

2023 Paul Mellon Lecture, Walter Hood, July 13

Shaun Leonardo: {applause} So, in preparing for this introduction, I came across a term that our guest uses, which I struggled with, and struggled through: native cultural landscape. And now, I came to realize that my struggle was with in the combination of words, and acquiring some meaning into how I might link the three, so I separated them out instead. Native, for me, meaning belonging, pre-existing, home. Cultural, of course, being those things, symbols, behaviors, activities that define a society, a people. And then landscape, most plainly, meaning the place in which we reside. The space. Our guest tonight proposes a refusal to the idea that such a landscape can be created out of singular brilliance. There is instead a belief in an emotive and spiritual response, rather than an articulation of a statement, or answer.

Walter Hood is known for modern landscape forms that engage with nature, in response to nature. Respecting what is already present in the development of something artful. A beauty which emerges out of an interrogation of place. The use of that word purposeful here, excuse me. So let's talk about that interrogation of place, let's talk about that a little bit. Or maybe, let's visualize it together. I want you to take a walk with me. Of course not literally, though it would be nice in this heat. I want you to visualize your walk up the hill to upper campus. To this place. Have you yet identified a sign, a plant, a tree, a rock, a leaf that you direct your eyes to on a regular basis that therefore in that identification may start to claim that path, that journey, as your own? Is it possible that your walk up the path might have personal meaning? Are we even in agreement that a path might carry personal meaning? Maybe we need to start with something a little less complicated, like the solitary space of our studios. I think it's easier to attribute individual meaning to these stud, these spaces, the spaces that we've rearranged, that we've claimed our own, for our artistic activity, for our creative energies. I know that when I arrived on the first day, I felt compelled to check into my old studio, 2004. The very first thing that I did was look for a pattern in the wood, because in 2004, Dr. David Driscoll, who would later become my mentor, sat down and interrupted whatever the fuck I was talking about and pointed out the fact that in the wood, in the bottom right corner, there seemed to be a symbol, a little grain in the wood that resembled the continent of Africa. And he predicted that as an omen of some kind. And so while that studio is now Mustafa's, Mus's, I will always claim that {choking up} studio, in my memory of looking at that symbol of Africa.

Maybe it's easier to, to claim or gain collective meaning. This is where we light a bonfire. This is where we eat and dine together. This is where we get muffins. This is where we talk shit. (00:05:04) {laughter} But what else can we decide on together? What type of collective activities start to bestow meaning onto a place? Maybe we don't have to decide at all. Under Hood's principle of twoness, we reckon that a space need not be reconciled. That a place may be more than one thing. He asks us then to listen not for wholeness, but instead messiness. What can we find when histories diverge, or memories, like my own and whatever memories Mus is going to create - what can happen when histories diverge and memories collapse upon one another? Can we even agree to the relevancy of this place? With frescos, with our experience of these lectures, both good and bad.

Walter Hood states, a place does not exist until there seems to be some consciousness of meaning. But meaning need not be fixed. Settled. Such a proposition exists in his notable designs, such as the Woodrow Wilson marker at Princeton University, the Curtain of Courage memorial in San Bernardino, California. The Witness Walls, a public art installation in Nashville, Tennessee. The Shadowcatcher at Foster homestead and burial ground, in the University of Virginia. And more recently, and most, maybe, grand, at the International African-American Museum landscape for, in Charleston, South Carolina, and even his own proposal for an infrastructure of walkways and pavilions in the wetlands of South Carolina, recently presented at the Venice Architecture Biennale. These are charged sites, sites to be negotiated, contested. So maybe, our responsibility to site, therefore, is in the excavation of complexity, which then leads to dialogue. Maybe, our relationship to site, and therefore to one another, may just reside in the entanglement of our collective meaning making. Which we will do here all summer.

Our guest Walter J. Hood is a designer and educator. Hood has worked in a variety of settings, including architecture, landscape architecture, art, community, urban design planning, research. He is the former chair of landscape architecture at the University of California-Berkeley, and is currently the principle of Hood Design Studio in Oakland, California. And in 2019, he was awarded a MacArthur genius grant. Y'all, please welcome Walter Hood. {applause, cheering}

Walter Hood: I don't think I'm gonna make it through this, man, you're gonna mess me up. Um, thank you for the wonderful introduction, um, and before I begin, I'd like to thank all of you, and particularly those who I've had the great privilege of hanging out in your studio. You really reinforce the idea of education, teaching, camaraderie, courage, fearlessness, fellowship, companionship, I can go on and on. And I talked to a lot of you about this idea of having courage. And I'm gonna show some work tonight, and by no way does this work suggest this is the single way to approach work. You know, work is hard. It's great to have theoretical ideas, but to have tho, that work come face-to-face with having to make decisions to make something. And you guys probably know this sitting in the studio looking at those walls, four weeks left, fuck, I gotta make something. Right? {laughter} But that takes courage. (00:10:02) And you can imagine in that kind of insular abode of the studio, how hard it is. But imagine if you got 100 people, 1,000 people, 10,000 people waiting for that response. But that's the work.

Tonight, it's gonna be like a church in here, it's hot. I'm gonna try to keep it under an hour, so we don't melt away. But I want to talk specifically about landscape, meaning, representation. And the attempt to recover, not maybe just voices, but to recover things that are here in plain sight. [switches slide] I really value this idea of place, and when I moved to California from New York and Philadelphia, back in the late '80s, early '90s, I thought I would just be there for three years. Cause I thought I would make my home in Philly, cause there was something about Philly that I loved. Thirty some-odd years later, I'm still in Oakland. And there's something about being in a place, right? You know – oh. I gather a lot of moss by being in Oakland. I've seen a lot of changes, earthquakes, fires, riots. Turn of a century. The change in leadership. Squalor. I've actually found a new colonial landscape in Oakland where people constantly come into my neighborhood and say, 'I

discovered this place.' Right? And in being in a place long enough, you see that cycle. And you learn that history does repeat itself if you let it. And can you get in the way and disrupt that cycle. And particularly for those who can't stand in the way.

[switches slide] Our studio started out, me, as a young assistant professor at UC Berkeley, trying to figure out how to get tenure. I thought I was a researcher, I got a grant to go out and do field research that I hated, and I said, I need to make things. And, at some point, I said, I want to make work that deals with justice. Work that deals with memory and history. But more important, where do I fit in to the work? And we kinda call that embracing the strange. I was talking to someone today about ethnoautobiography, which I learned in art school. That my presence on this earth is research. That my story can actually influence decisions that I make about things, just like going to the library, and actually doing annotative bibliography, my life is an annotative bibliography. And that if I put it out there, I can actually begin to use it, but it takes courage, because every context that I was put in, no one looked like me, and no one could understand those, that ethos, that history and those things. And that was just part of the work. And so, for the last twenty-five years, in teaching and working, ideas have shaped my career. And they don't last! They change. Like I remember my first set of ideas was about improvisation, I was taken by jazz and blues and how, you know, Vlach talked about this idea of, uh, the African-American culture, this reshaping of the old into the new. And then I took a jazz improvisation class with Grover Sales, who was Miles' roadie, and he showed me the same thing happens in music. But then I looked at the art, the medium was working with, it was different, it wasn't music. Well, how do I do that? And this idea of embracing these familiar things then became the subtext for the work. But then after maybe six or seven years, it was a new thing happening, because the world changed around me. And that's one thing I wanna posit, don't be afraid to change. If you have an idea, those ideas should change over time.

[switches slide] And so one of the last decade, I've been really interested in this idea of memory. As I get older, I want to remember things in particular ways, and in my class, we use Lowenthal. And in particular I use these five different, six different ways to talk about the past with my students: the tangible, the collective, irrecoverable, ostensible, the altered, invented. They're all here around us. Right? You can go to places where we've invented history in this country. Just like made that shit up! Or we take it and we make it ostensible. There's a little fiction, there's a little truth. But all of these things exist, and if you really want to understand you've got to work through those ideas. (00:15:02)

[switches slide] I'll give you an example. In Charlotte, North Carolina, the Pomodoro Grande Disco, the fifteen-foot high in diameter piece, in the '70s, as I was getting into high school, this piece went up in my downtown. And I was like, wow! This is before *Star Wars*, so we didn't even know that was like *Star Wars*-looking, right? But it was like, what is that thing? And Pomodoro said, this is a dynamic city, it's changing, it's symbolizing moods, responses, all of this, and the future was new, and you could push it, and it would turn. Right? I left Charlotte, two [switches slide] two years ago, I'm standing on the corner of Trade and Tryon, and I notice, fuck, what are these four statues? The Pomodoro was pushed to the side, but this is the new future. The ostensible past. And I looked at them, I'm like, who is that lady with a baby? Who's the person over here? Who's the prospector?

There was gold in Charlotte? But all of these things, and Mr. Kaskey is from the northeast. I noticed that guy, right there on the left, I'm like, huh, there's a brother with a hammer. And I had forgotten that North Carolina was part of the Confederacy. So I had to go back and look, say, were there slaves in North Carolina? Of course there were. But that's a new origin story, invented in the '90s, and no one questions that Black man with a hammer who worked on the railroad. Someone told me, oh, that's John Henry. It's not fucking John Henry! It's a fiction. And so if we begin to kinda think of those things, we can begin to question where we are. [switches slide] And today we are beginning to sort of tackle that postcolonial through these dualities of a double logic, a double semiotic, and a double consciousness. The double logic is how can we live in a world where we can go to the other and not worry about it. We go to a neighborhood and, oh, it's a poor neighborhood. It's a Black neighborhood. And we're okay with it. Go to the other neighborhood, ahh, and get some espresso. I can go to the hood. How do we live with that duality? How do we deal with the different signs and symbols? No loitering. No more than fifteen people here. All are welcome. We're constantly shifting, which creates this double consciousness, and I would argue Du Bois was really talking about African-Americans being at the turn of the century, but a lot of people are affected even today by the consciousness of those dualities. That we shape ourselves by how people look at us and force us and want us to act a certain way. And so how do we get out of this? And I think love [switches slide] can make that happen. Right? If we begin to kinda look at the collective, and we begin to look at ourselves, and begin to think about how we came to be, but how those futures might coexist along the way.

I'm gonna show a series of projects that kind of parallel the studio practice. And for [switches slide] a long time, I couldn't get work, because I didn't have any work. And I was lucky enough to find a project here, in this sand dune. And this is San Francisco in like 1870s? This is Golden Gate Park. So if you ever go to San Francisco, this is what Golden Gate Park used to look like. It was a giant sand dune. And someone was like, we need a central park. We need to make this. Olmstead came out and was like, nope, you shouldn't do it here, you should do it every, somewhere else. But McLaren was like, we're doing it here, took a trip to Europe, found out how they were actually taking dunes, landscapes, and turning them into landscapes. So they would start with grass, once the grass kept, they would plant the trees, and before you know it, [switches slide] you got this. Right? This landscape. Which most people think is natural. But we worked on the de Young Museum, with Herzog and de Meuron, and this was the first project that allowed us to really talk about things. And so everything here is about sand. It's about how the sand moves, and about history. [switches slide] None of this was about me. But it was about that place. And so the first decade of the work was really about going to places and trying to understand the flora that came from Australia, that came from Japan, that came from Chile. That, how all these things came to make a fiction, right?

[switches slide] Or in LA, Eli Broad wanted a museum and there was no landscape. And he was like, I'm almost ninety years old and I need something. So we found 120-year-old olive trees from Spain, and we put them there to create that fiction. But it was about that LA fiction. [switches slide] These landscapes were trying to deal with that place. Deal with how these places act. [switches slide] Or my own hometown, in Oakland, seeing the

futile development of West Oakland and these poor neighborhoods, people putting in things that exist in other neighborhoods that just died when they went to West Oakland, because of the scale. (00:19:59) And so we decided to start looking at those infrastructures, those freeways, those signages, and actually using them as a way to talk about, right, the infrastructure around, so the things that we started to add culture to to actually have a conversation [switches slide] with the things around it. So you might not see the trees, you might not see other things, but when you go on BART, into San Francisco, back and forth, you see those Black faces that are on the walls of many houses. There's Martin. This was the year Obama was elected, so he got a place on the wall as well. But I was surprised when we finished this project that no one objected. No one objected to Malcolm X, no one objected to Martin Luther King, no one objected, because this is West Oakland. This is where people who look like me live. So their objection was, wow, those area familiar faces. And all of those things started to resonate.

[switches slide] So within the practice of landscape architecture, the projects grew, the complexities grew. We somehow {sighs} how can I say, amassed about a half dozen to ten different museums across the country. Oakland Museum, Cooper Hewitt, we were able to work in Wyoming – people were like, you worked in Wyoming on a sculptural museum, why? It's because it's fucking Wyoming! {laughter} Right? And to be the only Black person in Wyoming, talking about glaciers and shit – man, it's revelatory. Right, that that's a way that I'm part of that landscape, just like everybody else. From Philadelphia – but if you amass that kind of work, then it gives you a perspective. A perspective and a courage to go out there and begin to believe, right? That you have something to say. So over time, by the time I finished my MFA, [switches slide] I'm doing paintings, right? These are giant monoprints, six feet by four feet, that are now gracing the BART headquarters of places that sort of tore up neighborhoods. And these paintings begin to kind of talk about that palimpsest place being [switches slide] wiped away.

[switches slide] Or currently we have a show opening up in San Francisco, at MOMA, a moment of *Black Towers*, *Black Power*, where we postulated all those sort of low-income projects and those sort of self-help groups along the street, why can't we live in towers? And we took the Black Panthers' [switches slide] ten tenets and married them with Black inventors and said, why can't you guys do more for us? Right? And of course they rejected it, but now it lives in a museum for people to look at, and go, well, while can't you do more for us? Right? And our studio just purchased one of these lots, and so hopefully we'll have the first Black tower in the neighborhood.

[switches slide] But through these kinds of exhibitions, this kind of work, it gives you a kind of courage, actually, to go out then and deal with, right? That diversity of culture. So I'd like to share with you some of these narratives of stories, right, that we were, have been able to do over the last decade.

[switches slide] It was mentioned, this first project, of Catherine Foster, at the University of Virginia. And most architects know the ecumenical village, that's down the hill, but most people don't know what happened on the bottom land. If you go to UVA now, the McKim, McKim, Mead & White building blocks that vista. But it blocks the vista because

no one wanted to see Kitty Foster. They actually built a goddamn building to block the view that Jefferson wanted to see the landscape because he didn't want to see the shanties. And Kitty Foster, a free Black woman, lived in a place called Canada, down here, and we think this is where we think free Blacks were able to live. They used to stop at her house. And as we were doing the north lawn, which is the extension of a lawn, they found burial remains, and I jumped to work on this project. [switches slide] And so we were able to sort of do archeology and find that Kitty Foster's home had this beautiful artistry. Right? In search of our mother's gardens, right? The idea that these gardens were actually something you could find the diaspora throughout the tidewater and throughout Virginia, that people made things, they planted trees and things like that. So we came up [switches slide] with this idea of a shadow catcher. And this reminded me of something my grandmother talked about, when we would go the cemetery, she would always take the poinsettia and pull the foil back and let the light hit it, and the flash of the spirit. Which allowed the spirit to go to heaven. And we proposed it, and no one objected. [switches slide] And within this kind of brick-laid sort of facility of north campus, the shadow catcher sits. On a cloudy day, there's nothing. But when the light comes out, there's shadow. And like an archeological dig, that shadow zooms around. Right? The ground, and it marks that sacred space. [switches slide] We created a reveal where you can look down. And when you see the splash in the shadow, you know that portal is operating. That place has something different to say. [switches slide] And like one of my professors talked about a cemetery in Europe where you walk through the cemetery and you look down, and you look up. (00:25:02) Down, you look up. You don't care about the thing, but it forces you to look down and up. That's what happens here. And through the body operating that way, you actually become part of that celebratory journey [switches slide] of Kitty Foster and her descendants. And [switches slide] the site is marked in different ways, there is very little pedagogical signs. [switches slide] And in the place of internment, they found twenty-seven different bodies interred that included humans, and animals, we didn't know their names, we researched those cemeteries of the area, and we noticed that particularly those early cemeteries, wooden caskets create sculptural ground. And you go into those old cemeteries, and the ground is just a sculptural place because the bodies decompose and the wood rots and there's something. And we found that could be this wonderful way to begin to talk about, right, the afterlife, [switches slide] the wake.

[switches slide] {coughs} Moving to my friend's hometown in Nashville. A meager \$300,000 is given to the celebration, the remembrance, of the Civil Rights Movement. Where down the street a million dollars is given to a piece of public art that recognized the gateway. And I'm like, how are we gonna do something with this meager amount of money? And working with the Civil Rights descendants, as well as a lot of the veterans, two things came out, they were like, we don't want a picture of Martin Luther King, we don't want a picture of Rosa Parks, we don't want a picture of people that we know. We want people to understand that we were first. And I was like, first in what? They were like, sit-ins! I was like, no, I'm from Greensboro, I went to A&T, we were first at Woolworth. They were like, nah. Diane Lane and others came in {snaps} they flipped in a week. Because they understood commerce. And at the time, no one really knew, because all the photography and all the publicity was never really shared. [switches slide] And so this idea of witnessing, right? How do you witness something that you really don't understand.

[switches slide] And so again, within a marginal site on the side of City Hall, we were able to take an abandoned space and really begin to kind of talk about how can we actually provide a space for people to come and sit and think about that. [switches slide] And on the way, we were privy to a lot of the images that were collected by *The Post* and *Courier*. But these photos had never been seen. Someone found a trove of these photos, which are now in a history museum at the library, and they are just now being presented. And I was taken by those beautiful Black women and children. There's this regalness in the face of this kind of putrid hatred. But their heads were always up walking. And there are hundreds of images like this.

[switches slide] Or the image of this, which, as I was working with one of the elementary school kids, she kept asking me, this could be today. And this is like 2017. Right? And so taking these images, [switches slide] we thought about ways in which we could witness, using those images. And I was thinking about the twenty-first century, and I was like, it's not about marble as a material; maybe it's about concrete. And I found a local concrete construction company that was doing these, how can I say, CNC images of people like Elvis Presley and, I mean, all of these like contemporary folk, and I was like, do you guys know how to deal with concrete in aggregate? They were like, sure. [switches slide] And so we created these giant block prints that started to talk about marching, and using those images to make almost like these giant block prints in concrete that will weather, and that will actually tell that story. And you can do [switches slide] rubbings, but there's this kind of, how can I say, the body becomes really, really engaged in it. And through these kind [switches slide] of collages, they just tell a different story, a more abstract story. You can't really read them. And the veterans really liked this, because it's like, they remember how it's marked, but these other things begin to conjure up these other memories. [switches slide] And on the other side of the concrete, we CNCed these images that are pretty, how can I say, typical of the Civil Rights, of kids, of others marching. But when they're again, no light, you can't see them. They're in the concrete. And so when the sun comes out and rakes it, they come out of the concrete. So, two sides of the wall [switches slide] have this different, visceral feeling. And again, you can go [switches slide] and sit. And again, that was one of the things, again, not trying to teach, but just a place where people can go and just sit and muse. And one veteran told me, was like, Walter, I love coming here. Because I can just sit. And I can muse. And I can remember. And I can think about marching, and I can think about sitting. [switches through slides] And on opening day Freddy, on the right here, comes up to me, had been part of the entire process, says Walter, that's me. (00:30:01) Get the fuck out of her Freddy, that's you? That's me, man! That's my cousin. Walking down the street, the guys came up and just accosted us. The newsman heard him, came over, Freddy disappeared. I went home, and I saw *Eyes on the Prize II*. And who's in *Eyes on the Prize II*, Freddy. Freddy had got on one of those Freedom Rider buses, went from Florida all the way to Texas. Bombed twice. He made it all the way through. But he didn't want any, any attention drawn to him. And that has stuck with me to this day, in the world of this me me me. Freddy doesn't want any of that, cause he did his job, he was there.

[switches slide] Projects in the past. They're a little different, right? Than those that exist in our world even today. And we see this new phenomenon, particularly with shootings and killings, where there's a need to want to remember immediately. Because if

we're remembering the sit-ins from the '68, with Freddy fifty years ago, today, if there's something that happens today, we immediately want to remember it. We worked on a competition for the December 2nd Memorial. In San Bernadino, fifteen people were murdered at a birthday party. Um, left to die, and the entire city of San Bernadino went in search of the culprits, found them, and killed them as well. The county put out an RFP, competition for competition, and we lost it. Didn't think anything of it. Someone else won. Went on about our work, a year and a half went by, I get a call one day. Mr. Hood, we'd love to talk to you about this memorial, because we could not work with the previous designer. And the critique of our work was, it's too light. It was too light. And they went with something heavy. And this was, like, literal, right? They went with the granite, black thing, right? And they found two things: that, one, it was too expensive. But the other, they didn't want to sit right in that misery. So, they convinced us to start again.

[switches slide] So we came back and we said, we'd like to begin to suggest a different way. The previous design found an area tucked out to the side that they made a work. [switches slide] We were interested in this major promenade. This is in San Bernadino, that's them San Bernadino mountains, palm trees, the light, the shadow, striking shadow. It's a county building, the worst county building ever. You know, it's just the most god-awful place. Now I'm thinking, why can't this new thing brighten up this, right? Through this kind of death and maybe there's renewal. And working with them, [switches slide] we started talking about this idea of a curtain of courage. Can we begin to do a surface that could catch that light but could also be brilliant enough to actually give people protection. Those early coils, I talked about, was investigation into the bulletproof vest. And the nanotechnology. And could we actually use that. And we never really talked to them about that, that was our own way into the project. [switches slide] And so in San Bernadino, from the bird's eye, we created a series of chapels, almost, along that edge, that as you come to work every day, you walk past. And you see the light. You see the pattern. [switches slide] But if you lost someone, you have your own nook. Each family has their own place. [switches slide] As you look, then, back out to the landscape at night, it could be a place of mourning, a place that's serene. Each color in each one of the chaplets is decided by the family, they chose their family's favorite color. We worked with them extensively. There was one hot pink one, there was one vermilion green. They were very specific. We also gave them a slot in the bench where they could place keepsake, that only they know what they placed in it. And they used a quote of their lost one on the bench. And for them, that's sacred and that's theirs. But [switches slide] for the public, it's still a place in which one can move through.

And again, I was taken by the light. I was taken by this environment of southern California that when you go there, there is just this amazing, revelatory understanding that you're in a different place, unlike the previous design, which was bleak. [switches slide] And then [switches slide] on opening day, each family would be able to come and find a place. And this was probably one of the most cathartic days for me, which I had to go with each one. But they, each family was really, really what can I say, appreciative of the kind of care. (00:35:02) Right, again, which taught us a different kind of relations, the kind of care, right, in thinking about their emotive spirit, right, within the confines [switches slide] of a public space. [switches slide] We were asked by a reporter about this, and I just said, I will

never do a project like this again. Right? Because that kind of reinforcing of this. And what we found, that at the opening here, parents from Sandy Hook was here. And that there's a network now of memorials, monuments, of people who've lost in the last decade. And they share that grief. They actually brought keepsakes, and that kind of perpetuation of that, right? Is something that I don't want to be a part of anymore. This idea that maybe we need that distance, we need that time. And maybe that time might force us to act in a different way. Not build memorials, but actually deal with gun control and some other things.

[switches slide] Twelve years ago in Pittsburgh, I won a competition. Pittsburgh Penguins was building their new arena in the hill district, that had been completely erased over the last fifty years. The new arena takes place over the older civic center, and the competition brief was interesting, it was like, we want a landscape architect and an artist to come in and recognize that there has been erasure, and to celebrate the neighborhood that was here. But also, we want a rain garden. {laughter} And for those who don't know what a rain garden is, it's what landscape architects do, clean my water as it comes down the hill. So the landscape architect would do the rain garden, and the artist would do the commemorative thing. And so we came up with this project called curtain call, and the idea was to call the neighborhood back, this was August Wilson's neighborhood, and I was really taken by the theatrical aspect of that. So the curtain call was we asked, [switches slide] anyone who lived in the hill, give us your images. We just want images. And at the time, we needed to collect 7,000 images to make this giant curtain. Twelve years later, there's still nothing. Pittsburgh Penguins reneged, the city never built it, and we're still collecting. [switches slide] We were able to go to Carnegie Mellon, we have Teenie Harris' collection, Teenie Harris was an African-American photographer who basically documented the hill district, so we have his archive, and we have our archive, and we've been waiting for a new site. A year and a half ago, we got a new site, and the project is moving forward.

[switches slide] Some of the images are just awesome. Miss Shirley here, I've shown her all over the world. One day she saw one of my presentations, she called me up, she said, 'Man, you showed me in your presentation! I'm looking good!' {laughter} [switches slide] You know, there's August Wilson, there's Sweetwater up on the hill. There's the clubs. This was the rhythm and blues neighborhood, the Chicago of the East. People stopped on the chitlin circuit to come here. Lena Horne, Benson, they were all from the hill. You would never know that when you go there today.

[switches slide] And so we thought, what would be the best way to do this? So, the design is very simple. We made giant curtains, and when you walk into these rooms of curtains, [switches slide] you hear rain songs. And the rain songs, in the beginning [rain recording plays] we were going to mine all of them from all the rhythm and blues songs. And they were gonna be, like, Otis Redding, you know, "Rainy Night in Georgia," but it's been twelve years. So I got my nephew, who's Jay Hood the rapper, to now do us a soundtrack. So now when you go in, you'll hear this new compilation of rain sounds. So you'll walk into these spaces, [recording stops] and these giant curtains will actually enclose you, and they almost act as architecture. And when you walk in, these rain songs will pervade the space. So there's that moment between the rain songs and the images, right, and we're hoping that that zeitgeist, right, that thing that people started going to, why

are there these songs, what is this thing doing, [switches slide] where people will live emblazoned in these giant curtains. [switches slide] This is slated for construction over the next year. [switches slide] And hopefully they'll do it this time. [switches slide]

[switches slide] A couple of years ago, I was invited to Chicago Biennale, to do a piece at the library. (00:39:56) And they were like Walter, we have a great site for you! And I was like, what am I gonna do in here? And they had all these rules, you can't do this, you can't do this. And one day I'm reading the newspaper, and it said, President Obama cutting down trees in south Chicago, in Jefferson and Washington Park, for his new library. I was like, ah, idea! So I called the Parks Department, I was like, you got that wood? They're like, what do you mean? The wood that Obama cut down! And they're like, no, it was a storm. I'm like, I don't care, I want that wood. So we're able to take the wood, and we made three trees. And we placed them inside the courtyard. Yes, one's Obama. One's Jefferson, and one's Washington. And there's Obama. [switches slide] And this idea again, right, beginning to tell and weave a different story. And that came, became a, how can I say, the beginning of a set of projects that we call Witness Trees, that we now are interested, right, in the botanic has existed in places, because the National Parks Service they actually, you can't cut down trees on national, like on the mall, because they witness things. And so delving into the Obama library allowed us to sort of think about this larger piece. This now is moving to Charlotte because the hardware from this we're now using to do trees like this in my hometown.

[switches slide] But this then made a connection to a place that we'd been working for the last few years, which is Philips, in the lowcountry. The Gulla Geechee along the Gulla Geechee sort of coast line. Ten years ago I had my students work with Richard [switches slide] Habersham, [switches slide] who's on the right, to basically do a plan for his community called Philipps, which is in north Charleston, and they're trying to, like, put a four-lane road through the neighborhood. They are actually from the Mount Pleasant, descended from the Mount Pleasant plantation, and they were given 1,000 acres of land when they were freed, and they created Philipps. And Richard said something to me, he said, 'Walter, we thought all we had to do was own our own land.' And slowly that land is disappearing from heir's rights; if you have a cousin in New York, your cousin wants to sell, the law says you can sell it. [switches slide] Through really bad development, like that crap, on the other side. It's just taken all of this low-lying wetlands, they're just disappearing. I think *The New York Times* said north Charleston was one of the fastest-growing suburban areas, in the late, early part of the millennium. But this image is quite striking. That's Philipps, and that's a neighborhood. People want that; no one wants this. And as we were working, in the Philipps, Richard told me, he said, Walter, this landscape here is easy to work. It's like, when my daughter came home, and she needed something, I just cut her a little piece of land in the overgrown. In the what? The overgrown. I was like, what's that? The woods, the overgrown! We just let things overgrow. We don't need fences, the overgrown does everything. I wrote that down. And the plan that we made was all based on the overgrown. Unlike that, there's no overgrown. There's lots of weed killer, there's lots of DDT, all kinds of stuff keeping that grass green. They hate that. And so from the overgrown, we created [switches slide] a master plan, where they have a public walkway, that they can

sell baskets in the overgrown, looking back against those single sort of people on the other side. The baskets were taken off of the highway, and so now they can sell their stalls here.

And we were asked [switches slide] to do the Venice Biennale this year, and so we went back and looked at the cen, South Carolina map of 1856, really looking at how the natives and the Africans were actually deterring the colonial, uh, the colonists from mapping this wetland, because wetlands change. Wetlands change. One year you come back, they're flooding, the next year you come back, they're dry. So they couldn't map it. And over time, what allowed those settlements to happen – but today what they do is drain it. Get rid of the water. So we decided to do a provocation to say, [switches slide] well what if we took the overgrown, these long striations of wood, and what if the Philipps community used that yearly, as you see the wood out here in this landscape, what if the community used that wood yearly to make their architecture. Because it grows really fast. And from that, [switches slide] we came up with this idea of basket houses that come out of weaving. And then we took it to Venice, and what we discovered in Venice, because this was under the theme of natives, is that this idea of native, right, of place, in Venice, these polinis, this wood, the chestnut, is actually holding up the city of Venus, of, of Venice. And if you see those polinis in the water, the oars, everything is made from the same wood. And I was like, wow, that's a really great relationship. (00:44:56) And so, [switches slide] through this project we showed this manifestation of these basket houses, and how they could be made from this simple [switches slide] set of wood, and how they could actually coexist in this overgrown woodland. And how they could actually be recharged [switches slide] every year, every season, through these very simple constructions. And how it could really talk about this native culture. As Richard said, all we had to do was own the land, and the land has given us all of these things. [switches slide] And through that, we have an understanding of how people can be in a place over time, [switches slide] and how they can begin to celebrate the spirit of that place. Right, through that Indigenous material, through those people [switches slide] who have been there for a long time. So maybe the people looking across, it's like, how can we be like those people? We want that. And I'm looking from the pier, across.

[switches slide] So at the exhibit, we showed the models, the tectonics of how all of these things get made. [switches slide] And the beauty of how architecture might become to simulate, right, that world, that chaotic, that kinetic, that construction, that renewal, that becomes part of a community. And someone was telling me, I was looking at your exhibit, man, and I'm like, you can't do that shit. [switches slide] And then he goes outside, like, yeah, you can do that. And this is in the Scarpa Pavilion. Where we take Scarpa, who's a renowned architect, and somehow through the polini, and that idea of the native, his columns disappear, and all of a sudden now the overgrown actually takes over. [switches slide] And then I noticed that in a 15th, 16th century painting of [NAME UNCLEAR], that he had these moors, and these moors have polinis. And I'm like, there's moors in Venice with the polinis, that's the, those are my Gulla Geechee! And it's like, all of a sudden, there was that connection, right, between the natives of the world. Making projects and discovering these little connections, it's pretty amazing, I was talking to someone today about that idea that prolificity of iteration, that you keep going, you keep going, you keep going, you keep

going, ah, there's something here, you stop. Right? And that's [switches slide] the exhausted part of it.

Back to California. We won a competition to do a landmark sculpture for the Santa Monica, the metro. You guys know where this is. The beach, Santa Monica, you can kinda see the cliffs over to the left. And our piece was very simple. I was intrigued by, who was Saint Monica? Saint Monica was the patron saint of sobriety. She came to LA, she saw all these Spanish soldiers drunk, and she cried for them, and their garden appeared. That's the story, or that's one mythology. But the Tongva Indians called it the crying rock. That's the cliff where the Spaniards threw their ancestors over to their death, plunged. [switches slide] So this piece faces west, it's on a public sidewalk, two meter pieces of stone stacked against a gold wall. Every day at sunset, the shadow hits that wall. [switches slide] And there's a glass tear that cries. So every day, the crying rock is celebrated. This is stone that literally is mined from the core of the local landscape. [switches slide] And it's on a public sidewalk, so everyone has to come into contact with it. [switches slide] It's one of those projects where each stone has a different story to tell, and a different life, and people would touch it. It's a strange thing, right? Next to it is a Pete Walker landscape with stripes, this is just these big pieces of stone, that just sit there. But they tell a story.

[switches slide] Mike and I are involved in Winston-Salem right now, on this project that Peter Oliver, and Peter Oliver, beautiful story. An enslaved man whose master takes him to Salem. Salem is a Mennonite community, and he notices that these people are artisans, and they're nice people. And he gets it in his head that they're gonna buy me, they're going to purchase me. So on a trip back, they purchase him. They allow him to go to Pittsburgh, somewhere, he gets a wife, he comes back, and he buys four acres of land. He becomes an artisan, a craftsman. And he makes clay pots, he makes pipe cleaners, and he gets buried in god's acre. And he's totally forgotten. Chris Paul, the NBA basketball player, it's his great-great-great-grandfather. His mother, his ancestors. [switches slide] Highway 41 completely diminishes all of this, he said, we want to do something for our ancestors. That little curve to the right there is the site. (00:50:03) So we're like in the face, the freeway is literally on his land. Ways to erase. Ways to forget. Underdevelop these landscapes, and they will forget.

[switches slide] So how do we think about Peter today? And through this process working with the family, during COVID, we had meetings probably twice a week, it was pretty awesome. We started to sort of delve into how to celebrate this. [switches slide] And so now Peter Oliver, the freeway is down here, you see the big O. It's a pavilion made of wood, just like you see in Salem, the beautiful craftsmanship. Looking back [switches slide] towards the city, you, you see it, you understand his land. [switches slide] A timeline, an active timeline is being built with the family, so you can add to it. It can grow. It becomes a gate as you make your way up south. [switches slide] You arrive into this place, it extends out over the gully, and you can see his land that he owned. There are maps that show you, you can point to where it is, you see the infrastructure. [switches slide] But you also, on the other side, see the artisan. See what he was able to go from enslaved to artisan, the kinds of things that they were able to make. [switches slide] And then maybe every other year, the Paul family can come and have that reunion, the big table in the middle. Right, where again,

that public celebration, where people are able to sort of honor Peter Oliver. This project is in fundraising stages right now. The great thing about projects like this, Chris Paul is now a Golden State Warrior. And now, I can wear my Warrior hat, because before, we couldn't talk sports. Now we can, and maybe now he can come to the studio, and we can get that money, and make this project, right? {laughs}

[switches slide] This next project is in Arlington, Virginia, and this, this project is a very interesting one; we were contacted by the public art agency, in Arlington, and said, 'Walter, we have this project. We've been looking at your practice, and we have a project where we think your work could be really prophetic.' Arlington is also the place where Nauck is, and Nauck, I didn't know, is a Native name, and Indigenous name, but it comes, it's like the fifth name of this community. Most African-Americans call it Green Valley. And it is the land that extends from Arlington Cemetery all the way to the Pentagon. That was all part of a freedmen's village, so if you don't know, during Reconstruction, the federal government created the Freedmen's Bureau. And the Freedmen's Bureau went out, and they actually carved out land for free Blacks, to build schools for them to live. In Arlington Cemetery, which is Robert E. Lee's plantation, Black were there, probably for twenty-five or thirty years, so there was a generation of people there, and then the diaspora moved out into Virginia. [switches slide] And so starting the project, we were like, I got fascinated with this idea of freedmen, and what does that mean when you're a freed woman? I just went down this, this tunnel of, like, looking at this idea of, like, when you're called free – and there was something weird about that to me. Cause they don't call, if you came from, I don't know, Italy, in the, they don't call you a free person. So who are these free people, they call Native, Indians, free, and they call enslaved free.

[switches slide] And then I kept going back to this image, which is what the space looked like – there was a timeline, and in the space, every day, there'd be about ten to fifteen brothers, you know, hanging out, drinking, smoking. Pretty much it. And I was talking to one, he's like, and, you know, that freedmen thing, they just keep putting it up over there; it means nothing to us. And so we started thinking about ways to begin to interrogate that. [switches slide] We tried to create a space to be as green as possible, again, to tie back into Green Valley. We didn't want it to be a paved space. [switches slide] It's a highly articulate planted space with a lot of amenities and different uses.

[switches slide] John Robinson passed away a couple years ago, the space was renamed for him. And at the middle of the space [switches slide] sits the sentinel, called free. And in the community meetings, we would go and we would have the text, the freed man, and people started turning these things on their head, and someone turned it vertical, and was like, that's like a clocktower, I like that. Can we make it gold, to be like these other things around, and can we start adding the names of things? And the one thing that we tried to do was make this – this was an African-American neighborhood - make it the most, greenest place. [switches slide] Give people, you know, talk about water, talk about all these other [switches slide] infrastructural things, at the point, at the top, by the new condo, where the new gentry is coming in. Freed stands there. So when the new gentry opens their window, they see Freed. (00:55:00) Up against them is Freed. And this idea that this element [switches slide] stands for a past, [switches slide] but it also is a symbol. And it

made me start to think about this idea that when someone lets you go, you're always fucking looking backwards. But maybe they're gonna come back. And then I understood Josh Gibson, the baseball player. Don't look back, they might be gaining on you. But that idea of freed, not freedom. [switches slide] And we had a lot of conversations from the meetings about this idea of freed, but at the end of the day the community was like, [switches slide] that symbolizes our place, and as you make your way up the hill, we arrive. [switches slide] And you have to remember, this is in the Washington, DC neighborhood, where you have a lot of vertical things.

[switches slide] Mm. Out of twenty-five years of opening projects, this is opening day on one of my projects. It's African-American homecoming week at Princeton. And the president and I are out there, and we're cutting the ribbon. And the students are going, what the fuck! There's no governing position for negroes – basically quoting Woodrow Wilson. [switches slide] It was a competition. A handful of students at Princeton – I want to say less than ten – bum-rushed the president's office, said, we want Woodrow Wilson's name off the building, the School of Public Policy. Locked themselves in. 2017, I want to say? Trustees, president, school, said okay, let's do a competition. But first let's set up programs throughout the campus that deal with our enslaved history. Like we've seen most places; so now there's like maps, you can find things, you can find the one enslaved guy who was there on campus, you can find all these things. It was a little project, a little narrative, they created a website, but their big thing was let's create a competition, throw a million dollars at it, and we're done. And like a lot of places, if you go to New Haven, if you go to different places, you will find markers, you will find a ball and chain in some places, you'll find a circle and other things that deal with it – and they're done. Here, at the School of Public Policy, Woodrow Wilson [switches slide] was a very, very, how can I say, uh, revered individual that people thought, if you got rid of his name, the school could not exist. He was the president, League of Nations, I mean, you can go on and on and on again. From the South, son of a preacher, racist. You can just go on and on. The competition brief was like, talk about his good side, and his bad side. That's what the competition was. And I'm like, how can I find a way to talk about this dude, you know, he, I don't know anything about this culture. And I was reading, again, Du Bois, and I was like, well, what if I said, if he did have a conscious, could I give him one. Conceptually. And so the project was first called *Double Consciousness*. [switches slide] And it's located up at the top of the site, at the school, right in the middle of campus, and what we found out [switches slide] was this space is also the center of Princeton, the city. Skateboarders come out here every day, they're out there doing their thing, when anything happens in Princeton, this is where you meet. There is the Rothschild set of trees, there's the Fountain of Freedom, from '66, that sits there. It's a very formal sort of project. [switches slide] So we thought, what's a good way to kind of talk about this dude? So that was the project. We took a square, we cut it into diagonal, we turned it, and the diagonal hypotenuse is one and a half times wider, and on the two sides we etched in all of his writings. But on the inside, that flat side that was larger, we put in all of his detractors. [switches slide] Elements from that. [switches slide] And then we took out two trees, and we placed it where the trees were located. [switches slide] And there were contemporaries, pretty powerful words. This is happening in real time {laughs} with the current election. People were reading, 'He's going to do better. Once he gets in office, he's going to do better.' This is what they were all saying. Trotter, Du Bois, Wells – he's going to

do better. Right? And of course we know, he didn't. (00:59:56) But we found these words working the university, edited a lot of these, [switches slide] and then from the Wilson side we were able to use this, as a way to kind of go through his life. [switches slide] And we used stone glass, which is this material, highly reflective material, that you can etch inside, but it looks like glass, it reflects everything, and you have to go up really close to sort of see it. We wanted it to be sixty feet tall, sixty plus, that was his age; it had to come down because you can't build anything over thirty-nine feet in Princeton, something like that. [switches slide] And the piece then went in.

What you're seeing in this oblique side is the black piece that stands erect; the white piece leans on top. But within, we're able then to capture young and old faces of all his detractors in a lenticular piece, so as you go by, they change and move by. Wilson's name is nowhere on this piece. Just his words. [switches slide] If you walk by daily, you're probably gonna, there's something [WORD UNCLEAR], you can always just walk by, but you might come back [switches slide] and walk through and then look up. And here you have the reflection, the words, reflection, sky. And that's the conscious, right, that inside, it's like opening him up. Right, and making him have a consciousness. [switches slide] And again, very metaphorical. And within that, the Fountain of Freedom then gets literally brought forward. So all of these pieces are interrelated.

[switches slide] And on opening day, people came out, read, conversations, it then became a place where people literally around [switches slide] started discussing. The students, on opening, still, 'Mr. Hood, we love your piece, da-da-da, we still want his fucking name off the building.' They called me during the summer after it was done, I'm thinking they're gonna tear the thing down, I'm like, okay, I can give you guys money, we'll stand, we'll create an event around the whole thing. [switches slide] And then George Floyd happened. The trustees met again, one of the more ardent trustees goes out to the piece, starts reading the pieces. Goes back in, changes her vote, his name wiped off. [switches slide] The piece did the work, but it also still sits there, almost as testimony [switches slide] again to being able to do the work. And without his name now, which I hadn't thought about, on this piece. Booker, Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, they're the ones who are present now. Right? They're the focus of the piece, as you walk through. [switches slide]

This piece was a very, very difficult [switches slide] piece in that during this time, this kind of social change, the tempo of social change we've gone through over the last three years, it reminded me that none of this stuff is permanent. That we do the work. Right, that we do the work to do the work. And that edifice, right, is not sometimes meant to last. And at one point, I thought this was gonna co – it still might come down, I don't know. But his name is not on that building. [switches slide] And then we're reminded, right, of these other narratives, that maybe we hadn't understood before. And it gave me a completely different understanding of my civic duty, and want to understand what has gone before. And how history repeats itself again if we let it. [switches through slides] And so we should all have opening projects that look like this. And not just sitting around drinking martinis, right?

[switches slide] And this is called *Double Sights*. And *Double Sights* comes out of another of Du Bois' writings that the Afro department showed us that was a better way, because instead of looking here, it looks out.

[switches slide] The last project I'm gonna share with you is in the lowcountry, going back again. These are Gullah Geechee settlements, like Philipps, the one I told you about that was next to the Mount Pleasant plantation, all of these, Snowden, Hamlin, Green Point, Scanlonville, Marysville, Accabee, they're all next to plantations. If you live in a suburb in North Charleston, you're probably living on a plantation. They just erase the names. These settlements are facing obliteration. Because they're listed as settlements. We just, not me, but Richard, was able to get Philipps to be on the historic register. We were able to fight, the road now only is gonna be three lanes wide, it'll cost a million, ten million dollars to change it, that just came out, we learned, a month or so ago. That's fifteen years later. (01:04:58)

[switches slide] My foray into the lowcountry was through the Art Institute, working with Ernesto Pujo, Francis Whitehead, and Kendra Hamilton, at Spoleto, where we wanted to call attention to water in Charleston, so, for three months, from April to early parts of summer we grew rice in a courtyard, and created a wetland right downtown. And it blew my mind that within a month, there were frogs, you look up, there's blue herons. At nighttime, it was just this crazy thing, and after three months, families took the rice home. Years later, I get a call to work on a project in the same place. [switches slide] And to create *Our Ancestors Garden*. [switches slide] And this is for the International African-American Museum, which is unlike the National Museum. It's about the lowcountry, and it's about a particular history. A local history, but it's also about the Atlantic crossing, and that relationship. [switches slide] Every time I hear this number, it jumps. At the opening, fifty percent of African slaves came from here. It started at forty-one percent, okay, it started to rise. But we think at least fifty percent of the African diaspora landed here at Gadsden's Wharf, and either went into South Carolina or went down around the horn. [switches slide] This was all forgotten. And you go, like, how is that forgotten? You got an aquarium there, you got all this stuff here. Charleston is a city of history, it has its [WORD UNCLEAR] of the oldest city in the country. How did they forget this? [switches slide] And, twelve years ago, someone found a map. And they found a map that said Gadsden's Wharf. And they found these little cells, or that was a warehouse. And people don't understand the culture of slavery. It wasn't here people bringing people to auction blocks. Those boats would come in, out of Sullivan's Island, they would incubate you, make sure you're healthy, and they'd bring you on a slow boat and put you in the warehouse. And then on whatever particular day there was a sale, people would find out and come down and do the purchasing. Writers have written about the food chain of the harbor changing, because people died in there. I mean, you were in Charleston in the summer, in a fricking warehouse? You're gonna perish.

[switches slide] When we started the project, we were able to locate the line, we did the archeology and sure enough they found the warehouse. They found the warehouse seven feet down, they found different mittens, cups, and things like that. And they had to re-enter it, so they know it's a real site. [switches slide] Harry Cobb, the esteemed Harry Cobb, Pei Cobb Freed, who passed away in 2020, called me up and was like Walter, this is

an important project, my build and I want it to be very simple, it's non-rhetorical, this is all about landscape. Guy Nordensen, the structural engineer, helped design to put this building on stilts, the floats; it's in a hurricane region, so it had to be up anyway, but we lifted it up to thirteen feet, the columns are two meters wide. [switches slide] The landscape underneath it's all tabby. Everything you see that's gray is crushed shells. And those shells are taken out of the harbor and spread out on the ground, and this is what our ancestors invented. On opening day, the director was like, I, I researched tabby, you know what tabby, the definition of tabby is, it's inconclusive where tabby originated from. Right, these things that we know were made by the hands of the enslaved. And so they create this ground plane. And what you see to the north here, in plan, we tried to sort of create this kind of colonial garden, through this kind of African aesthetic that you'll see three-dimensionally, and a little piece of the warehouse, because the building sits on the other half, we were able to excavate. And then along the edge, we bring the water up to celebrate the vista out. [switches slide] One of the things that is probably gonna still be controversial in this project is should there be walls around it, should there be fences. And we agreed that there shouldn't be. This should be just like the ghost tours of Charleston. You walk around Charleston, people are in buggies, doing ghost tours, walking through cemeteries. We want the same thing to happen here. That people feel compelled to come in and feel that spirit of a place. [switches slide] And being inspired by the Brooks map, [switches slide] we chose to take this meager graphic that's out of Sullivan's Island in this really chintzy exhibition and exploit its use. [switches slide] And we started thinking about the corpses of those who passed away, and could we create this new kind of ground plane where we put the shells into the figures and create these bodies so that when the water came upon them, that, the sea, the ocean, and the bodies meld to one. [switches slide] And so through this kind of magic of an infinity fountain we actually float the water up and allow about a quarter inch of water to float back into a [WORD UNCLEAR] and constantly fill up, and drain out. (01:10:02) Constantly fill up, and drain out. [switches slide] So that on certain time when you come, it's just water looking back out into the harbor. [switches slide] And then when it disappears, all the corpses would just appear. Right? [switches slide] And then it fills up again. So it depends on when you're there. [switches slide] After ten years, the project was completed. It opened three weeks ago, and here you see from the water that extent of that fountain, that comes off, the walkway that cuts in between, the local wall that's made from local African-American bricklayers that riffs on all that kind of brickwork in the city, the grove of African palms, the warehouse, a set of gardens, and a landscape that begins to try to tell the story that what lies beneath is something sacred.

[switches slide] So as you come from the city, the landscape rises up, and it kind of invites you in. Along coastal areas, primary dunes used to exist. But you had to break through the dunes to get there. And we want it to feel like you're breaking through, so that when you turn back around, the city collapses back on you. There was a park across the street that by making this scale we could bring the park closer, so that green existed on both sides. [switches slide] And that became a way that you could cross over into a landscape. [switches slide] A landscape where people could find that tabby ground plane, right? And this kind of enclosure that one could fill. Because the other big inspiration for the project is Toni Morrison. On one of the trips we had out to Sullivan's Island, one of her bench by the roads is there. And Toni, after someone asked her why does she write *Beloved*,

she said, 'There's no place for me to go and sit and think about my ancestors.' So she started the Bench By the Road Project, where she just placed benches. New Orleans, New York, Africa, Europe – just a bench. And there's a little plaque. And I was taken by the one, when we went to Sullivan's Island, it was the only thing we could take a picture of in a historic landscape, was a marker by Toni Morrison about a cheap bench. And so this idea of being able to sit and think in this landscape, [switches slide] we give you a multitude of places to go [switches slide] to be by yourself, whether it's the ethnobotanic garden, [switches slide] whether you're wrapped along an edge, whether you're enclosed in various settings, [switches slide] whether you're winding through the sweetgrass garden, [switches slide] whether you're [switches slide] out by yourself on the edge, we give you just these different spaces and a small place to be by yourself.

[switches slide] And then there are different gardens, like the [WORD UNCLEAR] garden, which is about the spirits that live in rocks. Sound and myths from some of them in different dialects. [switches slide] And then in reference to them, Charleston's one of the only places where you could actually rent out the enslaved. Right, if I want – oh, you can go work for Mr. Blahblahblah, but wear your badge. If you didn't wear your badge, it was consequences. It was one of the few places that had that. And so bringing that, the director wanted to bring that into [switches slide] play. And then other things ripped off of that. [switches slide] The serpentine wall, again, when you go to plantations, or even you see the, the brick wall on the city, you can actually read the fingerprints of young kids who made the brick. But if you also go to University of Virginia, these other places that have this beautiful work, we know they were done by the enslaved. When we started this project, the contract, if you can't do a serpentine wall – we showed them one from UVA, it was like, yes you can. And again, we were able to hire African, local African-American artisans, who said, we can do that. It's a very simple thing.

[switches slide] And then that line that I showed very early, that you cross upon back into the water, and everything literally becomes part of that Atlantic tide. Anything in the water begins to melt away. [switches slide] And then looking back across, the light as we're facing east is constantly changing; you don't know if this is wet or dry. [switches slide] And one of the things that I was taken by when we were there is these corpses, they actually find their way to the surface in different ways, obliquely. [switches slide] Or if you're looking at them directionally, there's something in people revere that line. You revere that line, [switches slide] and that line has become like that place where I can stop and think about those who lost their lives in the crossing, but also those who lost their lives here. [switches slide] And when the water recedes, puddles are left. And those puddles then refract, and it becomes a different surface. [switches slide] A surface that says something a little different, [switches slide] more abstract. Someone described them as bones to me. (01:15:05) [switches slide] But what we were looking for was that multidimensional reckoning of that material. [switches slide] And then as you pull yourself out of the warehouse, a long, black wall, with a Maya Angelou quote, 'Still I rise.' [switches slide] And I rise. [switches slide] And when you look through these figures hunched over, that you really can't make out, and they're in an infinity wall, a polish wall. And as one of the scholars talked about here, this is where our ancestors became African-Americans. We have left Africa. And through the toll of labor, we became African-Americans. So here,

[switches slide] we hadn't become yet. [switches slide] And then when you're up looking back out, you can see the pier, where probably slaves marched all the way back, underneath. Some lost their lives, and some would go on to be prosperous in this world. Thank you guys very much. [switches slide] {applause}

Any questions? I know we're hot. None? Let's hit the bonfire.

Audience member #1: Hi, Walter. Um, I'm just curious, so earlier you were talking --

Hood: Who's talking?

Audience member #1: It's me, Ute.

Hood: Oh, hey, yeah yeah.

Audience member #1: Earlier you were talking about making, like, spaces for humans kind of on these boundaries where kind of nature and culture or human I guess activity kind of butts up against each other, those like transitional spaces. I'm curious about if there's, like, instances where, like, the natural, um, environment is like, you're like, oh, okay, I need to actually leave this be. Maybe this isn't a place where human, where we can like be in relationship to each other. When, when has that happened, ever?

Hood: If I'm understanding the question right, do I have any experience with those landscapes, you just leave those landscapes alone?

Audience member #1: Yeah.

Hood: There are, I guess in my southern experience, there are places where in agricultural fields, particularly in the south, you'll see, if you see a stand of trees, you'll sometimes see a stand of trees in a field, an agricultural field. And a lot of times those are places where something's there. People don't know what's there, over time, uh, like my uncle had a field, he was like, don't go in there. And to them, they, either someone's buried there, or something happened there. And those places are left sacred. And that's one of the few places I know where people make a conscious decision to leave something. And it almost parallels the overgrown, to a certain degree. But I have to say, I've been, I would be hard pressed, in an urban environment, where we've worked, where someone has just let something go. And we've tried that on many cases. And, you know, that's the value of land in this country. Right? People see that, you know, there is a value that is monetary placed on the land, and whether it's spiritual or cultural, that outweighs leaving it vacant. But we were talking earlier about, you know, some of the environmental issues that we're facing today, and at certain points, we're gonna have to be able, right, to let certain things go. Because if not, we're not gonna be able to inhabit this place.

Audience member #2: Hi, Walter. Uh, question -- how difficult is it to, in terms of monuments, or you talked about disruption and memory -- how, what do you wrestle with, like with a figure like, you know, Woodrow Wilson, or --

Hood: Yeah. (01:20:20)

Audience member #2: -- Thomas Jefferson, or George Washington for that matter, or even Obama, right? Powerful figures that, powerful presidents, but they've done so much, especially with the founding fathers, and Woodrow Wilson in particular, in terms of segregation, in terms of, I mean, you know, imagine being a Black student on Princeton's campus. And feeling like you don't belong.

Hood: Mmhmm.

Audience member #2: And knowing that wow, you're here, it's a prestigious institution, but that this great person, that, president of Princeton, didn't want you there. You know, that instituted segregation, and did so much, and I know that, like, you know, the mon, the marker does allude to that, but, you know, and just wrestling with how you would care, how you would go about that, you know, I'd like to know more about that.

Hood: Uh, I mean, you know, it's difficult. But, you know, having age on my side, I, I've come through, right, a lot of changes in this country. You know, from the point where, you know, we're only talking a little more than fifty years or so where we legislated to live together. Right? And we keep forgetting that. You know, it's not like we've been living together for like hundreds of years. Even legislatively, we were told, by law, right? And so imagine before legislation. There were two worlds. Right? And those worlds existed separately, and there was symbology on both sides.

When I grew up in North Carolina, there were Confederate shit, KKK around. That was the world we lived in. And then again, once we decided – well, we didn't decide, once it was decided that we had, we should mix, laws were decided; we didn't do it {laughs} deliberately. But laws! I was bussed as a kid. Put on a goddamn bus, sent to the suburbs, told, you gotta mix! I had white mothers – this is when I'm, like, in the ninth grade, I had white mothers spitting on me. I couldn't play sports in the afternoon because you would get beat up. This is in Charlotte, North Carolina, I'm talking '70s, I'm not talking that long ago. And so this idea, you know, I talk to my students about this, about belong, all of these, this feeling that that's crushing you, you have to understand, there was this long, long line that – this is a young moment that we're in. Right? And that idea of being, I don't know, for me, being vulnerable to those symbols. I'm not vulnerable to them, because people before me, they fought for me to be strong with those symbols. Right, that name on the wall. Fuck that name on the wall! Right? That name's been on that wall a long time, it's not gonna tell me who I'm going to be. But if I let that happen, we will never get to that point. Right? And so, I, I get it, but we have to kind of look at the longer view. Right?

And this notion of these things having impacts on you, I was giving, putting together a lecture, and I was going, hm, so if we had lynching '20s and '30s, '60s people are marching – can you imagine marching in the Civil Rights thirty years after all that lynching, and people knowing that you might get lynched! I mean, that's what we have to remember, I think, as we're moving forward. So when we look back at the thing, we have to look back at

the '60s, fifty years ago, but I can even look to the '90s! Right? These are moments. And King talks about that, that arc, right? And so those are the things that when we're working on a project, I had these long conversations with the Princeton students. They didn't want me to use double consciousness as a term. And I said, why? That's Du Bois' words. I said, I know, that's why I'm using them! So, again, I think we have to have these hard conversations. You know, we think that everything should be this way, but we gotta do work! And it always blows me away, because we were legislated to live together! And what did people do after maybe a decade? Don't want to do it! (01:25:00) And so my family moved into the suburbs in the '80s, in Charlotte, North Carolina. We were the second Black family to move into the suburbs. Within a year, there were no white people. Right? And so when you see that, there's still a lot to be done. And so maybe half of this country does want to do it, but there's just a lot of work, and so I just think, we gotta have that courage, and I would just say, you know, those words, again, those words, for me, when I see them in [WORD UNCLEAR] they don't impact me in the same way, because I know of worser things. Like death! Right? I mean, other things, being taken away. And so I think you have to put it all in the context. But it's tough. These are the kinds of conversations I think we have to have. Uh, and you know, I get this idea of, like, one of the students was like, said the exact same thing you did, said, I walk past that building every day, and I don't feel wanted. I'll tell you, I've been teaching at UC Berkeley for close to thirty years now, I still am not wanted. Right? I'm not wanted! Because I'm the only African-American professor in a department that's over a hundred years old to have tenure. One! Which says a lot. They don't want me. Cause if they did, they would want more of me. And so, it's complex, you know, and I tend to, you know, this work is very difficult, but, again, I think you have to kind of see it in this broader context, right, and I think the more of us, if we could put it into context, we would have that power to maybe, I wouldn't say convince other people, but to allow people to understand how we feel, because it's not just about seeing the word. It's about having that experience over time, over and over and over and over.

Yes, sir. Ready.

Audience member #3: Alright, Walter. I, I really appreciate how you, toward the end of your lecture, grounded your work in the idea of, like, we do the work to do the work. And how therefore the idea of monument should continuously be contested. And I think it's important for all of us to hear how your ideas of monuments might be shifting now, particularly as they're being contested in the contemporary world, that's like, what permanence means, what, how those lock stories into particular contexts and particular sites, and how your thinking has shifted at all. If it has.

Hood: Yeah. I mean, someone was mentioning today, maybe it was Stephen, that said, you know, this idea, we're building them too soon, and I think it was J.B. Jackson that wrote, in *The Necessity of Ruin*, this idea that the Civil War before the Civil War, we built monuments to acts so that they would never happen again. And the Civil War was the first one where we actually build monuments to people. To individuals. Which shifted it. Right? Which shifted it. And those monuments to southerners, northerners. And that's, again, what we've been reckoning with. But that, we're in that now, as we're just proliferating them. And there need to be these shifts that happen, um, and that's the thing, you know, for a long time, it

was like, you know, when I got into the profession, things stay the same. No they don't. You have to be willing to let go of certain things. Right? And as you have more experience and more relationships, you change as well. Right? You change as well, and hopefully your work changes as well. And those conversations help to change. And we can all change together, like in ways that we never anticipated we can change. I think, I don't know about you guys, you know, like, nationally, now, affirmative action is gone. Right? We got rid of affirmative action in California twenty, twenty-some years ago. Right? And so, people freaked out, it was like, how, what do we do? I mean, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for affirmative action. You wouldn't even be listening to me. So how do we kinda shift and begin to think about it differently. And what we did in California is that we just started thinking in different terms. Right? This idea that the mandate no longer exists, and so each one of us, then, had to have, right, that mandate, to make sure we go out there, and want to live in a different world. And a lot of people want to live in a different world. And that's the work, right, to constantly do that, so. {sighs} (01:29:58)

Audience member #4: Can y'all hear me? Okay, cool. I have a question, how you think about the future of your projects, especially, like, I, I really appreciate how you bring in these Black and brown histories, but knowing how architecture and art works, to me it's like, especially with real estate, like, I'm in the hood, like, I've seen how architecture and art displays gentrified ethnic cleansing, and like you said, history keeps repeating itself. How you're thinking about the communities in the long term. Like a lot of times I feel like it's like, for us, but we don't get to witness that, because of how real estate's working. I guess, like, how you're thinking about that challenge, or thinking critically, if that makes sense.

Hood: You know, it makes a lot of sense. And, you know, sometimes, I'm just like, not deep, but it's like this idea of like when I first started practice, it was like, okay, we're doing this work? I need to leave some evidence that I was here. Right? If it changes, I want to leave evidence that I was here. If you go around the world and you see different places, you see the evidence that certain people were there. And things are going to change in this place. We've seen it. Just look over the last three hundred years – things change. Cities change, landscapes change. But certain privilege, cultures, they're still there. You still go back and find the breadcrumbs. And for me, that has been the thing. And it started out by, okay, I'm not gonna use concrete, I'm not gonna use material that's gonna – I'm using stone! I'm using, I'm gonna use stuff that you're gonna have to spend a lot of money to get rid of. And that is one thing, because if you look at the kind of investment in those neighborhoods, there's not a big investment. And one thing Americans will respect is money, and that investment. And I think there are ways, and that's why I've made mention of the money that's being spent on these projects. Some of that is just nothing, and there's no way you can create that kind of permanence. Right? And so a lot of things that we do, we're out there trying to articulate and advocate for those resources. And it's interesting, in our practice, one of the first public art projects, three hundred thousand dollars, five hundred thousand dollars, a million dollars, two million dollars – now I think we're up to eight million dollars for a project. But we can kind of see that tracking. And that really matters. That really matters, because with that investment, you can have permanence. Right? You can begin to do things that will have a lasting influence, so maybe when the next thing comes, they have

to negotiate. Right? They have to, right, have a relationship with it. But, but that's my view as someone who's just constantly making.

Audience member #5: Hi. I was wondering how recent reversals in legislature have impacted how you approach your practice.

Hood: Say that again?

Audience member #5: I was wondering how recent, like, reversals in legislature, particularly for people that look like you and me –

Hood: Yup.

Audience member #5: -- how that may have impacted your approach to your practice.

Hood: I wouldn't say they're recent. Right? I see them, started the practice twenty-five years ago, they're the same. Right? They haven't changed, they've never improved, they're actually worse today than it was back then. Right? Some of the things that you can do and even some of the things that people want to do. It seems today there are less people who want to participate. When we first started the practice, there seemed to be more people to want to participate. And I mean, I don't mean just, you know, African-American, I mean whites as well. I mean, I've had people tell me, who don't look like me, say, I can't work in Black neighborhoods anymore because they don't listen to me. And I just find that mind-blowing. And I re, I said, you know, if I said that about most projects I have, I wouldn't have a practice. And that's a privilege, right? So.

Audience member #6: Is it on? Yeah. Hi.

Hood: Oh, there you are.

Audience member #6: I'm really drawn to the comments you've made about, like, being in it, and to not, like, giving space for remembrance, but I'm also really curious about, like, figuring out when it's time to remember something, or like, when it's time to stake claim to something. (01:35:06) And how you think around that, or, yeah.

Hood: I'm, I mean, for me, it's pretty simple. There's so much forgotten. {laughs} There is just so much forgotten. In plain sight. I was talking to someone here about this landscape here. And people who look like me were even forgotten in this landscape. But it's just so much out there. I mean, Clint Smith's book, recent book, where he goes around and, without critiquing, he listens to how people remember different spaces. You know, he goes outside of New Orleans to the, the prison, he goes to a Confederate reenactment, and he's just listening. Finds there's so much, right, that has been forgotten. And so I just think there is so much work to do. I can't even get to that point where I'm like, there's nothing more, I should chill out. There is so much.

I think people are hot – oh, yes sir.

Audience member #7: Thank you for sharing. I have a question about works in public, and how when you, I see your, the things you make as like, you know, unearthing histories, and intervening in public space. So, I'm wondering how you think about people re-intervening in your work, for example through tagging, or through other means of interventions, how do you make sense of that, and also any just exciting or interesting stories that emerge from that re-intervention in the work?

Hood: I mean, there's been some things, I think in the national project, during the summer of 2020, someone came through on the picture with a cop and put Xs in the cop's eyes. You know, which, I got a call, they were like, that was good graffiti. Like, I mean, it's that, those kinds of things. I do not fall into the category of, if you let them do it themselves, it won't get tagged. Right? I mean, if you do a mural, it won't get – you know, I don't fall into that category. We just bought a, moving our space to a main space on San Pablo Avenue, in Oakland, and it's tag city, right? It's just like, graffiti everywhere. And anyone who gets a building, they immediately hire a muralist. So that their building doesn't get tagged. So we buy this building, we're out there painting the building, ah, it'll be all nice – this guy comes running across the street, is that your building? Man, you better get a muralist. I'm like, nope. We're going to paint our building, we're gonna plant some trees, we're going to improve it, and my friend Lou Watts, I said, Lou, give me some photos, big, we made the windows into vitrines, and I think in a year and a half, like, maybe one time, we've been tagged. And since then the building across the street got rid of the mural, painted it. What we're trying to do in our community is show people that this defensive way of operating in the world is not sustainable. Right? But I can be on the offense. If I show you that I can take care, there's value in this, that maybe that is something, right, that can be shared and other people can see. And we went out of our way – well, Mike convinced me, that we should get this building, but people said, why are you guys still in west Oakland? Why don't you go up there? But for us, it's, we want people to see who we look like when we're still there. And maybe, oh, you'll wanna move in. Maybe you wanna move in. Versus the opposite. Move out and then complain about gentrification. Right? You can complain about gentrification all you want to. But if you want these neighborhoods, if you see that value, you can put the value in there. And these spaces are not inexpensive. They have value! {laughs} And so that's one of the things that, I'm really proud of my studio. There's twenty of us, and everybody has bought into it. You know, we have barbeque out there every day, it's now in that space, and people, you guys are there. But it makes you feel like you're contributing to something in a different way, and that when we go out in the world and enspout these values, they're actually part of the work. They're not just something, right, that we talk about from San Francisco Financial District. (01:40:08) Right? But we're actually there. And yesterday, we were on a plane, and our assistant was like, {laughs} what is that thing, Mike, that you read that talks about crime? {laughs} Yeah, Citizen. He's like, Citizen! Someone was shot two blocks away. We're like, Guy, stop looking at Citizen. If you look at Citizen, you're not gonna be here, right? And, but it's this idea that, you know, people get, there's so much information to tell you to not be here. And there's no information to tell you to be here. And that's what we're trying to do by our service there, that we want to be in these places. Yeah. Okay! {applause}

END OF RECORDING