2022 RESIDENT FACULTY LECTURE, June 27, 2022

Kota Ezawa: Hi, everyone. It's my pleasure and honor to introduce Kukuli Velarde. Kukuli is a lifelong artist born in Cuzco, Peru. In a conversation we had last week at the gray barn, Kukuli told me that she disagrees with some of the texts and reviews written about her work. Therefore, I'll stay away from quoting critical texts, and instead offer my own thoughts on Kukuli and her work.

One term Kukuli has used in connection with her practice is Indigenous aesthetics. This comes out of Kukuli's critique of the idea of pre-Colombian art that separates artistry of the Americas between a period before the invasion and after. And denies Indigenous culture to think of its history as continuous and ongoing.

In art school, we are taught from the wrist up, especially in an MFA program. Theory and verbal discourse provide the superstructure for everything visual. Aesthetic practices that don't adhere to the superstructure are put into the specialty corners of the art world, presented under vitrines with different color wall paint, and under the rubric of outsider art.

In my day job as a professor at California College of the Arts, I was once asked to join the curriculum committee. In endless sessions, course credits and review structures were discussed. Nothing substantive ever came up, in my opinion. In total frustration, and in hopes to make a meaningful contribution, I presented the idea for the college to offer courses in green tea ceremony. There was no approval or disapproval, just blank looks. Traditional Japanese art practice, despite their refined aesthetics, are thought of as theoryless, and therefore not material for higher Western art education. A former director of Exit art gallery in New York once gave Kukuli the advice to read one book of theory a week, in order to progress as an artist. Kukuli didn't follow this advice. {laughter, cheering} Kukuli doesn't look at the canon of Western art as the basis of her work, nor does she try to make her own work part of this history. Instead, she turned to the visual forms and rituals of her ancestral culture as a starting point. This turning toward Indigenous aesthetics does not mean that her work tries to represent Indigenous culture. Kukuli's own personal history is mixed and unique, and so are her influences, but her work is looking to connect to the spirit of ancient culture. In a statement, Kukuli said, "If it's true that spirits exist, some of those millions of people might inhabit these sculptures. They're like a summoning of those ancestors whose names I don't know whose languages I don't speak."

Kukuli received her BFA from Hunter College. She's the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, an Anonymous is a Woman award, and a Joan Mitchell Foundation award, amongst others. In 2013, her project *Corpus* got the grand prize at the Gyeonggi Ceramics Bienniel in South Korea. Solo shows includes the Weatherspoon Art Museum at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, and University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor. Recent group shows include *New Grit: Art and Philly Now*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, *El Peru: Art in the Contemporary Past for Peruvian Artists,* National Hispanic Art Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her work is included in the collections of Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Lima, Museum of

Fine Arts-Houston, and Art Institute of Chicago. These awards and achievements are numerous and impressive, but they are not a summary, or the final result of the work that Kukuli pursues. Kukuli dedicated her artist's career to the visual heritage of Indigenous culture, women's rights, and other causes. As Kukuli remarked in a studio visit here at Skowhegan this Saturday, "The white cube is not the end of our artistic efforts." Please welcome Kukuli Velarde. {applause, cheering}

Kukuli Velarde: I used to give talks frequently, but this is the first time I'm nervous about it. {cooing, cheers, laughter} I'm not gonna show you paintings this time, this is the only one you're gonna see. I'm just gonna focus on my ceramic work. But I just will tell you that this painting is based on Peruvian transitional textiles, transitional in the time of thirty years in the colonization from 1530 to 1560 or 70. Anyway, and the title is *Daddy Likey*. {laughter} And it's from 2010. Or '19. I take like a year in making everything I do. {laughs}

[song plays 00:06:12 – 00:07:14] You just heard the rock band Uchpa singing in Quechua, a language spoken in Peru and neighboring countries for centuries. They added the sound of a violin from the musical accompaniment of the scissor dancers, from the Peruvian Andes. A European instrument adapted through centuries to Andean sensibility, becoming a vehicle of right. The scissor dancers are in Peru legendary, and popular. And funny, and serious, and tragic. All at once.

Here, they are summoned in another contemporary artistic expression, through Renata Flores, Peruvian Quechua singer of trap. [music video plays 00:07:59 – 00:10:15]

And finally, the scissor dancers themselves, characters of religious nature, whose predecessors are lost in oblivion. [video plays 00:10:28 – 00:11:14] I have added some snippets of music throughout the talk, I apologize if they don't fade in and out. They are included as examples of the continuous exchange, absorption, and recreation of Western culture as a vehicle of continuity. And as cultural landscape. Most musical expressions in Peru have a very Spanish sounding, which frankly is evidence of how colonized we were.

Many years ago, near the border of Skowhegan, Norridgewock, Wabanakis established themselves along the Kennebec and Sandy rivers, where they roamed in peace and security for generations. They were killed and their settlement destroyed by the British in what is known as Dummer's War in 1724, ending in that way this nation's presence in the area. I want to begin by naming the Wabanaki people in whose territory we are. I am aware that acknowledging them is, in a way, an empty gesture, because it doesn't change history. I do it as a sign of respect.

I also want to acknowledge Skowhegan Pachamama and [WORD UNCLEAR] Mama Qucha. My own mother has gotten very fervent belief, fervent believer of the entities that populate Inca's mythology is still present in the Andes. It is in her name that I greet them both, the land and the lake as feminine entities, and thank them for making possible seventy-five successful years of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

I am a Peruvian-born American citizen, and my country of origin are two hundred years old social and geographical construct has still a strong presence in my aesthetics. The territory that is known as Peru has been the stage of many cultural developments for millennia. For instance, Caral-Supe, which is allegedly the oldest civilization of the Americas flourished creating impressive architectural and engineering structures around 27, 2700 years before our era. At the same time, the Egyptian pyramids of Giza, Djoser, and the sphinx were erected. When silk was discovered in China, and the Indus Valley civilization, the most ancient on the Indian continent was thriving in what is today Pakistan. A time when in Mesopotamia, the first fortified city was constructed in Uruk, and men helped by tools made of antlers build Stonehenge in Great Britain. [song plays 00:14:27 – 00:15:06]

The territory that is known as Peru has been indeed the stage for many cultural developments, for millennia. Civilizations such as Chavin, Paracas, Chincha, Biqus [?], Moche, Nazca, Tijuanacu, Huari, Chimu, Valleque, Cupisnique, Ica, Chancay, Inca, among others, sprung within and beyond the territory and created culture. They built housing developments with aqueducts to distribute water within, as well as irrigation channels for farming, and engineered earthquake-resistant constructions. They practiced brain surgery as early as 2000 Before Christ, with apparently successful results, shown in a skull's front with cranioplasty covered in plates with silver and gold. They began the process of the domestication of the potato plant around 7,000 years ago, following centuries of selective breeding, producing up to today over 5,000 varieties of such plant. They developed independently or simultaneously to other civilizations in the Americas crops such as corn, cotton, several types of aji peppers, peanuts, tamarinds, sweet potatoes, quinoa. Funny story about quinoa – it was never sold in the supermarkets in Lima for as long as I remember. It was food, it was a staple for people in the country and people with not much resources who were coming from the Andean region to the capital. It wasn't til it was commercialized abroad that Lima began selling it in their fancy supermarkets, and now the people who was fed for decades or centuries with it cannot eat it because it's too expensive.

Around sixty percent of food globally come from the Americas. We can safely claim that pre-colonized nations here have contributed to the world with a staple food that would sustain nations at times of famines and would enhance the culinary of many societies in the European and the Asian continent. [song plays 00:17:43 – 00:18:27]

From within the, from within and beyond the Republican borders of Peru, from north to south, within the whole extension of this land, ancestors were inventing their world, made entirely to their image, and after their own likeness. Here, in the Americas, life was thriving.

Christopher Columbus arrived to the Americas in 1492 and changed forever the course of that history. The moment he stepped on the island of Guanahani, the Bahamas, and planted a flag of his sponsors, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, cultural development in the continent began to stone.

In 1532, the Inca empire was still solidifying the power of a robust territory beyond the borders of actual Peru. A quarrel about inheritance to the throne between Huáscar and Atahualpa, sons of the Inca Huayna Cápac, provoked a division in the territory at the exact time that Francisco Pizarro began his journey towards Cuzco, its capital. Atahualpa had won over his brother, and once he learned of the newcomers, curious, ordered his generals to let them go and get to him. (00:20:04) Little he knew that his curiosity added to the discontent of people from annexed territories, and next that they spoke of divine beings coming from the sea would cost him his kingdom and his life, but so it happened, and that universe lost its axis. I name and acknowledge the history as a continuum. It's not past, it is present, because culture is like a river. We can redirect the past, but we can never change its waters.

My work has frequently resolved – I'm sorry, revolved, around the consequences of European invasion, the intricate cultural strategies of resistance and negotiation developed by populations, especially that of the original inhabitants of Peru. I try to imagine the traumatic experience that the population went through at the very beginning of the process of colonization, and particularly, I try to imagine what it meant for the artists. As an artist, it is hard to comprehend what it would mean that everything I know about my aesthetic practice, including what is considered sacred and transcendental in my historical context, were to be dismissed, erased, or belittled.

How were they able to go from the mythical or anthropomorphic depictions of their world in mediums such as clay and textiles, to realistic representations of imported deities in materials as foreign as oil painting? The Inca government was basically a theocratic monarchic vertical society, yet its aesthetic was not drastically different from other nations that confirm it politically even further. Though many cultures blossomed and faded before the Incas, there were common denominators, perhaps based on social or economic exchanges, shared ecosystems, human physiology, all variables that produced an aesthetic that resonated throughout the whole continent for centuries.

On the other hand, Europe was an altogether different reality. Its aesthetics has developed independently from the Americas, influenced by Asia and Africa, but around and to the service of its own inhabitants, including what was to be considered sacred and transcendental. [songs plays 00:23:14 – 00:23:53]

The clash was overwhelming in all fields, and the consequences are still part of our daily life. Today, we hover between corruption or alienation in a continuous effort to remain afloat and survive a convoluted environment which extols our history while purifies it from our existence. Peru as product of colonization is a country where western European aesthetics is prevalent. It is the bar with which to measure, compare, and define the objects we make, as well as our own physical attributes, features, and skin. We became ugly right at contact, and our art expressions found themselves discontinued, or its production modified and classified as crafts. Or they go to a museum, anthropological museum. We are not any more the center of our universe. I remember when doing some research about Peruvian phenotypes, I came across websites in Spanish about the ugliest

people of South America, which were again and again Peruvians, Bolivians, Ecuadorians, the population with the highest amount of precolonial features.

This state of things and the seemingly eternal status quo in Peruvian society have prompted me to question the divergence between Peruvian phenotype and our physical bodies and our sense of beauty. Can we be beautiful again? I don't pretend to free myself from western influence, for it is an impossible task. But I am recognizing my position, hoping to insert myself in artistic dialogue started long ago by people who looked and still look like me, while representing my contemporary self closely. A product of colonization, yes, a mixed-race urban middle class Peruvian middle-aged cis woman. I base my work in pre-Colombian ceramic creations, not as an act of plunder or appropriation, but of recognition and reconnection. And I wish to stand proud as an artmaker. Not to be a prop, a reference, a source, an ethnic curiosity, or a token. I embrace an aesthetics that represents a population that's suffered colonization, endures coloniality, and is not reflected in the universality of European, Euro-American understanding of art. In so doing, I portrayed our cultural dichotomy, western culture and non-western heritage that exist as nemesis in our skins. I hope my artwork is at the end a document that speaks of what we were and what we have become.

The nature of what was going to be my creative work became apparent in 1991, when the western world was preparing to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Columbus' enterprise. It sprouted from a feeling of impotence. I remember playing with a shape and doing, and going nowhere with it, until I began placing rusty, dusty nails on its chest. And in that moment, I felt that I found my voice. I felt for the first time that my thoughts and my feelings were connected and materializing through my house, through my hands. There in the spot, I began my first series, *We, The Colonized Ones*. I titled this piece *Impaled*, and I took it with me on the subway and to an anti-celebratory protest in front of the United Nations in Manhattan that year. That piece was made thinking about Christianity, and its implications in the erasure of civilizations and genocide.

I will be interspersing images of different protests in the Americas, from Canada to Chile. They have been happening for centuries, and will continue, for the right of the land, water, and wellbeing. Borders, in the end, don't matter, because these protests are all one.

On the left, the mother who gives birth to mixed-race children, who will reject her later on. At her feet, small pieces that I also used to carry on the subway train. The children who never had a chance to be conceived. When people prompted me to show my baby in the subway, I happily would uncover it and talk to them about the celebrations. That was the only way I had to, to do something.

Here, one of my children that was never born. Not even thought. And seemingly never missed. La malinche. Colonization defines the process in which a territory is taken over by force, and its population is subjected to exploitation. Coloniality is when a population hasn't been freed of the colonial structures that colonization crafted, because such structures benefit those who inherited the power based in their economic status, and European aristocratic provenance. (00:30:12) Colonization is the cradle of modernity and

coloniality, the [WORD UNCLEAR] who support our capitalist system. It is possible to imagine and begin at the colonial process, I think. And develop strategies together, particularly in the aesthetic realm, and in so doing contribute to the resistance and negotiations carried already for centuries.

This piece was part of the series, also dated 1992, but it is more specifically about the right to choose to bring a child to the world or not. I was not including this piece, until two days ago. It's titled *Womb I*, and after all these years, unfortunately, it is still relevant. [song plays 00:31:15 – 00:31:41]

After *We, The Colonized Ones*, I have worked in several series. One of them is *Plunder Me, Baby.* I always wonder what would happen if pre-Colombian ceramics in any museum in the world were to wake up from centuries of sleep. What would they think or feel out of context, and stripped of meaning? What would it be for them to be prisoners in a beautiful display or [WORD UNCLEAR] in captivity in an anthropological museum? I imagine them in despair and fear, and I also imagine them overcoming their defeat. Owning themselves, not any more victims, but witnesses of history, transcending their own existence.

The title of this series is a defiance, a teasing invitation to futile aggression for they are being harmed. Individually, their titles are composed by racial slurs, the ones still very much in use in Peru and all Latin America, against ourselves. There is a sardonic commentary following each of them, stressing frequent stereotypes and condescending social perceptions. In addition, since each piece is based in an actual pre-Colombian figurine, they all have the name of the culture as well as the date that such a style was in use. They all have my face, for I had to own their title descriptions in first person, to give an idea of size of human face. All human faces are life-sized. *Plunder Me, Baby* ideal representation is an installation. Preferably, in museum showcases. [songs plays 00:33:53 – 00:34:25]

Corpus. *Corpus* narrates my history incorporating pre-Colombian and colonial sensibilities by visually mimicking syncretism within a contemporary narrative. It summons the presence of unknown [WORD UNCLEAR] ancestral entities, disguised with the gilded garments of Catholic sculptures that are part of the festivities of Corpus Christi in Cuzco, Peru since 1572. By the way, this is Santiago, also known as the Indian killer. And also, he is thunder and lightning. So he has many personalities. And this is my, my, my {laughing} my installation *Corpus*. [video plays 00:35:31 – 00:37:10] They are accompanied by the imaginary clicking and flashing of tourists slash paparazzis, pacing their journey with a military march titled "Peruvians are Passing, Pasandos Peruanos." Processions often have the musicality of military march. The voice of my father in the background reciting a prayer in Quechua to Viracocha, the invisible entity. *Corpus* is my reflection on the meaning of survival in contrast with existence, or inheritance versus appropriation, or national quote unquote personal communal aesthetics versus foreign aesthetics, and on creating versus following.

This is the last series that I'm gonna show you. I got pregnant at forty-eight, and I really never felt more beautiful. I felt for the first time that I didn't have to see myself

through the male gaze. I gave birth to my daughter Vida, who is now ten, and in 2018, I began a series I titled *A Mi Vida*. Her name is Vida. Which are portraits of my love for her, but not only. The idea of creating this intimate works came from anticipating the moment of separation, following American custom, to have children leaving the house early in life. It's already breaking my heart. I make up tons of photographs of her, but once she's gone to follow her path my arms will be left empty. I give myself through the pieces a chance to embrace her always one more time. Para mi Vida is not just about that. The pieces speak of a natural, avoidable, and unbearable pain of separation within the frame of our political landscape. The pain of a parent and a child when separated by force, because the color of their skin at the border of this country. *A Mi Vida* is an urgent request for empathy and protection against the cruelty of such an impulse to separation.

Each piece has been made to be carried by a mother's arms. They don't belong to pedestals. Their ideal presentations is within your embrace. I should add, *A Mi Vida* is also performance. It consists in my offering them to the audience to hold them and help me appease their crying. [video plays 00:40:19 – 00:40:43] I like the idea of the audience being able to hold, not only the idea, obviously the idea of a child, but also, you know, to, to fill that gap between the artwork and the audience, to have them holding them. I'm gonna continue this series here in Skowhegan. They're supposed value as an untouchable art piece is exchanged to become a physical metaphor of the incommensurable value of a child.

To end, let me show you my last project, the first piece of this series, which I've been working for more than a year. It's a new body of work, having in mind the power of acknowledgement, and of showing respect. This is a piece that will have, that has five parts, one is talking over the other. This is the bigger one, the one that goes at the bottom. It's the huaca del agua, the walk of water. It's said huacas were perhaps mediators, transitional threshold entities, places, all of the above, or something else, we can't quite describe. My huaca del agua consists in five units stacked on top of each other, each representing different history periods of Peru. Water is always present, present, and changeable. It will see us go as it saw us coming. Ah! [video plays 00:42:48 – 00:43:32]

Documenting what I don't know, and being okay with the impossibility of knowledge. I'd rather not know than translate. The chronicles translated the universe, and in doing so, they shrank it, and their terminology not created to define it with accuracy. I am aware of the existence of that universe, and from the borders of my mixed culture, slash race, I show my respect. Becoming part of a collective memory. Fluidity from past to future. Fighting oblivion. Claiming a space. Thank you. {applause, cheering}

Any questions?

Audience #1: That was so good! {cheers, applause}

Audience #2: I don't know if I actually have a question, I just wanted to {laughter}, I do just kinda want to compliment you really heavily for the ridiculously beautiful formalism in the balance with ceramics – sorry, {speaking more into mic} the balance with the ceramic pieces you're making, and these finishes. The colonialism kind of call-out built in is so

consummate and stunning, and emotional. The historical standard is incredible! I really like the way you're observing things from the first person, and if I do have a question it would be, is that something you feel is like a tenet in kind of painting yourself, figuratively, or your face as the face of these subjects in the vessels? Yeah.

Velarde: I don't know, I wonder if [UNCLEAR}

Audience #2: Wow, okay.

Velarde: {getting on mic} Which I, I have never, I have never been allowed to think. You know, like, as I said, there were a lot of websites about the ugliness of Peruvians and Bolivians and Ecuadorians, because of our Indigenous features. So when you think about it, how much that can effect a society, that embrace western aesthetics, and in that aesthetics, it's categorized as ugly. And I think it's, it's a pattern [?] that we live with, and we don't realize how harmful it is.

Audience #3: {laughs} Okay. {sighs} Thank you so much for that talk. I was wondering if you could talk a bit more about your relationship to performance art in your practice, like even the gesture that you did in the talk of, like, dancing, in the middle, it felt very experiential but then you talked a bit about some of the performance work that you were doing in the gallery. I'm just wondering about your relationship to performance.

Velarde: You know, I, I, I use painting, performance, video, or ceramics, depending on what I want to say. I have never been shy in terms of talking front of public, so, you know, I'm, I don't mind dancing in front of people. I'm not a great dancer, {laughter} at all --

Audience #3: You were dancing great, yeah.

Audience #4: Great!

Velarde: But it's part of my cultural upbringing, you know. It's the music that, that, it's the music that make you dance. And, you know, like I'm trying to learn, because we had a conversation with Andrea about reggaeton – I'm trying to learn about it, but it's not the music of, that my youth, and the music of your youth is the one that, you know, imprints you for the future. And so that music, to me, seemed immediately moving. I don't know if it makes sense.

Audience #5: Hi! I guess, I just wanted to ask about, like, well, two part. One part is, what, like, finally made you, you said, in your talk, you talked a little bit about not really feeling like an artist, or like not really doing art stuff until, you know, like the Columbus work and stuff like that. Like, what was the trigger for that, and then, I guess the next part is, like, how was it like doing this work in the '90s in New York, on the subway, which seems like a crazy landscape to be in, yeah, I'm gonna stop there.

Velarde: I, I hate impunity. And we experience impunity all the time. And celebrating what meant the end of civilizations seem to me like so heartless. And, and it was happening

everywhere, including in South America. I, at that time, I had so many conversations of people, including professors in the university, that would tell me, but, you know, you're not going to deny the benefits of western culture. (00:50:16) And I don't know, you know? 2500 years before they came, they were doing already surgery, so I, I just, I cannot understand – even if that were not the case, these were millions of people. And, and we were just willing to celebrate, like, well, you know, yeah, they died, so, but it past already, you should look forward, and, and I think that is one of the reasons for which, when I went to college, and Paulo Coelho [?] told me to read one art theory book per day, per week, and I tried, but I don't find myself on those books. And I really tried. But they are not talking about me. And I just decided that that was not something that interested me. As it didn't interest me to do a master's degree either. I didn't think that was necessary for being an artist. But it happens that it seems that it is. And it shouldn't.

So, you know, the books that I read are art history books – no, not art history. Neither. {laughter} Because I'm not there either, you know? You have like this universal art history, which is western, you know, European and American, and then you have like this of Asian, and then like three pages of Aztecs and Incas, and it's like, you know, this is not universal. So I refuse. I refuse to read it, those things that are denying my existence. And I don't know if it makes sense. {laughter, applause, cheering}

Audience #6: Hey, hello. I, the thing that keeps sticking in my mind is the variety of facial expressions that you have created on your, on your sculptures. And I'm just curious, like, how did you go about like coming up with or forming these like very intricately specific expressions for each figure?

Velarde: I, you know, I do as much as I need, and maybe it's out of laziness, or, I don't know – I like to procrastinate a lot. {laughter} I, I like to enjoy my life, you know? I {applause, cheering} I mean, I had a kid at 48. {laughter} I already have done a lot of art work by, you know, I have already been in the studio. And I am okay with who I am and how far I went. I don't expect my career to get to Gagosian Gallery or something. {laughs} But I am okay with that. So I do what I feel like I need to do in that moment.

This is the first time that I'm digging clay with participants that are far more knowledgeable than I am about that. Because, you know, you study ceramics in the United States, and unless you are in an area like New Mexico, where you can actually find clay and all that, you buy it. So I am part of that reality. I'm not trying to be somebody else. That, that's what I've done, that's what I've seen, the clay that I get, it's made. And, because I, I cannot be who I'm not. I am, I'm living in the United States for thirty years, and I am still speaking like this. I haven't even done the effort for to speak better. {laughs} So I don't know, I just go as I need. But you know, there are people who do better faces than I do. Yeah. But I am okay with that too. {laughs}

Audience #7: Kukuli, this morning we talked about how, like, objects might live on, or how objects from thousands of years go get reinterpreted in, like, the contemporary. And I'm wondering if, after seeing this, if you have any, like, hopes or considerations for how, for how your objects are, like, interpreted down the road, or, yeah.

Velarde: I want to think that my work is, that I'm creating documents, but as any artwork, once it is, been seen by other eyes, the people who look at it will come with their own baggage. And that's not possible to control. We really cannot know anything at all, you know? And I think that's a certainty that we can have. Any, anything that we know about history, we know depending on who wrote it. So we don't really know what happened, or how it happened. We only know the results because affect us. I don't know if that answers your question, because I already forgot what it was. {laughter} I am fifty-nine. {laughs}

Audience #8: [INAUDIBLE] {gets mic} – okay, there we go. There we go! Yeah, thank you again. And I, so, the message, the sort of moment of you bringing the ceramic work onto the subway was brought up, and I was also thinking to you bringing your, the first piece that you showed us to a protest, and it was like, I've never seen anybody bring a ceramic to a protest, right? And there's this sort of immediate relationship to a threat of, like, rupture, that feels like you're willing to engage, like, also thinking about the title of *Plunder Me, Baby*, like, I'm curious fi you could speak a little bit to, yeah, just your willingness to engage, like, even putting the fragility, or potential fragility of the ceramic in a public space, playing with, you know, the invitation to plunder, yeah, I'm just, would love to hear more about the sauciness {laughter} of that gesture.

Velarde: To me, that idea is always more important than the object. I, when I did that performance, that last one, I did it just a month ago, at The Clay Studio, and I wanted, I wanted to give one piece to someone. And leave. And the first idea that came to a curator was, why don't you give a copy? We have copies for having them outside with, you know, and he curates with weather. And I thought, you know, we cannot value economically our work to the point that it doesn't have the strong voice that you are pursuing it to have. And I sell, you know, I just sold those two pieces – I am a bad mother {laughter} – at the Gardiner Museum in Toronto, they just told me today in the morning. But I gave that piece to somebody I didn't know, because the point was, protect them. You know, protect them. And as I left, the person didn't know what to do, you know, what was happening, until the guy, you know, that curator told her, you are gonna keep the piece. Because the value of the idea is more important. The value of the meaning, and, you know, I, I have absolutely no regret of giving that piece away. It was what it had to be. So, I don't, I don't mind people holding the babies, because the meaning of the babies is your arms, your relationship with it, the idea of children that are suffering. A piece is nothing in comparison to that, those lives. So, you know, I don't mind giving the pieces because I, I'm not so worried about them getting broken, like, I wouldn't like that {laughs} but I think it's more important what they say than their physicality.

Audience #9: Hola. Gracias por compartir. Una pregunta que tenia, si tiene usted un consejo muy corto, por un momento, que tu haces con enojo, el coraje?

Velarde: I work.

Audience #9: Diario.

Velarde: Diario?

Audience #9: Diario. (01:00:05)

Velarde: Mucho nom [?] por diario.

Audience #9: De ser artiste en este --

Velarde: Este pinche mondo?

Audience #9: Yeah! {laughter} Yeah.

Velarde: No, I'm not, I don't have anger to the art world, you mean, or?

Audience #9: No, pero [WORD UNCLEAR] convertir a tu mismo. Porqué solo eres una persona, no?

Velarde: Yeah, but everyone is adding. You know, like, this is the first time that people listen to house Quechua sounds here. For example, you know? And I have told you a little bit of history that maybe you knew, maybe you didn't. And that is adding, the, the, the colonizing aesthetics, if that is our purpose, is not gonna happen with us. And it has been happening for centuries, since the very moment that invasion began, there has always been a force against it. And we just have to acknowledge, I mean, that theory of, of coloniality and decoloniality is thirty, forty years old, and it is, it has been crafted by South American thinkers in the last few years, and you cannot read most of it, because it's in Spanish, but you can read it. But many cannot read it because it's in Spanish, and I love the idea that knowledge is not expected any more to come from Europe or the United States. I love that idea. So I think that little by little, things are changing. It's just not gonna be me, or, you know, the next generation, maybe later. But so what.

Yes.

Audience #10: Hi. Sorry. Oh. I'm just, I was wondering if you could speak about contradiction. I think that when thinking, I think specifically for me, in my work, thinking about sort of colonial, decolonial, who we are today, there's a lot of questions that are raised around contradiction based on the things that we, the systems that we continue to uphold, but also how we're trying to make that our own? And I just wondered if this is, if contradiction or the ideas around contradiction comes up in your work. And thinking.

Velarde: You know, we are, we are a mix of experiences. And, and we should act accordingly. You guys grew up here, your experience of American culture is different than mine. And you are, you are dealing with what is, has been, what has been given to you. And that is okay.

I don't identify with a lot of things about American culture. Even when I was living in Peru, I didn't know American music or British music or whatever, you know, rock and other

stuff. Led Zeppelin I didn't know. I remember I bought a CD of Led Zeppelin, *The Staircase to Heaven*, because I thought my husband was gonna be so happy. And then I go, look what I got for you! And then I put it in, and my husband is like, he's from Kansas, {laughs} [UNCLEAR]. And he just, you know, listened to it, and he said, 'Yeah, I saw some. {laughter} But I have heard it millions of times.' You know? And that, that is a cultural difference. So he has to deal with that. You know, me, on the other hand, I was learning who Led Zeppelin is, and I cannot still recognize music, and, you know, I like music in Spanish, I like the poetry of lyrics, but I respond to my reality. And I think that each of us can only respond of your own, you cannot go back to something that you don't know, but you can show respect. And acknowledgement.

And I think that there's no such thing as social ethics, in terms of acknowledging, you know, like, we all eat quinoa, and we don't know where it comes from. We don't know what it means that we can eat quinoa. But that, we are just responding to what we know. And there are gonna be always contradictions.

And my husband is, is, doesn't speak Spanish, he's an extraordinary man, I love him so much, because he's, he was a great man the first day, and twenty-three years, he's still the same great person. I haven't found any fault on him. Yet. I'm looking! {laughter} And we have such a different way to see the world, you know? And, and in little things it shows, like, like I'm kicking some Peruvian dish I don't know to cook, so I have my recipe, and I'm cooking that, and I know how it tastes, and I'm cooking and all that, and then he comes. And then he did that, cutting carrots, and cutting vegetables, and I'm like, what are you doing? And he's like, oh, I'm, so that we make the, you know, it's more nutritious. And I'm like, no, man. {laughter} Excuse me. {laughs} It doesn't take carrots, you know? But it's a tiny thing, so, to me, has a very deep cultural meaning. Or maybe I just see, you know, see it everywhere. {laughs} But he, he does that, he tries to improve what is already there, you know? And for me, tradition is a, yeah, it can be improved, but let me improve it.

I know it doesn't make sense. {laughs}

Audience #11: Kukuli?

Velarde: Yes. Oh, sorry.

Audience #11: I don't have a question, but I have a, I want to give thanks for your presenting the work, and for sharing parts of your culture, and, and for treating the work with such care, I think is something that is very inspiring. And you, as an artist, and your work, you know, you inspire artists like me, and I, I don't know if I'm another generation, but, slightly, you know. {laughter} And I think that, you know, when the colonizers came, they controlled everything, but the thing that they never controlled was how we responded. And I think that your work, and your, your care for that work, will last beyond you. And I think that thirty, fifty, 100 years from now, when a young girl is Googling Peruvian people, they will see an example of one of the most beautiful people as a representation of your culture.

Velarde: Thank you. {applause}

Audience #12: I just wanted to say that your work is so beautifully rooted in Latin America. But it's very interesting that you've been living here for thirty years, so I'm wondering if you think that you would have been able to have developed that body of work also in Latin America, or it's connected also with immigration, and how you can see the, Latin American from afar, and also it's interesting, because you say that, that yes, we need to follow, like, our own cultures or regions, and don't follow the US, or Europe --

Velarde: No, no, no.

Audience #12: I'm sorry, no?

Velarde: You just follow what you feel like, you know?

Audience #12: No, I mean, but {laughter} no, I know, I know, but my point is like, we don't need to --

Velarde: But, we, it's not that we should, you know? We have options.

Audience #12: Okay, but --

Velarde: I'm not totalitaristic.

Audience #12: No, I know that. But I wanted to say, that's what I --

Velarde: Containing my work. {laughs}

Audience #12: I just wanted to say, it's like, that even when there is a lot of recognition from, or interest in, in Indigenous cultures right now, in Latin America it's happening because it is happening in the US, and it's happening in Europe. But it's not happening from inside. So how do you think we also can change our own narrative from inside, and not be able to be, like, outside, to have like a, like, recognize and acknowledge the value of our own cultures? (01:10:00)

Velarde: Oh, it's changing. There is, there are a lot of young Peruvian artists that have nothing to do with me who are breaking ground. Who are questioning why we are, we are very racist with ourselves, for instance. And I think that happens in all Latin America, but just to, to give you an example, we have the first president with Indigenous roots, he, he's actually an Indigenous person. It's a terrible government. But they hate him not because he, he's terrible, but because of his, the color of his skin. And when he was about to be president, and it was undeniable that he was elected, young people from the, from the, you know, upper levels of society, white, young men, came out onto the streets with colonial flags. I don't remember exactly the name of the flag, but it's a white flag with a red cross in it. What the hell that means? In a country like Peru. All these people, you know, children of the very, the one percent, coming out with their colonial Spaniard flags, talking about their,

their pride to be descendants from the colonizers from that Creoles, what does that mean, you know? But there are many people, many young artists who are working right now, who are, who are doing the work that probably I would be, I would have done or I would have been doing if I were living in Peru.

It's not, it's like usually we look at what artists are doing when these artists have a level of, you know, where they are showing, but there's a lot of artists that are working and that are doing amazing, amazing things. They are blurring and erasing the lines between what we call arte popular, artesanía, arte, [WORD UNCLEAR} artists. You know, they are erasing all of that because it shouldn't exist to begin with. So it is happening. And what I would have done if I stayed – I tried to go back to Peru. But my work is – it's not something that, that, that will, will have a good success in, in, in terms of the, of the art world in Lima. And also, it's something that I wouldn't want, because I've seen how it works, and I, I don't feel comfortable with that. I have had work going to Lima, I have talked to people; people remember me when I was a child, because I was a prodigious kid, I had a show since I was ten, solo shows until twenty-one, and then I left the country for no reason. And that, and then, for an exhibition, people came to see me, because they remembered me from that time. Can you mind how crazy that is?

So, I like that part. But the art world in Lima is not something that will interest me. It's very European oriented, very American oriented. And, and I'm kind of, they cannot say anything against me, because I have recognition abroad. But they would love to, I think. It feels like it. I don't know if it answers the question. It is happening. Bottom line, it's happening. It's changing. And we have to be aware of that.

Audience #12: [UNCLEAR]

Velarde: Hm?

Audience #12: And be part of that.

Velarde: Of course. But we are part, even if you are not there, you are part of it. Right? I mean, do you feel disconnected from, from where you guys are coming from?

Audience #13: -- California. {laughter}

Velarde: So you're connected. Yes.

Audience #14: So, when I think about the, the, like, when I see the intervention work you were doing on the subway, with the ceramics, I think about Adrian Piper's interventions in like public space, when she was in school when she was a bit younger. And I wonder, but I'm also like, maybe that's not an artist you see yourself in conversation with, so it made me wonder, like, what artists do you see yourself in conversation with?

Velarde: Can you, I'm sorry, can you --

Audience #14: I was saying that I was seeing the intervention you did with the ceramics in the subway in conversation with Adrian Piper's interventions on like the buses in New York when she was younger. But then I'm also like, well maybe that's not an artist you see yourself in conversation with. So I was wondering, what artists do you see yourself in conversation with?

Velarde: [UNCLEAR] I, I don't, I don't look at, I don't look that much. I look, but I don't look that much, at contemporary artwork. No.

You know, when I teach, sometimes, and when I have graduate students, they begin talking about references, like, oh yeah, you know this one, that one, the other. And I'm like, I know nobody. {laughter} I just want you to tell me what is, what this means to you. And I think that's the, at the end, that is what, what that work is about, it's not, you know, what are, what art we have seen, but what we have created, and what is the core? I always ask, what is the core about what is moving you?

Anyway. That's it, right? Thank you. {applause, cheering}