts of wood, and I'd like nail them together, or glue them together, and I'd just, like, make little things. And so, I never thought of myself as an artist, because, you know, when you're young, you have these ideas of what an artist is supposed to be like, like, in fourth grade, it was the kids that could draw Garfield really well, [laughter] and like, I couldn't do shit with Garfield. [laughs] Like, so, that was – so I, because of that, like, this like entrenched that I had to be a good drawer, like, I never thought of myself as an artist.

And then when I went into high school, I became really, um, kind of interested in the sciences, and was a big math and science nerd, um, ended up representing the US at the International Science and Engineering Fair my senior year. [oohs and aahs from audience] So, [laughs] throwing that out there because we all come from different backgrounds and like, it's nice to know, like, when people are big old nerds too, you know? [laughter]

And so, um, and then I went to college. And I just started taking classes that interested me. I, um, ended up taking a lot of Native American studies classes, and a lot of studio art classes. And by the time it was time to declare a major, I realized I had enough credits to be a double major. And it just, it seemed like the perfect mix for me. Um, a lot of what I was learning in Native American Studies was informing my work, and just kind of making me more kind of conscious and aware of my experiences, and how they were recorded, you know, within anthropology, within Native American Studies, within articles and journals that I was reading. And realizing that those were important moments, that they weren't just like my own personal things that I had to deal with, right? And so, this was, um, for my senior thesis show I college, we're starting from, like, the early on times. [laughs] Um, from the last century. [laughter] And so, this is called *Navajo Baby Blanket*. Um [switches slide] it's made of quilting squares, and I went to frat row at my college and collected all the beer cans, and the Dr. Pepper [laughing] Dineo talked about. [laughter] And, um, early on, like, and I didn't even, I don't, I wasn't, I don't think I was really aware of, like, my use of humor, but even very early on, I thought it was like hilarious, I was like, I'm gonna throw a Dr. Pepper can in there too! And it just, like, for me it just, it was dis, a moment of disruption.

But it was also a nod to tradition, as well. Um, because in our way of making, like, in terms of like the Native way of making, a lot of times people say, you can't make anything perfect, like, you have to create some small minor, like, disruption in there. And so for me, that's what this is. Sometimes like, in a necklace, you might see, like, all of the beads, like, beautiful, but there's like one that's a different color. And that's on purpose, because you're not trying to reach perfection, is what you're trying – like, that's kind of what the work kind of states.

Um, and for me to go from like, a dad who made jewelry to this, it was, it was a long journey, because for me, when I got to college, you know, what I had known were more craft-based, like, artistry, like pottery, and weaving, like, all of those types of things, like things that I had learned growing up. Like I learned how to make jewelry, I learned how to bead, I know how to make all the traditional parts of, like, a Native outfit. Um, but when I went to school and I started learning more about kind of like contemporary art history, I realized there were these trajectories, within, you know, Asian-American art, Latin American art, African American art, and how they were encompassing a lot of ways of working. Like, not just painting and sculpture, but installation, and video, and performance. And this is like the mid to early, like, late '90s, and so there weren't a lot of Native artists working in this. And I realized that this was a way of, that I could speak freely. Without the baggage that kind of more traditional materials brought along with it. Like, when I first start – I realized, you know, very quickly, I was, like, a sculptor. Um, and people were like, 'Oh, so you make pottery.' And I'm like, no. And so I was like, scared of ever using clay, because I, I felt like that was relegating me to, like, this, like, [miming a container in the air] dimension that I couldn't get out of, and so I refused to use clay, and that's probably why I still don't use it, or like textiles, in a lot of times, because for me, it was just, like, it was creating, like, the perfect frame for somebody to view a Native artist. And I wanted to break out of that.

And so, you know, during this time, I realized, hey, I could extend this trajectory for Native American art history. Like, extend our canon, and do more work in performance and video. And that language came really easily to me.

Um, [switches slide] so this is my first performance I ever did. This was, again, from my senior thesis show. I built a travois, [switches slide] which is like a traditional mode of transportation for specifically the Northern Plains Native tribes. Um, usually, this like contraption was dragged by, uh, horses, and sometimes dogs, and so I built one for myself, that had, like, backpack straps on it, it had found wood, stuff from my dorm and everything. And originally, it was set up against the wall in the gallery for the show, and, cause I thought of it as a sculpture. And then during my critique, somebody said, 'So when are you gonna use it?' And it, I was like, what? Like, that had never dawned on me, to like, actually activate it. And so, I was scared, I was like, oh my god, like, never done anything quite like this. And so I knew that I needed to go out into the streets. And I was really nervous, being a brown woman, in north, New England, which is not very brown, in terms of people [laughs] and so I took, took my license plate, from my car, and put it on there, [laughter] cause I was like, at least something will kind of be legal here. And I learned, like, bicycle signals, and stuff like that. Um, and like, I was like, and I didn't know anything, really, about documentation, so – and I always was like, whatever, documentation, and so like I didn't do video or anything like that. And then, um, so my boyfriend, at the time, who's my husband [audience coos] who you all will meet at some point, um [switches slide] was [audience member whistles] my [laughs] photographer. And so this is, so we did this, like, right, right after the show ended.

[switches slide] And then I went on to grad school. And I loved the freedom that I found in that first performance. I was so excited about it, about just this idea of activating pieces, that they didn't have to be stagnant, that they could, they could be some, they could live on in a different way. And so, this is one of my pieces I did when I was in grad school, it's called *Rocketship*. Um, I call it a fully functioning rocketship, it's about twelve feet tall. Um, and so, for this piece, um, during my critique, I read this text below, and then I showed everyone how it works, and that was my performance. And there's no documentation of the performance. Um, so the text, if you can't read it, at the bottom, it says, 'When the natural resources of earth start becoming scarce, many people will look towards the option of leaving this planet in hope of finding another planet that will sustain life. While most people will be in these fancy, sophisticated NASA-type shuttles, there will be people, such as Indians, who cannot afford such luxury, and will have to build their own ships. These less complicated rocketships will not be able to take off on their own, and will have chains that hook onto the larger rocketships. [laughter] But one thing each of those shoddy rocketships will have is an escape hatch in the floor. [00:19:59] As all of the larger space ships begin their countdown to take off, all the Indians will be slipping out of their escape hatches. The Indians will be putting their feet on the ground, while everyone else is on their way out of here.'

And so, when I say it's a fully working rocketship, it truly is. So there's a big chain at the top of it, and there's, an, so you can see the southwest interior, and you can see the lack of beautiful documentation [laughing] with my out of focus photos. But, um, on the floor

there was AstroTurf, and so when you picked up the AstroTurf, there was an escape hatch. And so that's why it's built off the ground, so you could come out of it.

Um, and so, for this piece, I was, I had, I was taking, um, a class at the Yale Law School at the same time, Federal Indian Law, and so I was learning a lot about, like, treaty rights, and like, historical, uh, kind of agreements, between the US and tribes, and so this is kind of what I was thinking about, with that idea of, like, the chain hooking onto the larger rocketships. It's that idea of kind of this tribal sovereignty that we have, but it's under the guise of the federal government. So it's a sovereignty, but not full sovereignty. Yeah.

Let's see here. And then, in, um, [switches slide] 2022, I was curated into a show in Mi, uh, Fort Lauderdale. It was called *Lux et Veritas*. And so it was a, uh, group show of artists of color who had gone through the Yale MFA program, from 2000 to 2012. And they asked me to re-create the rocketship, because little did I know, in 2002, that this idea of kind of like independent, like, space travel, would actually become a reality. Right? And be part of, like, mainstream conversation.

And so I rebuilt the original one at the full size, and then I made two others. And as you've all seen my little kids here, I, one was for each of them, and so they all have numbers on the exterior that have my kids CDIB, their certificate degree of Indian blood, that kind of certifies their Native American. And then, in the interiors, they're all decorated with, like, the kind of connects to their personality. And so like Coco, my middle daughter, likes things really soft, and like, plushies, and stuff like that, and so that one's full of like stuff like that, that big triangular one. And the other ones kind of are like the other kids. And so, this was a way that I was able to kind of bring these pieces forward. And so this, these are gonna be put up in Colorado in a big outdoor installation, at the end of July. So they live on.

[switches slide] Um, after grad school, like literally right after graduation, I drove up here. And I was here during the summer of 2002, and I thought, my studio was in the sculpture yard, I thought I was gonna be doing more sculpture, but I ended up doing just mainly performance. Uh, two performance pieces came out of my time here. And so this is, um, these are stills from the first one. It's called *Navagation*, cause I'm Navajo. Get it? [laughter] I like stupid puns. Okay. [laughter] You guys probably already know that about me. [laughs] Okay, let's see, let's keep going here. [switches slide]

So I'll show a little bit of [video plays 00:23:26 – 00:25:34] the video. And just skip around. The idea was that I would, um, walk from upper campus to my dorm, in lower campus, blindfolded, using only my Indigenous sensibilities. [laughter] So, like, listening to the wind, and feeling the heat of the sun, and the sound of the ground, and all of that. [scrubs through video a bit] So this was like five minutes in total.

Little did I know I'd comeback to be in that cabin! In the back. [laughs] [video ends] So in total it took me about thirty minutes. Um, to get from, um, upper to lower, and a big fall in the mud.

Um, the other piece that I did while I was here was called *Let's Dance!*, named after the David Bowie "Let's Dance," and so originally the idea was that – cause I was thinking about, like, Native tropes, and like stereotypes, and so I had this idea that I would dance with people, that they would teach me a dance, and then I would record the weather [laughing] the next day, and then have like a two-channel video like that, where it'd show the weather that that dance created. [laughter] But then I realized that it really was just about the dancing. And that kind of like goofiness that happened, because something that I've always been really aware of is this idea of what I'm supposed to look like, as a Native person. That I'm supposed to have long hair, high cheek – there's just all of these stereotypes that kind of go into that, and this idea that I always have to be an educator. So something that I was, I thought a lot about during grad school, um, and even before that, was this idea of Native art always having to teach you something, always having to be serious, and I always fought against that, this idea that I always had to deal with, like, my spirituality, in some way, or my, like, myths, or something like that. And I was like, how come I have to do that in a gallery space, but the, you know, white guy next to me can, like, do things that look like his penis. You know what I mean? And it's just like [laughter] we, we're in the same program, but like, everybody expects different things from us.

And so, that's something that I've always kind of fought with, is like the expectation, the, the boundaries that are kind of implicit in whatever I do, and so, that's what I was thinking about when I was making this as well, is this idea of like, what should I be wearing? And it's like, why can't a Native woman just be casually dressed? As so. [comes out from behind podium to show her outfit, and laughs] With, like, flip-flips, and a t-shirt, and shorts, right?

And so I, so I ended up doing this for thirty days, asked people to teach me dances, and then, um, at the, you know, and when I showed this, one of the first times I showed this, a reviewer said this, you know, this video shouldn't be in a Native art exhibition. And this is 2002, 2004, I think when it was finally shown, but that kind of lets you know what the thinking was around that time, and I think why this piece was so important, and, you know, that it had to be made. And so. And I liked the idea of goofiness. Like, I love the humor, and like, and I think that's a strain that has kind of maintained throughout all of my work, is this idea that it can, it can be Native, and it can be dumb, in the best way, you know? [switches slide]

Let's see. And we have some superstars that are in this video as well. [video plays 00:28:37 – 00:32:06] That we'll, that I'll point out. This is fifteen minutes long, so I'm gonna jump around. [scrubbing] Go ahead over here, let's see. Oh yeah. This is the Harlem shake. [laughs] And I don't think I'm a good dancer, just to say that. Okay, let's see, what else do we have. [scrubbing] Okay, so this is, um, Sean, like, after this one is Sean, the baker, that's down [audience coos] at the kitchen. This is Lester. You can see how proud Lester was. So this is Sean the baker, that makes all of our desserts. [scrubbing] And then we'll end, let's see, right here. So this is the last dance. I don't know if you recognize him. [laughter, gasps] With his quintessential rubber boots. [applause, cheering] [video stops]

Okay. So, let's see here. Okay, moving on. [switches slide] Moving on, during the mid-2000s, I experimented a lot with ideas of performance, about future kind of realities of Native people, um, these, this was from a suite of photographs that were all performance stills. During that time I was also thinking a lot about the idea of documentation, and how kind of video lets you think that you know everything that's kind of gone on in something, right? Like when there's been an action, or a happening. And so, I like the idea of photography as documentation, because it implies that you don't know everything that happened there. Um, and it kind of just gives you a snippet. Uh, something, like, I did dance, like, traditionally, in competitions that we have, called pow wows, when I was like a teenager. And, um, and even into college. Um, and something that always was surprising was the way that people, because they're open to the public, would come up and take photographs of me. And like, kind of jam cameras in my face. Without even asking, and so there was always this idea that people had some sort of, like, right to do this. And so that's something that I've kind of carried with me, and I think about during performances, like, is this a performance that should be documented, is it, should, like, how should it be documented, does it need to have, like, a physical documentation, or like, like the rocketship, can it just live through that story and you, you kind of imagine it on your own, and to me that's like, that's rich enough, right? Um, so I'm always kind of thinking about all of those things.

[switches slide] So these are two *Le*, from the *Legend* series, *Legend V* and *Legend I*.

[switches slide] Um, and then, I lived in New York for a bit, uh, while my husband was in law school there, and I did a piece at Socrates Sculpture Park. This is called *Stalks of Beans and Other Stories*. So, with the money that I received as like, um, the fee, like the commission fee that they give you, I asked twenty-four Natives – I gave twenty-four dollars to twenty-four Natives in New York City, or in the surrounding area, to, um, buy something with the twenty-four dollars and give it to me, that I would put on the scaffolding. And, um, it goes with the story of how Manhattan was bought for twenty-four dollars' worth of kind of trinkets, and possessions, um, from the Lenape people. And so I wanted to highlight what that looks like in terms of, uh, present day.

And the scaffolding, um, is a way that some tribes use offerings, kind of like an altar, in a way. Sometimes for the dead, sometimes just for, um, like different other rituals. And so I set it up that, so it mimicked the skyline of the city, as well. Um, and so I received [switches slide] a lot of different types of things, um, [switches slide] you know, everything from like [switches slide] somebody just going and buying a t-shirt at the Gap, um, to like, I don't, these were tools, up in the corner. Um, and then I would resin them onto the scaffolding that I made. Um, and these antlers right here, this is the, like, the best story. This is somebody who lived in that, the area, who took the twenty-four dollars, sent it to her mom in Washington State, her mom bought twenty-four dollars' worth of salmon, and traded the salmon for the antlers. [audience gasps] And then they sent me the antlers back. So that was kind of a nice, I was like, ah, that's so Native. [laughter]

[switches slide] Um, and then this person donated their twenty-four dollars to, uh, the homeless service organization. [switches slide] Let's see. And then, um, this is kind of

what it looked like kind of early on, and I thought this was like, the best result is what happened during the six months that it was up at Socrates, [switches slide] is that people just ripped the shit off. [laughs, audience sighs] And tore – anything that people could reach, they would break off and take. And I was like, this is exactly, like, what should happen, like, this is beautiful, this is, like, speaks to the story of everything I'm trying to talk about. Um, so yeah. So that was there.

[switches slide] Let's see. Um, this was a piece that I did during that same time. I was asked, um, to create a piece, a video, or just a piece, for the, highlighting the quadricentennial of Henry Hudson's arrival to the Hudson Valley. It was an exhibition that was curated, um, up at Wave Hill Gallery, and, um, it was only Native artists in there that kind of spoke to that, to that, uh, theme. And I think there was like fifteen of us there. And so, my take on that was like thinking about Henry Hudson kind of coming into this land, and kind of calling it his own, thinking that it was, you know, um, not being used, not being, um, seen as kind of a homeland, and so, I think we were talking – this is one of the pieces I wanted to show because we talked about in a studio visit was I decided to, um, colonize Henry Hudson's identity. So [laughs] I filmed part of it – here, I'll go ahead and play it [video plays 00:37:31 – 00:38:32] if you wanna turn it down, I'll just speak over it. [volume is lowered] So there's one of me, speaking in London, talking about me coming to London and colonizing, and that's being filmed on the Thames. And then the other is me in New York, um, on the Hudson River, like, speaking as Henry Hudson, and kind of colonizing his identity, or, yeah – and so, um, you hear my voice kind of like in normal cadence, and then in a terrible English accent. [laughter] I'm sorry, for those of you from the UK. [laughs] And then, um, and then, but you also hear the tour guides on boats – because these are both filmed on tour boats, and so you hear the tour guides as well. [volume returns briefly] This is like three minutes long, so. But, you get it. You get the sense of it. Yeah. Yeah. We'll move on from that English accent. [video stops] Alright.

Um, so this piece, I was, um, invited to a large scale group exhibition, um, that was held in New Mexico, and it was, um, a state-wide exhibition, um, that they asked artists to make pieces for that were throughout the entire state, and so I made the piece, a piece that was in Santa Fe, at the Museum of Contemporary Native Art. It's an outdoor kind of installation that's probably about twenty feet in diameter. Um, the theme of the state-wide exhibition is time, and, so I decided to kind of delve into the idea of, um, Navajo creation stories that deal with, um, kind of our understanding of multiple worlds. So, in, in our histories, there's, um, this idea that we might be in the fourth world, or fifth world. Some people say that this is the last world, some people say there's another world, um, our tribe is really big. It's, um, and it, our tribe is over, extends through three states, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah, and it's the size of West Virginia. So, when you think about tribes, like, as a monolith, saying, like, they all believe one thing, that, that just can't be true, right? [00:39:58] Like, when you think about something that's the size of West Virginia, like, Navajos that lives in the east side have, you know, differing kind of, like, dialects of religion, in a way, right, than Navajos that live in the west, or kind of in the north. And so I wanted to figure out how to kind of, like, bring all of those connections and those kind of stories together, and so this is the first time that I engaged with social media to put a call out.

So I used, um, I created a Survey Monkey survey, and then sent it out on Facebook, and then e-mailed it to all of the Navajos I knew, kind of just asking five basic questions about this idea, and then I ended up getting responses from over sixty or seventy Navajos. And so I took the text – and they all knew that this was gonna be part of an art installation, and so I took parts of their texts and put them on this aluminum signage. Um, [switches slide] in this huge kind of spiral shape, um, and then, so, the tenor of the text starts out as more negative, and then gets more neutral, and as you go to the center of the spiral it, um, gets more positive. And all of the wood is from my family land, it's from, it's like, found wood, um, from our, from like old corrals, and barns, and sheds and stuff like that. [takes a drink] and so, um, yeah, let's see, what else was I gonna say about that?

[switches slide] So there's sixty-four signs in total. And it's called *Edges of the Ephemeral*. And it was originally done in 2012. But I've, this has been, it's been on its own little tour, kind of around the country, throughout the past decade or so. And it's gonna be in Colorado, um, during another, like, at the end of July, as a big outdoor installation. On the side of a mountain. Which, I don't know how we're gonna put up, but, we'll do it. [laughs]

[switches slide] And this is also, like, the first time I really kind of started using text, like in a more formal setting, kind of like a public exhibition, uh, exhibition. I did use some text in more studio, kind of smaller studio pieces, that I didn't necessarily show to the public, but this is the first time I kind of sent it out into the world more.

[switches slide] This piece is called *She Made For Her*. It's from 2016, um, it was made for a solo show I had at University of Chicago. I, um, so this is all in response to an incident, like, an, or an experience I had at the National Museum of the American Indian, one of the Smithsonian museums in Washington, DC. Um, so we use to go there, I used to take my kids there like on snow days, or if the weather was bad, and we'd just go, like, look around. And we were looking at the different exhibits, and I was listening to this lady who, like, who was visibly Native, and I could tell that she was talking to a group of, like, ten or twelve people, and I just started listening to her. And I started, you know, watching her, you know, talk about different objects. And then I realized that she was like, she had no idea what anything was. [laughter] And she was just making stuff up. Like, [laughs] it was crazy! And so, I started following them, and then I was like, who is this person? Cause then I realized, like, she didn't work there, she didn't have, like, you know, the shirt or anything. And then it just made me start thinking about, like, ideas of truth, and like history, and like all of those different layers about how they kind of all go together. And, like, if a Native tells you something, does that become the truth forever? You know, about like, art history? I don't know, I just started really kind of diving into that. And then, um, I started thinking about, like, what if I just created these objects that were seemingly utilitarian.

And so I started thinking about, like, okay, if I'm Na, you know, being this Native person, living in DC at the time, like, what are the materials I would find in my environment? And, you know, if I was true to that, it wouldn't just be like found wood, and like, natural materials. Like, Ikea's everywhere. Like, right? Like, it's on the streets, it's on Craigslist, you can get it for free, right. And I realized that that was what my source material would be. And so, all of these sculptures are made from Ikea remnants. Like, things that you

would get in as is, like, I did dumpster diving behind Ikea, um, and this started a whole new world for me, [laughs] of using Ikea pieces.

But I love that idea, because innately, it is, like, a truly traditional, like, um, use of materials. Like, this is what my ancestors have done for millennia, used the materials that are around them. Where you don't really have to search too far for them, this is just what's here. And so, the way that I'm, the process of this, the process of gathering, is, is similar to what's been done forever. And so, um, so I started making these pieces, and then, for this show I particular, um, I sent photos of the three different kind of objects here and, to about twenty friends that are, uh, Native women, and I asked them – they kind of know – they're not artists, none of them were artists, but they know me, and they know I do kind of whacky stuff. And so, [laughs] I said, 'If you, if you knew the history of this piece as a Native object, what would it be?' Like, what's the use of this, why was it made, who made it, and so, they all sent me back audio, um, recordings, and so throughout the space are hidden speakers, and so like, if you're sitting on that bench back there, there might be a speaker next to you what this was traditionally used for. And so, um, so there's, and, let's see, there were twenty different voices, and most of them were in English, but were, some were in traditional, like, tribal languages, like Crow, and Navajo, and I think there was a third language as well. Um, and so, yeah, my favorite part of this is like the goofy title, because, 'she made for her,' like if you just take the first letter of each word, SMFH, shaking my fucking head. [laughs] So, I don't know. I like that. [laughter]

And I love this idea that this woman who was touring all these people through the Smithsonian has no idea that she, like, inspired this entire exhibition. So, um, so these [switches slide] are some other, like, these are when they were in my studio, some of the pieces. [switches slide] [switches slide] Look at skill in craftsmanship. [laughter] [switches through slides] So, yeah. So this definitely did start, like, a whole renaissance for me, in terms of using Ikea pieces. [switches slide]

Um, but in the midst of that, I took a break. Um, I was asked to be part of an exhibition that was first shown in Arizona. Um, the exhibition dealt with mining, specifically uranium mining on the Navajo reservation, and, um, that, we, we went out to Arizona for three days, and so it was a different part of Arizona than my family's from, and, um, we met with environmental scientists, we met with psychologists, we met with, um, pediatricians, like, all of these different people, that educated this group of about, I think there was probably about twenty or thirty artists, from all over the southwest, and a couple from the rest of the country, like myself, uh, on, like, the effects of uranium mining.

So, on the Navajo reservation, there is about, over four hundred, um, mines that are still kind of active, that have just been abandoned. And so that means that they're open. Um, they haven't been, like, closed the environmentally friendly way, which means they're exposing residents nearby to different things. I mean, when I say nearby, I'm not talking like a mile or five miles away; I'm talking about, like, we a mine that was like right here and like out where the hill is, there was like a trailer, and they were having a birthday party for a five year old. So, all of these effects are like, very current, and happening to people that live on the reservation.

And during this, um, kind of, like, educational trip, I realized, like, something that I hadn't, that, it, it really hadn't kind of come together for me, fully, but where my family's from, on the rez, um, we have land that goes from the north part of this mountain kind of over into a canyon, and to the south side. And my great-grandpa lived on the south side, and about a half mile – not even a half mile, like a quarter mile from that, I remember growing up, when we'd drive through there to go to town, there was like this weird, like, football field. So this is New Mexico, so it's super high and arid and rocky, and very desert, high desert light. There was this like football field shape that had, like, grass on it. That twenty-four seven had like sprinklers going on it. And I never knew what that was, and nobody ever talked about it, and it never dawned on me to ask what that was, I just was like, oh, that's weird, like, I don't know what that is. And then, when I was in college, um, during a Native American studies class, like, it came up that there was the largest radioactive spill in United States history took place in Church Rock, New Mexico, which is that side of, like, where my family's from. [00:49:57] And I was like, holy cow. Like, and nobody knows about this. This is like one of those weird unknown, we're gonna bury all of the news about this kind of US thing that we do. And, like, if, like, it's literally comparable to what happened at Chernobyl. And nobody knows about it in our history. Um, they didn't evacuate anybody, they didn't alert anybody when this happened. It just happened and they were just like, mm. Okay. We'll just leave this alone now, and walk away. Put some sprinklers on it.

And so, um, and then, so I knew it happened near where my family was, but I didn't quite know where, exactly where, and during this, like, three-day thing, I realized that that's what that football field was. That that's where the, like, the mill, the pond was, the holding pond for all of the remnants of the uranium mining, and that had spilled. And that's where it broke. So I, like literally, the largest, like, toxic waste spill that happened in the United States happened adjacent to my family land. And I had no idea, until – because, we, nobody, I don't even know if my family understood, like, the ramifications of like the whole event. And so, um, so I made this video about it, it's called *Breath of Wind*. [video plays 00:51:16 – 00:52:22] And it's three minutes, we'll just watch a little bit of it. And so it's shots of my family land along with, um, my own body. And this is my grandmother speaking Navajo, talking about the wind. So it's this idea that every time the wind blows, that uranium dust is coming up.

What she's talking about, in particular, are like dust pebbles, like, when they make, like the mini tornadoes and stuff like that. Um, she was the last monolingual Navajo speaker in our family. So she didn't, never spoke English. [video stops] And it's from 2017. But I mis-dubbed it.

[switches slide] Let's see. Um, and then, we're in 2019 now, like, that's kind of where this, um, body of work started. In 2019 to 20, to 2020, I was the artist-in-residence at Colorado College. Um, a small kind of private college in, kind of south of Denver. And, um, during that time, it was the first time that I had free reign to kind of do whatever I wanted. I had a studio at the museum, I had, like, a full-year stipend, um, to make whatever I wanted, and, um, so I just started thinking about, like, okay, what was I interested in, what, what did

I kind of want to talk about, and, um, one of the, like, big things that people were talking about, especially during that time, was this idea of decolonization. Like, that was, like, the trendy word to be using. And I kept thinking, like, what does that mean? What does that actually look like? And do I believe in it?

Um, because for me, I think, you know, I'm not interested in deconstructing something. I'm not interested in ripping apart something. I want something to keep going, or to evolve, and so for me, like, I thought about it, about, as about, like, the indigenization of something. So, what would, how, how, what would that look like? How, how could I illustrate that through sculpture, through artwork? Um, what would need to be indigenized, what action would make the indigenization happen? And so, you know, you've seen the way that I use performance, I don't, like, at most, up until this point, I had done performance in front of maybe eight or nine people. Like, it's always been very private. Um, I don't do it in, I hadn't done it in front of large audiences, like, but I liked it as a way to kind of begin, sometimes, thinking about new things. Because I, for me, I think it's freer than, like, trying to build a sculpture, than trying to do a drawing, because you're just in the moment, kind of messing around.

And so, I started thinking about this idea of wrapping, and how that idea of like binding or wrapping was a very kind of Navajo way of being. Um, because I was thinking about, like, what makes me Navajo? And you not Navajo? Like, what makes us different? And I realized that that act of binding has always been present in my life. From an early age, like, I was in a cradle board, and wrapped up. You know, as soon as I started having hair that could grow long enough, my grandma would brush my hair and put it in, like, a ponytail, or a braid, or a bun, or something like that. And then we would make like, uh, medicine bundles, we would wrap things. Or, you know, um, even within our food we would do that. And those are things I continue with my kids. That's why you always see them with their hair up – they don't ever, like, just have it loose. The way that I was taught is that, like, your hair is your, are your thoughts, and your strength, and if you, um, like, if you leave it down, or you leave it crazy, then that's gonna be how you go through the day. I mean, like, you see my hair most days, and like, I think my grandma would be really mad at me now, but [laughter] cause it's like, askew.

But, um, but I, y - you know, thinking about those traditions, and everything. And so this piece, this was, um, a video still that I did where I wrapped myself up with a whole spool of sinew. Um, and then I took it a step further in thinking about, like, okay, what do I need to decol, what needs to be decolonized? Or, indigenized? And so I started thinking back, like, I was, um, looking a lot, uh looking at a lot of early kind of minimalist sculpture, and, um, started thinking a lot about Sol LeWitt, about how, like, anytime you take an, a sculpture class, or something, usually, he's one of the people that you learn about. And it usually starts with a cube, or something like that. And so, um, I made [switches slide] – let's see. Um, so I started thinking about his work as what needed to be indigenized, and I used Ikea remnants as a stand-in, esp, these are, like, the coffee table legs. Um, and then, I, so for this performance, it's called *12/Make It Right*, but it's, um, the idea that there, you know, in a cube, there are twelve edges, right? Or kind of linear segments. And so this idea that they needed to be indigenized, and I'm the indigenator in that process, so they needed to be

wrapped around me, and so this is, um [switches slide] we'll just look at a [video plays, with some scrubbing, 00:57:12 – 00:57:59] few seconds. So I'm trying to get all twelve pieces, like, bound to my head. [video stops] Let's see.

And then this [video plays briefly] went on, um [switches slide] to kind of these small sculptures that came out, um, of that kind of way of thinking. And so, you have the sinew that's binding everything together, you have the Ikea remnants, um, and I like using aspen a lot, like if you go in my studio now, I actually brought aspen with me. Like, literal aspen trees, from Colorado. And so these are all aspen cutoffs. Um, and in each of them, as well, there is – so, this is the same piece, but there's casts of Native women's body parts, that are part of that process to indigenize. And so for this piece in particular, the, there's porcupine quills coming out, and those show, like, the indigenous, indigenization is working. [switches slide]

And, um, the names of these are kind of like a riff off of Sol LeWitt, like the titles. And so, if I use, however many pieces of, um, Ikea remnants I used in the sculpture, or the performance, or whatever, is what the first number is, and then these words after that, like, I love thinking about my family, and I imagine my grandma, like, yelling at me [laughs] and she'd be like, 'Not too loud!' Like, 'Make it right!' Like, that's where these titles come from. [laughter] Are like, her, her warnings of like, just living throughout the day. And so, in ways, so, I'm indigenizing it also, with that title. Of my grandma yelling at them. [laughs] Let's see.

[switches slide] Um, let's see – these are a couple of drawings that kind of came out of this process as well. Uh, these are about [holding hands up like a frame] this big, and they're done on kind of a thick paper, um, but I burned documents, uh, in thinking about, like, the indigenization of documents, and like burn, bringing them to ash. [01:00:02] And like, to flame, would kind of, like, neutralize them. And so, these are, I did a whole series of these, these drawings. [switches slide] So you can, uh, *burn advertisements for the bounties of Native American body parts and scalps, marks not evenly dispersed*.

[switches slide] Alright. Now, we're moving on to kind of like, kind of newer work. This was still during that same time, at Colorado College, um, and during this time, I was thinking, obviously, about a lot of things, thinking about indigenization, um, thinking about, like, Ikea remnants, and all that kind of stuff. And, um, being, having a studio in the museum, I was also, um, having conversations with the staff within the museum a lot, and something that I, like, I remember thinking about a lot was like, talking to the education staff about, uh, the, like, the idea of the visitor experience. And, like, when somebody sees something, how do you get them to, to get the point, in a way, right? How do you get them to take what you hope they will from whatever they're seeing, as a tour guide, as like signage within, you know, the label, or something like that? And so, and this is also during the time of, like, Black Lives Matter, and like, all these race things happening, and so, I started thinking about, like, how, what about these racial interactions? What if – can I cultivate, like, a good interaction with people? Like, it was, it, the way that I came to it was very, kind of, wholeheartedly. Like, for a minute, like, twenty years ago, I taught second grade, and we learned, um, this pedagogy called responsive classroom, which is basically this idea of, like, if you, um, you know, praise somebody for doing something well, the other

kids are gonna want to do it too. Right? So, I was like, what if I just put these words out into the world?

And so, this was the first billboard I made, and it was in downtown Colorado Springs, um, and it was like up on like a three or four story building. And I, you know, I didn't want my name in it, I didn't want any, like, I wanted it to just be this anonymous thing that I threw out into the world. And I wanted it to be as neutral as possible. Like, I don't know if any of you have seen that documentary *Helvetica*, like, I love Helvetica. [laughs] And that documentary, it's about font, but it's amazing. And so, I knew, like, I want, I loved using like kind of Helvetica bold, because I feel like it's clean, it's neutral, but it's inviting, right? And so, so it's, it's the font that I always use, in most everything I do.

[switches slide] And so this is the second one that went up during that time. And so these were in major streets, and so, like, when you, when you can get a billboard, like, they usually tell you, like, 'This gets 30,000 views per week, or something like that.' And so that's where, so these were on kind of like main thoroughfares. And also during this time, these went up in November of 2019, November, which is like, Native American Heritage Month. Or it was? I don't know if it still is? Right? We're – don't know!

Um, and so, [switches slide] during this time, like, initially I came up with like twenty-three of these, kind of like, phrases. And so, I made two billboards out of them, and then I started thinking about this idea of inserting things into people's lives, and so I created, um, pages on Instagram, and Facebook, and put all of these phrases on there, and made it a business account, and so I started, like, throughout the Native American Heritage Month, of November, every day I would send out, like, three or four of these, as ads, and so, you know, and, I don't know if you know this, but in the business kind of, like, side of things, you can decide who these go to. Right? And so I could send these out to, like, women between the ages of fifty and sixty years old who live in Florida who are shopping for handbags. Right? And then this would, like, just pop up on their feed. And it would say nothing about me, it would say nothing about anything, and it would just go back to this page, with no information.

Because I wasn't interested in, like, cultivating a relationship or anything. I just wanted to mess with their moment, of, like, scrolling. And so, um, it's pretty cool, because through the analytics you can see that, like, throughout that month, I think I got like 35,000 interactions. And, yeah, I mean, I got some comments, that were like, not nice, like what the hell are you bothering me for or whatever, but like, but overall, it was like really fun, and really, like, people were really nice about it. And it, like, every day I would change the analytics to something random.

[switches slide] And so, this whole project [returns to previous slide] is called *The Native Guide Project*. That's what, um, [advances back to previous slide] the initial title is. And it started in 2019, and I'm still continuing. And I've shown it, um, like all across the country, from like Arizona to Portland, Oregon, to, um, New York. It's going up in Long Island next month. And then, um, it's like been in – well, I'll show you a lot of installations of it.

This is what, um, this is gonna be in, or this is in Scottsdale, it's at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, and, um, they had one big printout of it here. They had it live, like, the live Instagram feed, on the wall, and then they had exterior banners. And then they had billboards, the digital billboards throughout the like Phoenix metro areas. Wow. So this one's my favorite one. Um, I like it, I'm thinking of like dreams, like, that you have at night. Like this idea, like, when you're thinking about people that are very different than you, you don't think about them, like, peacefully dreaming at night. You know? And I just think it's a really beautiful kind of, like, thought. So. And I do know that they come off as sarcastic, and that's what I love about them too, is that they're like this double-edged sword, that people, some people think I'm being, like, you know, kind of like sarcastic about this, and some people are like, 'Oh, it's just really nice,' you know? So. [switches slide] Yeah.

This is an installation I did of it at the Wexner Center for the Arts, at the Ohio State University. Um, and so, I initially did, like, their entire lobby with text pieces, and then we expanded to the exterior [switches slide] of the arts center, into like, these squares, this weird grid system they have all around. And then they were like, 'Hey, we have access [switches slide] to all these digital monitors all over downtown,' and so I did all these ones for downtown. And a lot, this one was the first time that I made them more specific to a location, as well. So I, I was thinking more about the kind of like Ohio River Valley.

[switches slide] And then this one was the culmination, a large, um, billboard, and there were two, I think, text pieces rotating on this. And these were right across the street from the Ohio State Capital, which was fun. Cause I love this idea that, like, you know, state politicians would be walking in every day, and see this kind of stuff. And they'd be like, 'Who's Tecumseh?' [laughs] And they'd, like, Google it. And have to educate themselves.

And then, [switches slide] during this same time, this was, um, part of Counterpublic Triennial, in Saint Louis, Missouri. And so, this is another piece. This is somebody else's piece down here. [switches slide] But it was on the banks of the Mississippi River. And then, when I did that, they were like, [switches slide] 'Hey, we have these monitors too!' [laughter] And so I did some, um, pieces for that. [takes a drink]

And most recently, with *The Native Guide Project*, um, [switches slide] I was commissioned to do a piece at the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens, which is here in Maine, uh, [laughing] obviously. And it's about an hour and a half away, and, um, so I, you know, thinking a lot about this idea of, like, land, because this is a more permanent sculpture, and thinking about it being kind of par, you know, it's actually built into the land, I wanted, I was very aware of, like, me not being Wabanaki, and being asked to do this in Wabanaki area. And knowing that it was gonna be more permanent. And so I wanted to kind of bring in some of their history, to give, to highlight it, and so these are shell middens, um, about, probably like ten years ago, my father-in-law took me to these shell middens that are like in Damariscotta, which is probably about an hour and a half away – everything's like an hour and a half away. Um, an hour and a half away from here, but on the banks of the Damariscotta, that's where a lot of the oyster, um, beds are. And there are shell middens like this, so like piles of oyster shells that are literally over five thousand years old, that are

like two stories tall. That were higher than that at some point, but people would come and take them and grind them up for like concrete and stuff like that. But, um, I just thought it was like this beautiful idea that, like, the Native people were the first connoisseurs of like oysters in this area. And they knew where to go, and that's where people still go. And they were probably eating their oysters, and like [miming movement] throwing them behind them, and like, all of a sudden, it built up, like a cartoon, right? And so, um, so I wanted to kind of show that. And then during this research, I realized there were other places, more locally, that had smaller middens, and so they come out of the ground, it's like, forty feet, probably, like across, and then like, I think it takes up maybe thirty feet from front to back, for these four middens. [01:09:59] And there's granite, and like, just thousands of oyster shells.

Let's see here. [switches slide] And you can kinda see, the text is similar, it's engraved into the granite. Like, text that I would usually use. [switches slide] Let's see here.

[switches slide] Um, and so while a lot of my work kind of deals, like, has this more sarcastic edge to it, this, um, kind of, like, funny, like, there's humor kind of underlying in it. There are times where, you know, I become more serious, depending on like subject matter, like I did with the uranium, um, mining, and like that video. And in 2018, there was, um, a study that came out from the Urban Indian Health Center in Seattle, Washington, about the number of missing and murdered indigenous women in the United States, and the number of cases that were, like, not being investigated, that were just kind of left open. And so, I wanted to do something about that. Um, and kind of highlight that, um, issue, in a way. And so I ended up asking friends, like, um, if they would send selfies of themselves. Because what I noticed, in looking at a lot of these missing posters, was that it's not like a professional portrait that people post, usually. It's usually a selfie that the woman took herself. And, so, I asked Native women to send me, um, photos, and so I created this video [switches slide] um, out of it, and it's, um, the video is about five minutes long, and in the beginning of the video, they start sort of popping up, the selfies, kind of at a slower rate, and then it gets faster and faster and faster. And so, I'm trying to draw the, like, the features of the portraits of the women, but I obviously can't, and, because it's always changing. And so, it's this idea [video plays 01:12:04 – 01:12:46] kind of that, um, like, it's, you know what an exquisite corpse exercise is? Right? That you do in art class, where, like, you have a drawing that you start, and then you trade with somebody else before it's done, and, everybody ends up being part of it. It's kind of the reverse of that. So the image is always changing, but it's part of one drawing.

Um, and so, the idea within that is also, like, not just that kind of moment of like, them all blending together in some way, like, which is not good, right, it's kind of this horrific idea of identities blending into one. But also, the name of the exercise, which, like, is a terrible name! Um, when you think about it, and how it actually speaks to this. [switches slide] And so, these were the eight different drawings that kind of came out of that. [switches slide] And then this is like one of them – [gesturing to indicate size] and they're like about that big. And they're just done with graphite on paper.

[switches slide] And then during this same time, um, [switches slide] I was asked [video plays briefly] by the National Portrait Gallery, at, um [switches slide], in Washington, DC, to be part of an exhibition called *Kinship*, um, that, that was part of their *Portraiture Now* series, so they do, originally, they did it every other year, but everything got messed up during the pandemic, but, um, where they asked, like, seven or eight artists from across the country to, who focus on portraiture – I'm not sure how I got into it, [laughing] but, to like, to be in this. And so, but they asked me if I would do a performance, for this. And so, this was the first time that they'd ever asked an artist to be in an exhibition, and the main artwork was a performance.

And so throughout the fourteen-month run of the exhibition, I did two different performances that were an hour long, um, and then, when I wasn't there, this is the piece that was there. So this is, um, Kaysera, who is a friend of mine's niece, who went through this, um, who was missing, and who was then ended up, found to be murdered. Um, and, you know, when we talk about performance, like, the one thing that I feel like inevitably happens is that it becomes about the performer. Like, the performance, and about, like, you, like, your face, like, what, whatever, um, face you're making, whatever movements you're doing, and I didn't want it to be about me. Like, I really saw this as an opportunity to highlight other people, and other stories, and I saw myself as just, like, a pedestal for that. And how could I do a performance to where I wasn't the main focus, even though, even though I was the one moving throughout the space. Um, and so that's something, you know, I was thinking about, and this is, um, [switches slide] this is like a three-minute video, of the performance, and I'll just, we'll just kinda jump around a little but, since we're [video plays, with some scrubbing, 01:15:02 – 01:16:34] – and I highlighted four Native women, who, like, were all varied in terms of tribal affiliation, geography, and also definitions of womanhood. Um, because I thought that was really important to bring up. This is my brother. He's a Grammy-nominated Native singer.

And so, like I said, every, like, all of the performance I had done, like at most, had like maybe eight people. And then they were like, 'Hey, can you come do this in front of hundreds of people?' That was kinda crazy. [video stops]

So, yeah. So that was, um, this one was filmed in May, I think May 5, which is Missing and Murdered Indigenous People's Awareness Day, and so, um, it was nice to be able to kind of have that as a celebration, or kind of just like, not a celebration, but a memorial for those people. And, um, and it was really important for me, during this time, too, because I was getting interviewed, you know, people were asking questions about this, and it was, um, important for me to make sure [switches slide] that, like, the families were highlighted. So I would all, get asked a lot, like, 'Who, in your family, is there somebody who's MMIW?' And I'd be like, 'This isn't about me, let's talk about these four families.' And so, I would always bring it back to them. Because that's, for me, that's what it was about, was about this opportunity – like, when I was first asked to be in this, you know, it's this museum that shows the most important, um, Americans, supposedly. And so, I immediately knew that these are the Americans that I wanted to highlight. That needed to be in this space, along with all the Presidents, and all of the different, like, historical heroes, um. So that's kind of where that comes from, yeah.

[switches slide] And then [switches slide] we go back to humor. [laughs] Um, in, I think in 2021, um, I received a Creative Capital grant, for a project called *Indigenous Absurdities*. And it was meant, it's meant to be an investigation into ideas of Native humor. And, um, kind of communal jokes, and I originally had this idea that me and my dad, cause I do all my art stuff with my dad, that we would travel around to different Native communities, and collect jokes, and talk to people, and learn, like, just learn different phrases and stuff, but then COVID happened, it was, you know, during that time, and that wasn't an option. And so I ended up just talking to friends, and then gathering different things online, and over the phone. Um, and I realized, like, as I was doing that, that this, the specific kind of corner of like Indian humor I wanted to focus on was this idea of the way that specifically, um, women, like, roast each other. [laughs] And how we kinda tease each other, out of love, like, you know, I'm the city cousin, I'm from an urban area, I wasn't raised on the reservation, but when I would go home, to the reservation, and see my aunties, they'd always tease me, like, 'Ah, you can't even make frybread,' 'Ah, you can't even braid hair,' like, you know what I mean? Like, I was always the butt of all jokes. And that's just like, fine, you know? And, but I knew that it was like out of love. And, you know, and it wasn't, it was hurtful, but not in a cutting kind of way. And so, that's what I decided I really wanted to focus on. And for the first time, um, for this show, I came up with, um, the titles first. And, um, this was at MCA Denver, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver, and it opened in the summer of 2023. [01:19:54] Um, and so, it encompassed six sculptures and six kind of collages on wood panel that were like, um, four by six feet. And then one video. And so, like, these, to me, for the first time, the titles are, like, are texts. This was also when I brought together, like, the text with the sculptural work, and so for me, the titles are just as important as the actual objects that I made.

And so this is *She Must Be A Matriarch*, it's, um, kind of a flip of an old sculpture from the early 1900s of this, um, Native warrior that's like slumped over on a horse, kind of like shown in a sign of defeat, and he has like a spear, and he looks, looked really sad. Like, I wanted to, like, re-change all that, and so, do, um, like this idea of feminine strength, and like, even though it's called *She Must Be A Matriarch*, which is like, somebody making fun of somebody [laughs] like, it's also this idea of like, well fuck that, yeah, I am the matriarch, you know? And we're moving forward, and we're going – so these are all casts of Native women's arms, um, and then these down here are all about three hundred, um, condoms that are blown up, filled with like liquid plastic, and then the horse is fiberglass, and then there's a chair, like, on the back of the horse [switches slide], um, because, like, you know, in the US, we always say, like, you know, getting, bringing a chair to the table for women, and it's kind of like, fuck that, I don't need the chair, and I flipped it over, you know?

And so there's all these like moments in here for me that kind of are like playing with ideas of feminine strength and empowerment. [switches slide] Um, and then there's like diva cups, and like, wrenches, so that way, she can like throw a wrench into any situation. And like, if you don't believe in all of that power, there's an elder wand [laughs] right there, as well. From *Harry Potter*. [laughs] So, um, so yeah. Hitting all the bases there.

[switches slide] And so these were some other pieces in the show. The titles of the text pieces are the text that's on there. This is a piece right here called *She Thinks She's Too Good. Her Frybread Isn't That Good*. And these are all like Native women's, um, bodies, as well, that are in the collages. [switches slide] [switches slide] Um, perfect – and that's one called *She's All Tradish*.

[switches slide] And this is kind of like a big shot. [switches slide] And then this is the video that was like in the, a third room. Um, it's called *She's All Somehow*. This is a very, like, Navajo saying, uh, like we always, like, any time anybody doesn't have like a specific descriptor, they're just like, 'She's all, like, somehow.' [laughs] Like, just like, really Navajo. [video plays 01:22:56 – 01:25:33] And these are different audios, these are, um, there's Ina Garten teaching you how to make a panini, is one of the audios. There's audio of, um, a conversation with my aunt and my uncle and a friend of mine, like, drinking wine and like just laughing and joking around. And then, um, a third audio of, like, a sitcom. [video stops]

So that gives you a little snippet of that video. Um, [video plays briefly] and so this is like [switches slide] where my work is kind of sitting now, like, more generally, um, still with the text work, and the collages, and the importance of titles, um, these are some pieces that were shown at Independent Art Fair last year, with Tilton Gallery, in New York, um [switches slide] let's see. And then, and so you can see [switches slide] like the titles, like, *She's So Tough She Whistles at Night*, and these all still have, like, Ikea pieces, and pieces of aspen in them. And casts of Native women's hands. Um, but I started incorporating some other kinds of things, like antlers, and just [switches slide] other found objects.

And this is *She Still Thinks Her Shit Smells Like Sage*, [laughter] and this is like, [gesturing with her hands] about that big. And then [switches slide] these were some text pieces, that were in there [laughter] as well. [switches slide] [laughter]

And then the last three pieces I'm gonna show you are, like I've never made pieces, I think, that speak so directly to a current issue, and, um, after the Trump in, inaugurate, inauguration, like, I was thinking about that a lot. And thinking about, because there were, you know, big sects of every population, but within the Native community, there were a lot that voted for, you know, our current president. And so I wanted – and that, I was just, like, thinking about that, and dealing with it, and like, thinking, is this how they imagined it turning out? Is this, like – so I started thinking about, like, cautionary tales, and that type of thing. [switches slide]

Um, and so these are really bad photos that was taken on my iPhone, because this work is just like, from a couple months ago, um, that were in a show, and I haven't documented them properly. That's why it's blue for no apparent reason. Um, but these are, so I'm incorporating more like found objects on collages, and making them a little bit more three-dimensional. [switches slide] And so those are actual arrows, and so the paper printout of the hands go over that, and then they're stapled with sinew. [switches slide] And then, um – and these are actual saw blades. That are on, with the text printouts of, like, the text printout and the printouts of the hands, and, like, staples and sinew.

So, yeah. Thank you. [applause, cheering] Any questions? I know we have a karaoke gig to get to. [laughter]

Audience member: Eh, thank you Anna, for your beautiful lecture. [house lights come up] I wanted to know more about, um, your time at, your childhood, maybe, um, how you lived your first years, also like how you, um, get closer to art practice.

Tsouhlarakis: About my early years? My childhood? Um, well I was raised, that's something I usually always talk about, but I was raised by a single dad, and so, that's why I talk about him a lot, because, like, he was everything, right? And so, my grandmother came in and started helping out when I was really young, as well, and so I was raised by a single, very macho, like, Native Greek dad, and my grandmother, who was like super traditional. And, um, and what I mean by that, it's kind of like, every day it would be [laughing] like, what are you doing, you're doing that wrong – because, like, Navajo women are supposed to do this, or that, or something like that. And so I grew up with that kind of mentality, of like, always having to kind of correct myself. But also, like, growing up with strong traditions, um, but I think for me, like, the biggest thing was that, my dad, you know, my family's from the reservation, my dad was from the reservation, but then we moved to Kan, he moved to Kansas for college. For junior college. [01:30:01]

And, um, so he got off the reservation, and, you know, raised my brother and I out there, in Kansas, and so, and he wanted us to get a really solid education, like, it was all about education – like I remember at a young age, him taking us to the library, and he wasn't like a big reader or anything, and I don't know, like, he just knew to do that. Right? And he just knew to feed us, like, artistically, and like with literature, even though that wasn't how he was raised, and he didn't really have experience with that. Like I remember, you know, going to museums with him, in Kansas City, and seeing, like, famous artworks, that, like, I remember being kind of funny or something like that, and then like nowadays, I'm like, oh, that's this artist, or whatever, and so, he just raised us with such a rich childhood, even though he didn't come from much. And I think, like, when I think about me, myself, like being a mom, like, I know, I don't know because I had a mom, I know because I had the best dad. You know? And like, it was just, for me, like, a balance of everything, and it really created who I am, and like how I work across disciplines, and like, really trying to, you know, support people and all – I don't know, for me, that's all kind of entangled in that.

Audience member: Hi, thanks, Anna. Um, I was wondering if you'd speak a little bit to, uh, working across these different modalities of sculpture, performance, collage, and how you think about those, and if there are ever projects that start out as one and become another, or, yeah, need more navigation through what final form to take?

Tsouhlarakis: I think, um, early on, especially like in the 2000s, like, the biggest critique of my work was that I didn't have a style. That I didn't stick to one thing. And, I knew, like, when I started making work, I was like, there's no way I am gonna have, like, make one thing one way forever. Like, that just sounds so boring! [laughs] And, and I love, like, as I started learning new techniques, I always wanted to learn something new, or figure out, like, how to do this, or that, and so, um, and it was, it tended – and it still tends to

be, like, the idea and the concept that dictates whatever I'm using. And I feel like, you know, as I've aged, or as my practice has progressed, um, [laughs] I have gotten more confident in like being able to say, well, this is what this is gonna be. You know what I mean? Um, and, I would say, I'm usually pretty good about knowing whether something's gonna be a video, or, like, sculptural, or something like that, early on. Um, but I'm not afraid to like move, like, maneuver within that.

Like, I've always known, because my dad, you know, made jewelry, and, you know, he sold that to make, to help our family, and to make money, he was relegated to making work that was sold, right? A certain, that, that, what looked Native, what he knew the market wanted. And so, I knew that I never wanted to rely on my artwork to make money. That I wanted to make what needed to be made, and what I felt needed to be made, not what anybody else needed to. And so that's something that I'd always, like, held onto, no matter what, is like, I'm not, like – and, you know, I remember my dad, you know, when I was in college, he was like, 'Oh my god, how are you gonna make money doing all that weird stuff?' And like [laughter] the first time I sold a video, I was like, boom! [laughter] So, it, but, I think that's the thing, is that if you're true to your vision, and you believe in it, right? That, that it will come, that the other things will come.

And I think, yeah, I'm a slow burn, I'm forty-eight, but it's, it's happening, you know? And I feel, um, that my work is being accepted for what it is, that I can decide what it's gonna be, and I'm proud that I had stayed true to that.

Audience member: Thank you for your lecture. Um, what you just said kinda answered my question, but we could be diving in deeper – my question was, like, how do you navigate in institutions where they specifically want the artist to sit into a category of work?

Tsouhlarakis: They usually know when they come to me that I don't. [laughs] Like, I don't, I mean, yeah, I don't, I say, I don't even wanna say, like, I don't call myself an interdisciplinary artist. Like, I say I'm a sculptor, I'm an installation artist, I'm a performance artist – like, I list it all out. Because I don't even want to call myself, like, interdisciplinary, or multi – that's just like my personal preference, because I feel like I can be all these things. And I think, for me, that stems from identity, like, my dad, like, knew Navajo traditions, but his dad died when he was young, and he didn't know much about being Greek, and he had lost contact with our Greek family. But he raised us always, and he'd like, 'You're Native! But you're also Greek!' You know what I mean? And it was always this constant, like, you're not half of this or part this – you're each. You're wholly both things.

And so for me, I can be all of those things at once. And if you can't handle that, that's not my fault. I can be complicated, and complex. And I can ruin your own definition of what a Native artist is, and that's my hope. So. [laughs]

Audience member: Thank you.

Audience member: Um, hello. Hi!

Tsouhlarakis: Hey.

Audience member: Just wondering if you think, if you thought about doing a part two to the dance video this summer. [laughter, clapping, applause]

Tsouhlarakis: I hadn't, until literally this afternoon, when I was walking through there, and I was like, oh my god, that's like, what I have to do, isn't it? [laughter] I don't know – if I can get my other thing done first. [laughter]

Audience member: Hi, Anna, thanks so much. Um, actually, it's similar to Sam, it might be too big a question to answer right now, but you're so – yeah, you really do, like, when you explained the rocketships, I was like, oh no, are those gonna get sold or something, and you're like, oh, they're gonna get installed in this outdoor public – in this space, and I'm like, how do you – you've like released the, and you just said it, like, you didn't want to make money from your artwork, you want to find a different way. Um, can you like, I don't know, can you expand, like, walk us through a little bit of how you had that patience, or had that, steadiness to be like, I'm not gonna – I don't know. Do you have these contracts? Do you have really, like, like for that piece, the three, like, they asked you to make the rocketships. Were, like, are those sellable? Are they, do they have, like, I mean, this is a big – I know it's, you might just not want to answer it, but –

Audience member: [INAUDIBLE COMMENT OFF MIC]

Tsouhlarakis: [laughs] Um, so yeah, I mean, anything's sellable, right? But, and I've, like, I think, I've slowly come around, but also, like, the market has come around, and it's buying things that weren't deemed sellable before, are all of a sudden sellable, right? Like conceptual ideas. Like these banners that I make. Or, like *The Native Guide Project*. Like, a museum owns one of three of these now. Like an edition.

And so, I've made them commodifiable, if somebody wants it, but it's not what I'm worried about. Like, um, when I was in grad school, like, I already had this idea that I wasn't worried about making money off this, and then Adrian Piper, um, the artist, came to our MFA program, and she said, 'The best advice I can give you is don't rely on – if you want to make the work you want to make, don't ever rely on your work to sell.' And she, you know, she had worked all through the '70s and '80s, and I, she said it wasn't until the very end of the '80s that she sold her first work. And so, that really gave me the idea, you know, that kind of confidence to kind of move forward in kind of my thinking already. And I, I mean, I'm also, like, I have done, like, a year of, like, studio, like residencies, and stuff like that. And I learned I'm not a solitary artist that likes to work alone. You know, in my studio. I like to be in community, I like to be talking to people, and that's why I teach, because I, I like that.

Um, and so, for me, it's easy to kind of navigate that, to be able to have another, you know, like, a separate kind of money-making endeavor, and this. I mean, yeah, I think, well,

how can I sell stuff, but it's not the sole focus. And if I have to worry about it too much, then I don't want to do it.

But luckily, it's, you know, worked out. [laughter]

Audience member: Thank you for this beautiful lecture. Um, you've spoken about, uh, you've spoken about, uh, humor, extensively, in your, in your lecture, and in, through these bodies of works, you've tapped at humor, and you've dissected humor, as part of your practice. And I guess, I'm sitting with it, and I feel like there's some, there's some works as well that you've pulled at grief, and you're teasing at grief, as well, and it's been a form of grieving, and I think I'm curious, for you, as the artist yourself, have you found catharsis in any of the practice? In the, in the motions of the humor, and the grief, like, is there healing for you in the making, um, through the, through the humor and the grief? [01:40:06]

Tsouhlarakis: I definitely, like, my, my grandma, that raised me, passed away, she passed away in like '94, maybe. And, um, but I realized, like, as I was starting to make those titles for those, like, *12/Make It Right*, like, those pieces, like, I was able to bring her words in to it. And, like, my extended family, like, none of them are artists. Like, back home on the rez. And, like I'd be around, and they'd always ask me, like, what I'm up to, or I'm, cause they're like, 'Anna does crazy things, and she goes out and travels,' and stuff. So I remember I was talking to my aunt and my uncle, and then explaining to them like, the art, that art show, that I was having, and I said, 'And these are the titles,' and then my uncle was like, 'Well, how do you come up with the titles?' And I told him, and I said, 'This text part, it reminds me of grandma. Of like, what she would yell.' And he just started cracking up when he saw the list of them. And they were like, 'That sounds exactly like her.' And like, to me, I mean, that was just like, amazing, to me, that my family, like, people who knew her could connect with that. And that was just the most beautiful thing in the world.

And like, to be able to bring, like my brother, like I don't get to see – my brother and I used to be, like, inseparable. And like, to be able to bring him into the space. And like, to perform with me, it was just, like, phenomenal. So, and even like, the uranium, so that, um, at that point, when I made that, in 2017, my other grandma had started, um, kind of early onset dementia. So she wasn't really, like, fully coherent, and everything. But to be able to walk into like a black box screening area, and hear her voice all around you? Like, the first time I heard that, I started crying. Um, and so, and I know, like, my family, I've showed that video to other members of my family, and they just immediately begin weeping. Because everybody – I remember when I would go and record her, like, that wasn't recorded for that video, that was just like, I would go and record her, and like, ask her questions, and take pictures of her all the time. And people always just thought I was, you know, like, being weird, but now, like, to have that archive, and like, be able to pull from it in different ways, and highlight her through, like, these different pieces, it's just, it's amazing.

So, yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think that I find that in my work.

Karaoke? Martini? Good? Alright, thank you all. [applause, cheering]

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