

Kristin Anahit Cass interviewed by students in Art History 303: Exploring Art in the Community, Professor Susan Erickson

Tue, Apr 18, 2023, Stamelos Gallery Center, Mardigian Library, University of Michigan-Dearborn

PART 1: *Right of Return* and *Ancestors*

00:01

(Students laughing at start). Today is Friday, April 14, 2023. Students enrolled in Art History 303, Exploring Art in the Community, are interviewing Kristen Anahit Cass about her exhibition titled, "Reparations of the Heart: Recent Work by Kristin Anahit Cass," that opened at the Stamelos Gallery Center on the first floor of the Mardigian Library on the University of Michigan-Dearborn campus on April 13th. We're delighted that Kristen is willing to meet with members of the class today. (Kristin) Thank you. (Bella) So my name is Bella Bates. I am an Economics and Philosophy major. And we have a few questions for your "Right of Return" portion of the exhibit, I believe that Lahaila is going to begin.

00:45

Yeah, my name is Lahaila. I'm a math major here. And we were wondering about the titles of your photos. Specifically in this section, there was one that was titled, "I Wake Up Screaming." And we felt that reading or looking at the pictures and reading the titles gave us a different perspective to look at it with, and that was purposeful, rather than leaving them unnamed?

01:08

(Kristin) It's purposeful. I think it's hard to follow my journey if you don't understand what's going on because it was this series is really personal to me and my family. And that's why I titled everything. (Lahaila) Thank you. (Bella) So

01:25

I'm going to ask the next question. And I know you spoke on this a little bit last night, this is specifically about why the photos in "Right of Return" are in black and white. I know you talked a little bit about sort of the life had been sucked out of the village. And we wanted to talk a little bit more about maybe the feelings you've had there, and how that translated into relaying it in black and white. And then also, we have questions about some of the items that were highlighted in color, if you want to include that as well.

01:50

(Kristin) Okay. So I know I did talk about this last night, and but not everybody was there. So let me just talk a little bit about it again. So, so for my family, we understood that our village had been burned and did no longer exist. And so I had to do a lot of research. And I had to find somebody who was familiar with Ottoman Turkish to go through the archives to find out that actually, the village wasn't completely destroyed. Yes, a lot of it was burned, but, but they changed the name. So that's how we ended up finding it. But for us, with this feeling that this place that we were originally from and my family had lived for centuries, was gone. Was this real cultural erasure for us? -- it was a real cutting us off from our roots. And we had no, no location in which to basically place ourselves historically. So, so for me as a

kid growing up that always seemed, maybe as you said, as if the life is sucked out of it, but, but to me really something dark and shadowed that we could never reconnect with. So even though once I got there, and I had said last night that one of the things that was amazing to me was the way the color and the quality of the light, the sounds, the smells, everything, was so much as my grandmother had remembered at the end of her life. And wonderful and the colors are really wonderful. But for me, I wanted to share with other people who did not go on my journey, how that affected me and how I felt like things really were in black and white. So actually, the photograph that I highlighted last night, I have a color reproduction of that at my studio, because I really loved the colors of the place. And, and actually, it was really sad to me to see that this place where all of these different indigenous groups, specifically in our village -- Armenians and Kurds lived together and had lived together for centuries -- now it's only Kurdish people who are now the targeted minority. And it was, it was really sad to feel and see that, and they were the people who are there were really wonderful, kind, welcoming, and, and a little bit uncomfortable as the way sometimes we feel as Americans when we see some other minority group here being oppressed, and we feel like, it's like being part of both the oppressed and the oppressor. It was hard for them I think, and they were super kind. So, so that's the whole black and white shoot, and I don't want anyone to think that if you go to that part of the world, everything is colorless and drab, it's definitely not. And the people are really wonderful. So then in terms of my choices to make, well first of all you asked about "I Wake Up Screaming"—"I Wake Up Screaming" was really hard because -- and I made that, that's a, very much a construction of one of the dreams that I had being there. The village where my family fled after the Armenian massacres, they fled our village and went to Kharberd, which is a major city in Western Armenia, Eastern Turkey. And unfortunately, they thought they'd be safe in the city. And they were excited to go there because there were all these Protestant missionary schools if they could avail their kids of more education, blah, blah, blah. Well, as it turned out, Kharberd came to be known as the slaughterhouse province for the hundreds of thousands of Armenians and other people who were killed there. So it was really ironic. So we went back to old Kharberd, almost nothing is really left of it. It's, it's like this, grisly dystopia. Basically, it's turned into this kind of like historical amusement park, which for somebody whose family, so many of them lost their lives, other people were literally enslaved, blah, blah, blah, it was horrible. It was really hard to be there. So we're standing on the like, ruins of the ancient Kharberd fortress that Armenians built a few years ago. And it's just really hard. We, there's all these people buying balloons and cotton candy for their kids behind us and celebrating. and we're just like -- whoa -- and the city is just in ruins. And this modern city, Elazig, has grown up with the base of the mountain. So that night, and this Turkish family comes up next to us. And they spoke English, and they started chatting with us, we just felt, we just couldn't talk to them. We were just, it was really hard. We had, my daughter and son and I had just been standing there crying, feeling horrible. And they were so kind. And it was so hard for us to kind of feel like we needed to brush them off, because we just didn't feel comfortable sharing our grief with them. And it's not their fault. They're modern people, they had nothing to do with what the government did 100 years ago, and more, so. So that, that's from that dream. And it was a bloody, horrific dream, full of the things that my uncle had told us about the things he saw when he was forcefully conscripted into the army because he's a medical professional, so (words indistinct). So that's where that came from. In terms of the use of red, and in only a couple of the photographs, I purposely did that as really a symbol of the colonial violence that's enacted against indigenous people. And it's definitely not just by the, you know, the Turkish government. But clearly, as Americans, we know that our government has veered for a very long time and enacted violence against indigenous people. And

clearly, that's not the only place -- think of all the colonialism Europe's engaged in as well as other countries over the millennia. So, so that's what that's for. And one of the things that really stuck in my mind, and also I noticed my son and daughter as well, is that the things that -- so I was in Iran, and yes, there's pictures of Khomeini all over. And so Americans will always talk about that -- Oh, it's terrible; It's like, you know, this is like this, like, horrible autocratic government, blah, blah, blah. And, you know, there's Iranian flags all around -- oh, well, we do that stuff in our own country. And so seeing that in Turkey with these pictures of Erdogan, everywhere, I mean, it's like a cult. And then the Turkish flag is like carved into the hillsides of like Western Armenian and stuff. It's just ick. And then I realized, Oh, my God, we do this here. There's an American flag flying everywhere. And we have pictures of our presidents. For goodness sakes, we carved them into the sacred lands of native people at Mount Rushmore. So of course, that was another moment of like, oppressed/oppressor -- diaspora is just a strange place to be. So that's why I chose to do that with these photographs, but not to overemphasize it. But I think, you know I think a lot of us who live in these spaces where our governments have committed those kinds of acts, they just need to be aware, and we need to be sensitive. So, long answer.

09:40

(Bella) Thank you so much for that answer. Thank you, I really appreciate the insight. I know in this portion of the exhibit, people are not as centered or focused as some of the others. But I was curious of the people in this, because they, you know those people it's very clear that there was like a relationship at least built in the studio, and maybe they saw some of the reproductions and such, these people are much more sort of observational. Do these, do you build relationships with these people seen here? Do they have an experience with the exhibition at all? Do they see any of the photos? Or is it more sort of that sort of observational experience?

10:14

(Kristin) Yeah, the thing is, it was, they don't speak either the Kurdish language or Turkish, we speak English, Armenian, Spanish, and French, but no language we could communicate with directly with them. So the Armenian man that was with us, who speaks both modern and pre-modern Turkish, was great in terms of chatting with, helping us chat with people, but I couldn't really have a, easily a one-on-one conversation without the translator. So some of the people that you see, for instance, there's the photograph, "They Discuss Our Return," that's—I can't remember if he's the mayor or like an alderman kind of person, but he, we had a conversation with him through the translator. And that was actually pretty great. And he was really--he was actually really kind. We got so --- my, my uncle thought that the church had been burned and was no longer in existence. So, we went, and as soon as I saw the ruins from a distance, okay, this is an Armenian Church, clearly, because this shape is so distinctive, the architecture is really distinctive. And we went up, and you can see where people had tried to hack off all of the Armenian and Christian symbols. But that's kind of hard. It's a lot of work, because it's stone, so, had not been wholly successful. But it was really heartbreaking because my uncle had told this specific story about watching them burn the women and old people to death in the church, in one of the villages that he was in when he was in the army. So that was particularly difficult. And I just cried. I mean, it was just so heartbreaking to see it there. And to think like, all this violence, and for what? All these people killed, and for what? This did not make modern Turkey a better place. In fact, it would have been a much better place, in my opinion, if we all lived together, shared our culture, shared all the things that

we do share. Anyway, so, so I had that connection with him. The men who are, in-- the shopkeepers, I, we chatted with them just a little bit, but they were kind of, like, I don't know, they seemed a little bit shy. So no, none of these people get to see these photographs, unfortunately. Yeah. (Bella) Just curious, thank you again, we really appreciate that.

12:38

(Fatima) Hi, my name is Fatima. I'm majoring in pre-med and psychology. You mentioned that genocide and violence is inevitable. So what is your (word indistinct)?

12:53

(Kristin) Yeah, no, I don't actually think it's inevitable. (Fatima) Really? (Kristin) Yeah. Genocide and violence--I don't think it's inevitable at all.

(Bella) She says it's not an inevitable experience, and so we're curious about genocidal, foundational violence -- and if it's inevitable. (Kristin) I don't think that's inevitable at all. I don't think we have to deal - we've done it. But we don't have to continue doing it. We don't have to continue denial in America, and Turkey, and Europe, all over Europe, where they're in denial about, you know, the things they've done. We don't have to do that, but --

13:24

(Fatima) But do you think your art reflects on that?

13:27

(Kristin) Yeah, I think it does. One of the things that I felt once I moved from this black and white series to the other series, especially this larger "Republic of My Imagination" series, is that there's so much culture that people who are from the general SWANA [South West Asian/ North African] / Middle East region share. Yeah, we've been invading and occupying and, you know, committing all kinds of imperialism on each other for centuries, but we've also shared culture, and clearly, religion as well. Because otherwise you wouldn't have Islam spread across that entire area if we weren't sharing all these aspects of it. And then for Armenians living, living alongside actually so many, like Islamic cultures, that's really affected us too. It's affected everything from our cuisine, to you know, our music and art, which I think is great. Cultural cross-pollination is wonderful. And it doesn't erase anybody's native culture. So, I think it's, not, it's something that, and so yes, this really, so working on this "Republic" project series, and talking to all these people, it really made me understand how much we share when you see the things that are going on politically and militarily across the region. We have way more reason to back each other and help each other demand our rights, than we do when we appeal to Europe. Europe doesn't care about us, why would they care. They want the oil and other resources, and for sure, in Armenia, we know this. They come in, they extract our resources, and they leave, and they don't care what happens to us, and they don't care what happens to our land. So I realized that yes, we could really live together and share culture, and we should be supporting each other, because nobody else is going to care. Yeah, so and especially as I was going to the, like, demonstrations in Chicago against the war in Armenia, and what's happening in Palestine, and then Yemen, you know, it's just endless. It's been an endless. So yeah, I do feel like we really could, we could really acknowledge each other and our shared culture. And, and that really happened for me with

all these people that I met, and I feel like it happened for them. And a number of us ended up having like long-term relationships, with each other. So, yeah.

16:14

(Lahaila) Yeah, there's also the photo, "To Deny," (Kristin) Uh-huh. (Lahaila) It was, like a picture of an apartment building--and the picture, the person draped over the balcony. We just kind of wanted to hear more about the title and image that's portrayed there.

16:34

(Kristin) That's Erdogan. And it's--that returns to my feeling-- I had been in Iran before I was in Turkey. And it was just, that was an amazing experience, because it was nothing like anything you hear in any Western media. Of course, it wasn't. And it's just kind of shocking in a way, because you think, wow, nobody, you know, most people aren't going there. So they're never going to see that it's different than you expect. But returning to the issue of the photos of Khomeini all over, and the way Americans just make, and Europeans -- it's not just us-- make so much out of that. Meanwhile, I did find the idea of hanging a picture of Biden over your balcony kind of bizarre, and I was like, this is like a cult here. This is crazy. Okay, now I realized that I have seen pictures of Trump in some places, but that is a frightening cult of craziness. So I was like, okay, so that just really, really, like stuck in my imagination. And the title, "To Deny," I mean, yes, he is like denialist supreme. I mean, not that we don't have equivalents in American politics. So, I just thought it was a nice way of saying, here's this, here's this thing that I find crazy and offensive. We do it here and in lots of other places, too. So, yeah.

(Bella) Definitely similarities everywhere. (Kristin) Yeah. We don't want to acknowledge it.

(Bella) No, to deny. (laughing) I think that's all our questions just for this portion.

(Kristin) Great. Thank you.

(Bella) Thank you so much for all your insightful answers. Thank you.

18:34

(Adam) Hello, I'm Adam Foreman. I'm an anthropology major, and we wanted to ask you questions on the section titled "Ancestors." One of the first questions we had was like, this section, there's like, individuals alongside old photographs, and this suggests a yearning to connect one's ancestors. But yet also, like, has a sense of distance within the photos themselves. That like so much has been lost, and it's difficult to reclaim. And we we're wondering if you could comment on that.

19:02

(Kristin) Yeah. Okay, so one of the things about this series, that I, the way the series started. So one of my aunts was one of the women -- she wasn't a woman, she was a child basically kidnapped and sold during the genocide. And so, I started thinking about that in her experience, because it was one thing I didn't understand as a kid at all. And they talked about it in code, because we couldn't really-- you can't say that bad thing that happened, as if that will make it go away. And so I had made some work, which is not part of this exhibition, that addressed that. So I started thinking about it, and after making that work, I felt like, wow, I feel this deeper understanding of what Zaruhi must have gone through and how, you know, how I just --she's obviously dead now--how there's nothing I can do anymore--but for me,

there was this kind of sense of acknowledging her tragedy and finding some closure in the present. So I started thinking about--Wow, I want to recreate some of my other ancestors in portraits, and some of them are actually here in the show. Okay, so there's a, there's a wedding photograph, which is tiny and it's hard to see, but it's in the photograph that's "Hrant Kebantsi," and that's actually my son when he was much younger. So there's a little boy in the picture. And he's just compelling to me in a way. He's got very non-, he's wearing very non-western clothes--part of it, he's got a fez on, and he has a long, like, (words indistinct) -- it's a long shirt, more like a tunic, but over western pants and shoes. And so I wanted to recreate that in some way because I feel I find his figure really compelling. He would have still been a little kid during the genocide, and he did not survive. So that -- in some of the other pictures, so after I did that, I said, Wow, this feels really amazing to me. So I started talking to other people about this idea, and I got this, like, overwhelming response. Yes, yes-- can I bring in all these pictures and, and my grandma's lace, and these clothes my mother wore at her wedding in Yemen, and this and that. And so, I think it was, as a lot of people commented--Wow, I feel so connected to them by making this like contemporary embodiment of these people. It makes me feel amazingly connected. And people found things like there's, there's a portrait, "From My Grandmother's Hands," that's in the bottom right there. She's literally holding handwork that her grandmother made, and some of it -- it's the one that's over her arm-- was something she was still working on when she died, and there's a needle and thread in mid stroke. And it was just so compelling to see that and feel her grandmother's presence. And people were telling stories. So there is a sense of distance, because these people are dead, and we didn't make this connection with them during their lifetime. Some of them had never even met those ancestors. But there is also this, this kind of closeness and closure that people felt making this kind of very, you know, physical connection, -- I'm wearing your clothes, I've got your things in my hands.

22:44

(Aya) So building upon that, we did notice the elements of their Armenian culture, and the aspects relevant to these people in the modern world. So in the photo titled "I am the Fountain, You are Water," (Kristin) Yes. (Aya) The young woman wears clothing that seems traditional, but we noticed that she's also wearing headphones, and has all these like modern aspects. And we noticed the photos of the ancestors on the table next to her, but we wanted to ask you about the background chosen for the photo, which is, you know, the night scene with the light filtering through the windows and the building juxtaposed with statues hovering in the sky. So we wanted to ask what is the message that the sitter wanted to convey and the message you want to convey through the title?

23:31

(Kristin) Yeah, so starting with the sitter, Dani is Armenian. She is Armenian, not obviously all these sitters are clearly Armenian, actually, there's probably more various Arabs in these photographs. But, but Dani is Armenian, and I believe her family was living in Lebanon, so there's a more--there's the dress that she, that you see in the photos is more, (rather) is less traditionally Armenian than the taraz [tatreez in Arabic] that some people are wearing. But, but anyway, so you've got those ancestor photographs. And she's, she's a singer, and also DJs. So she said, I want to have some of the elements of my, you know, kind of modern life as an American. So she brought headphones, and she's got a microphone. But the rest of the elements are things that I pulled in that photograph specifically from Armenian culture. So there's there's the, like tiled floor, which is clearly I think, is an Arabic influence, which you will see in some places, especially if you're in the Armenian parts of Iran, or

Lebanon, or other places in the Middle East, but in some places in Armenia itself. And the background that you see lit up, that's Republic Square in the capital of Armenia. It's a really, really beautiful place that was built, actually during Soviet times, and a lot of the architecture was built to use really traditional elements of ancient Armenian architecture from sites like Erebuni, Van, so on and so forth. So, so that's why I started there. And it's a really popular place for young people, and basically anybody to go any time of day, but at night, it's really happening. There's lots of cafes around, it's really fun. And I felt like it would definitely be a place that Danny would find herself. And then in terms of the title, so that's, that's kind of, I thought, I love that that's from that's from a poem. And it, it kind of speaks to what's the situation? Who is the fountain? And who is the water here? Is, is Danny, the fountain through which the water of her ancestors flow? Are the ancestors the fountain through which the contemporary Danny flows? And that's a question for you to think about and ponder, because I think it's both. And I think that's why the connection to our ancestors is really important. Not that we should nostalgize, actually the way lots of Americans do -- I think, Oh, it was better than 1950s, or some crazy thing like that, but, but like not that we should nostalgize, but that we should take their experiences and any wisdom that they believe, and use it to anchor ourselves in both present and future.

26:28

(Jeff) My name is Jeff, I'm an Integrative Studies major. And first of all, I want to say thank you for doing this. And congratulations on an amazing show. We were here last night. (Kristin) Thank you. (Jeff) And just very warm and very inviting. And I loved the video playing [making coffee], with the -- hearing the gas turning on. (Kristin) Yeah. (Jeff) And you hear it throughout the gallery, and it's just, it's like a friendly sound, like very relatable. So, and coffee is so like, multi, ethnic groups, you know, like, I remember having coffee with my parents, and you know, that kind of thing. So it's very, it was very warm. And despite the sadness of these, it was heartwarming for me. And in moving around, you know, seeing the works are just incredible. (Kristin) Thank you. (Jeff) So one of the things we noticed was the "Ancestors," they're all in frames, and the rest are not. So we were wondering what the decision was to frame those, and not (words indistinct).

27:32

(Kristin) Yeah, so part of the decision about this was that I really wanted to have a feeling of ancestor photos. So I was, I really -- I was at my mom's a couple years ago. And she said, Ughhh, your aunt brought over a box of junk -- I would have thrown this away. I said, Mama, let's go through there. So we sat down, and like three or four hours later, I was like, she was going to throw this away. Is she crazy? So one thing that was in there was a really beautiful, really old, studio photograph portrait of my great grandparents that they brought on the boat when they came as refugees. And I love that, and the frame is kind of crumbling now unfortunately, it's been beat up, but I love that idea that, these are things you might find in the trunk in your grandma's attic. So that was kind of the idea about that. I liked that idea that would really connect. With the rest of the exhibition, Laura [Cotton] and I talked about this, and we really wanted to have a really modern feel to it. And we didn't want anything to really distract from just looking at the work itself. So that's the choice to frame and not frame.

28:55

(Jeff) I think it works really well. (Kristin) Cool. Thank you. (Jeff). A little more formal question--so our group noticed the contrast between gray and the ethereal images of humans surrounded by the rich

textures and colors of textiles in the background. Are these places and objects that are associated with Armenian culture, suggesting that there is a constant and impossibility to destroy?

29:25

(Kristin) Um, okay, so first of all, all of the backgrounds are definitely not Armenian. And I wanted to-- there's, yeah, there's a bunch of different places here, not just Armenia. And I wanted to connect to the idea that all of these cultures in the SWANA region have this kind of beautiful and amazing, I think, continuity of like colorfulness and being **full** of color and a lot of similarities of color. I remember the first time I took my daughter to Egypt -- she was really, she really noticed the like, colors of the light and how that connected to other places we've been in the region, which I thought was interesting. She's not a photographer, or an artist, so. So those are kind of things I noticed. But so that was part of the reason that I wanted to have the backgrounds in color. And also to, I mean, I think you're right too, that it is not really possible to destroy these places as long as they are alive within us in our culture--we keep it alive. And I would, I would definitely draw on the example and experience of the Assyrians that are in this project. I mean, they've had it really hard. America went into Iraq, basically, basically, oversaw the ethnic cleansing of all the Christians there, and the Assyrians no longer even have a homeland. I mean, Armenia only has a tiny little sliver of what it once was, less than a 10th I guess, but, but they have nothing. And yet their culture, there's, I think, I believe that Chicago currently has the largest Assyrian population outside of the Middle East, and their culture is alive and well, and, and it hasn't been destroyed. And that's part of, that was part of the titling of the photograph. You know, our land might be destroyed, but we are not destroyed. And I think that's really important, because that has happened, not just to people from the SWANA region, but you know, to people all over. And that's why I was talking about last night, about that sense of belonging, and the idea that our displacement, whoever we are, really is just a small example of the displacement of millions in the modern world over time, and so on, and so on. So that was—does that answer your question? Okay. (Jeff) Thank you.

32:08

(Kristin) You are welcome. (Aya) In the photograph, titled "Speaking Through Silence," it focuses on a woman who covers her mouth with her hand, much like the cloth covering the face of the woman in the photograph. (Kristin) Right. (Aya) The importance of words is suggested by the writing on the wall behind the woman. And we wanted to ask, is this text well known? Or is it writing of the past in general?

32:34

(Kristin) I shot this so long ago, this is—I'm trying to remember. This is, this is from a church. And I think it's in occupied Artsakh. If I'm not forgetting, this is one of the first photographs I did. So that's in 2014, 2015. So that was a long time ago. Yeah, it's, um, it's from a church, it's about the site, and so on and so forth. It's partly destroyed so you can't read all them in the churches. Can't remember if it's 10th century, maybe. So yeah, it's been there in the mountains of Artsakh in the weather, and for a long time, so it was a little bit hard to read. But yeah, so that, that was the choice of that. And I purposely chose that, obviously. So there's some, there's some dispute about this custom in the heart of Western Armenia that developed, that doesn't seem part of our like, to me at least, from what I've seen, of our like, native culture, of women, married women, covering their mouth, with which, of course, modern people are rather uncomfortable with. And so the sitter in the photo shows instead of having her head covering over her mouth, she uses her hand -- as you know, I'm asserting agency over this practice.

34:01

(Adam) As you've stated before, your family often spoke in code around you when you were younger, but like, has your connection to your grandmother and her culture, like inspired you to continue working on these themes, and like, just because like you weren't necessarily told when you were younger, has that like, inspired you to do more digging and research, and like take these photographs and continue working?

34:24

(Kristin) Yes, also, I feel that this is a, this is a common experience for diasporas for the region. They often are in this position of feeling, you know like all these things happen--we didn't necessarily understand why or how--and some of them, you know, some of them going back to like really ancient times, if you think about it when Rome invaded the Middle East. That was the beginning of this modern era, really, and so long ago, thousands of years ago, and yet that has had this like, horrific repercussions all this time down to the present. So, so yeah, that has really inspired me to keep working on it, but also the situation that I continue to see in the region, and also the situation of like, minorities in my own country. And that has made me really think so much. I feel like as an Armenian, I see both. Lots of us trying to engage in like, I would say, racial covering. And I understand that from my grandparents' generation, their feeling was kind of like, okay, if we can just all be white people, then they're not going to send us back. We just have to just like get in here, and completely assimilate, and we don't speak Armenian anymore. We don't, we don't eat weird food and, okay, we joined some other church. Okay, and then you know, we're not gonna get sent back to die, because that was a thing that happened. So I get that. But now I feel like, you know, this is a different world. We were, we were born here. This is our country, whether, you know--however well we think about it -- it doesn't really matter. This is it. So yeah, so that's actually been also a really big part of my inspiration is to feel empathy with other people in similar situations. Yeah.

36:25

(Jeff) I think you can feel that too with your work. It is very relatable in many different situations (words indistinct), and in our current situations, and country, like it's very relatable. Thank you so much.

(Adam) That's all the questions we have. Thank you for your time.

36:43

(Kristin) Thanks so much.

Part 2: *The Republic of My Imagination and A Planet of Our Own*

00:01

(Isaac) Okay, I can start. My name is Isaac. I'm a Communications and Art History minor, and also identify as part of the African and Brazilian diaspora. So I'm really excited to meet with you and ask you these questions. We're specifically going to ask about the "Republic of My Imagination" series that you had. So, as someone also in diaspora, I was like, wondering on what like steps you take in your practice, and in the series in particular, to preserve the backgrounds, and agency, and culture of your sitters?

00:34

(Kristin) Yeah, that's a good question. So this project, like all of them, except this first one, was really collaborative for me. And it was really fun. I like, I know, a lot of artists don't like to work with other people, but I like it. And there are sometimes you know, there are sometimes minor frictions, but not, but I think it's actually really stimulating. So working with the people in the photographs was great because we would like—they'd come into my studio, and we'd start talking about like, where are you from? And what's going on in your homeland, and stuff that's going on in the US -- and like, how did you end up in diaspora here? And just all kinds of things. What are these things that really anchor you to your like, ethnic culture, blah, blah, blah. So, so that that was always really great. And then my, my explanation to people who responded and wanted to be part of the project was, okay, so here's, here's the things-- you can see photographs of what I've made so far. You know, here's the concept for the project. Here's some of my writing about it. And what I want from you, if you're interested in sitting for portraits, is you come in and work with me. And either you can decide you're going to bring a friend or family member if you want, or tell me you want to come in with a stranger, and I will pair you up with somebody. And what I want you to do is decide what you want to wear. Like you can wear modern clothes, you can wear traditional clothes, it doesn't --you, it's your choice, this is your portrait, and then also bring any objects that are meaningful to you in any way, no matter what they are. And let's talk about it. And let's talk about what the background can be or will be. Okay, so that's kind of what would happen. They would come in, we'd shoot, they would--and I let them determine their poses. I didn't say do this, do that. If they got in, you know, if they were, for instance, that first photograph, "Salpi and Nancy in Flight," if they had been posed in a way that I couldn't see their faces, I'd say like, okay, tilt your head to the right, right, right--but they posed themselves. And they made decisions about that. And then afterwards, we went through the raw files, and they could, they could say, yes, you could use this one, and no, you can't use one--yes, no. So then I would have a small group of raw files to work from. And then you know, that, that's kind of how that came about, so that they would have some agency over the photograph and collaborating with me. The only time that I met with somebody, and I didn't collaborate with them, is that they had, they had some ideas that were completely outside of the concept of this work. And I had to tell them, this is just not where this work is going. So it's not, I'm not gonna be able to do that. If you want to rethink this, fine, if not, then . . . But yeah, so that's kind of how that worked in terms of how the, like, finished portrait came about.

03:31

(Isaac) Can I ask a follow up question? (Kristin) Yeah. (Isaac) I'm really glad you answered that, because that was another one of our questions, um, speaking on the backgrounds in particular. So do you feel like, you, the backgrounds represented the particular like subject's like culture and homeland, and you guys collaborated on choosing the backgrounds because we did notice that the backgrounds were kind of edited, but the objects, we could tell that they had, the subjects, or you, had brought them in?

03:59

(Kristin) Yeah. Sometimes the objects had to be put in later because a couple times people forgot stuff. So I said, alright, either swing by my place, and I'll shoot it, or send me a picture, and then I'll put it back in. So that did happen. But the backgrounds are all collaged. So they're all parts of different places. So the things I tried to do were either choose backgrounds that are actually part of the place where this

person's family is from, or backgrounds that were representative of it in some way. And so for instance, there's one of the photographs that I actually have the original background photo for it -- it's a separate photo, and it's in my studio. It's just a place I really loved--an artist studio, actually it's the outside of his studio. And the guys that came in for the photo, loved it. And they said, Oh, this looks like places we've been in Palestine. And I thought, it was not actually Palestine. They were like, we don't care, we want you to use them. So that happened, and I understand why they felt that connection to it. So that's kind of how those things happen in terms of the backgrounds.

05:20

(Isaac) I really like that and how collaborative you are.

05:22

(Kristin) Cool. Thank you. It was really fun. Yeah.

05:26

(Kyla) My name is Kyla, and I am a Criminal Justice and Criminology major. I know you had just gone over about like the poses that your subjects had chosen, like it was mostly their choice. But I noticed, or we noticed, that in your collection for this part that a lot of the subjects are facing towards the camera. I know there was a few that some of them weren't facing the camera, but I would say a good 90% of them face towards the camera. Was this intentional for this specific collection? Or was this just because they chose that pose?

06:01

(Kristin) Yeah, I, usually that's what, usually it was me saying, I like this one where you're, you're facing each other, instead of the camera. And they'd have to think about it. Because I think the traditional idea with portraits is you face the camera. And so a lot of people were like, No, I want, I want my face to show, which is totally fine, either way. But oftentimes, I'd see poses that I liked, but they wouldn't choose them, so then if they didn't like them, that was out of the running. But I do like that a lot of the subjects really wanted to connect with the camera, because that's how they're going to connect with you, as a viewer, and not so much when you see them turned to the side, but there were some specific-- there's that "Anahit and Ishtar Re-emerge in the World," portrait. And they really wanted to do that because they were both thinking about the carvings that you often see on like ancient ruins, and they will be facing sideways. So that was a purposeful thing. The other reason they wanted to do that is-- okay, so one of the things that I think is always a struggle for diasporans, who are not from European backgrounds, is that the standard of beauty is Eurocentric in the West. And so then for us, that's hard, and because we aren't-- we don't meet that standard. So purposefully, they chose, loved that pose because you can see the shape of their noses. And both of them felt like, yeah, this is my nose. And I don't—you know, I like it. No, I'm not going to change it to meet some -- and I think that that's a good thing, because I think that means that the standard of beauty is really changing and becoming, slowly at least, more inclusive. So that was the (words indistinct).

07:56

(Issac) That's beautiful. And you, you mentioned it a little bit about how you had your subjects come in with someone or you would pair them with someone. So yeah, we noticed specifically one of the titles

was “In the Future We Will Not Be Alone,” and yeah, we noticed that people, almost all the people in the photographs are with another person. And even in one where there was like a woman alone, she was holding the hand of someone who's a little off, off camera. Was that choice to photograph, not to photograph the subjects alone, intentional? And does it refer to kind of like the loneliness and isolation faced by people in diaspora?

08:33

(Kristin) Yeah, and I think that's true. And also, one of the important focuses of this, of this project was we need to build community in diaspora. We need to build a diverse SWANA community, where we, we support each other, because no one else is going to, and where we develop empathy for other marginalized groups within, not, within our country, especially. But also we're like, we need to have more empathy, we need to ask more critical questions. When we, when we hear people -- we hear the news media saying the things they say about Iran, we need to ask some critical questions about that. Is that true? How do you know it's true? You know, or other places, China, for instance, is another thing that's -- now we're going after China. So, I think that it's really important to ask questions, and that's something that I -- one of the reasons why I think we need to gather in community. And also a lot of people feel like they're not necessarily part of a community. So, I think that that was important as well in this work.

09:43

(Kyla) And piggybacking off of that same portrait [“In the Future We Will Not Be Alone”], we noticed that they were, the subjects were sitting beside a tree, and like, for example, the clothing that they wore, like the objects around them, such as the curved blade, and the dolls, the carpets, and the eye talismans -- they have like a timeless quality. So we were wondering if you could, like, explain what was imagined for this, like photograph, like the behind the scenes kind of.

10:16

(Kristin) Yeah, so, that's a combination of photographs from Yemen, and Palestine, and somewhere else -- I'm forgetting where else. But anyway, it's a combination of backgrounds collaged. And there's a Yemeni and Palestinian women in there. And they chose the--when you mentioned the dolls and things--I believe that Susan made those, or she might have brought them from Palestine -- I'm forgetting now because she does a lot of -- and she's also an artist. So she does a lot of textile work. And really cool stuff -- that, that, the tatreez she's wearing, she made. And there's another one that she's working on in the photo. But there is a really, I mean, there is a really timeless quality to the region. You know, if you think about how we humans spread out from Africa, and then the Middle East is kind of the next stop. Right. And so there's been, there's been a civilization there for so many millennia. That yeah, I do-- that was part of the idea behind that is, that these places have existed. And no matter what kind of things happen in the socio-political spectrum over the ages, they continue to endure.

11:33

(Isaac) Speaking of another image, one that particularly like, caught my eye, was the image “As American as Flaming Hot Cheetos,” and we learned that this was a collaboration with the subjects, that

are Mona and Miriam, but was the inclusion of the Cheetos and the Cheetos bags your idea based on her t-shirt?

11:55

(Kristin) Yes. So she-- so I talked about this last night, so I'm sorry if I'm repeating this for some of you. But, but I think it's interesting, too. So, they came in, they're sisters obviously, they came in and had a bunch of changes of clothing. They couldn't decide what to do. And I was like, we're gonna do them all. You're my last shoot of the day. So it's cool. You can stay here as long as you want. And so while I was setting up and getting the lights and stuff, Mona started, we started—I don't know how the conversation turned to food, but of course, it always does. So it did. And she started telling me about how like, there's Flaming Hot Cheetos burritos are really popular here. And I was like, well this sounds terrible. She's like -- No, they're really good. And then we started talking about this whole way that in diasporas, we fuse all these food cultures, and lots of like, really good, but also sometimes really strange things come out of it. And it was just kind of -- see we're laughing about it --and then she wanted to wear that t-shirt in one of the photographs, and she said -- I'm not gonna quote her exactly, but I'm going to be close -- she said, and we started talking about it, she said, yeah, you know, I want to, I want to, like assert my identity as an American. But I also want to absolutely resist the complete assimilation that's expected of me as a diasporan, and I always, and my family, we always keep our Lebanese heritage and homeland at the forefront of our personhood, even while we feel like Americans. So I thought that the Cheetos t-shirt was a great symbol of kind of American consumerism and our bad junk food that we sometimes love--and you know, we have favorites (words indistinct). But then I had this idea about this, and I was like, okay, I really want to have them kind of rising up out of the mountain of Cheetos as this real symbol of her tenacious, holding to her heritage, while still being and feeling American. So that was the background of that. And we just, it was just fun--so.

13:59

(Isaac) Right, the way that I initially saw it was like, she has literally one foot in American culture and one foot in her culture. (Kristin) Yep.

14:05

Yep. And I think that's actually pretty, pretty cool. So yeah, that made a mess all over my studio—huge mess. I did not realize how much that red dye just--

14:14

(Isaac) Oh, you actually had the Cheetos physically there -- you didn't just edit them in?

14:20

(Kristin) I added more, at the end—because I -- it was just for some reason, a mess, was a huge mess. And yeah, but then I had -- the ones I edited, I had a spread out on a sweep, and my studio was filthy. No, I just kept vacuuming up Cheetos for days. Yeah, anyway.

14:39

(Kyla) And then our wrap up question that we have for you. So we're referring to the photograph titled "To Be Seen and Loved." So we found it to be a very engaging photo, and I know you had talked about

a lot of these subjects in this specific portion, either were strangers, or they knew each other prior and they brought each other. So we were wondering if these two had known each other, or if, you know, they were just strangers, and the chemistry just was there. And additionally, if you had planned to capture the three facets of their relationship in the photo as like the foreground, middle ground and background, when starting the session, or was it something later on that was brought up?

15:23

(Kristin) So I know, I know them. And both of them, and they're, they've been best friends for a long time. And really caught up like chosen brothers as well, they have a really nice—that's Khalid and Samer. And, and they were just, they're just, they're fun, and they're funny, you cannot hang with them--and it's not going to be it--just you know, it's like Riot Fest, right? They're just crazy. So it was really fun. So I did want to, and believe me, the raw files I have, I captured way more than three aspects of their relationship. And one of the goofiest ones is in the, that video explaining "The Republic of My Imagination" project, just because they're crazy and really fun. And I had a really hard time deciding what to do with the photographs, I had so many options. But they liked that background. So I chose that. And then I chose those three purposely, but I did want to shoot as many because, because I have two people who are in like, tight relationship to each other. And I really want to shoot as many aspects of their relationship and personalities as I could do so we'd have lots of stuff to choose from. And also so I could share some of the raw files with them, just for them to play with. So yeah, that's kind of how that came about. There's a story behind every one of these. Yeah. Yeah, can I pull up one of the things that you guys didn't ask about--well you sort of did. I want to address quickly, the photograph of "Invisible Love," I talked about that last night, and I know the woman is, the other woman is, off—out of the frame purposefully, that was intentional. That's a kind of coming out photograph for the subject who's not fully out to her family at all. And they definitely reject that aspect of her. And it's an --, and she wants, we did this on purpose, because there's that, her partner, as the invisible love. But also because I feel like this is a real-- I think this – Laura [Cotton] and I had talked about this before, this is a real sort of important aspect of this project. A lot of LGBTQ people respond to this, a lot of them, and I-- and some of them didn't want to be out, and some of them did. But everybody felt like there was this safe space, to just like inhabit their identity in this project. And I really liked that, because I think, like a lot of diasporic communities, that's not accepted. And it's really hard for people. And so it was really important to do that, and that's kind of why we chose that particular photograph. And I want to, I kind of wanted to share that with you because I think that is something that's not always apparent in the photographs, you know, different people's identity. Yeah, you guys have asked a lot of great questions. Thank you. (Isaac) No, thank

18:13

you. Thank you for sharing that, and we have like, kind of one more question that, that kind of speaks on a little bit. But I feel like oftentimes people, it's hard for them to envision things they can't see. And you would talk about like creating the space and creating the space safe--do you feel that through your art practice, and through these collaborations, you feel closer to the future that you're imagining-- that you want to create with these people?

18:40

(Kristin) Yeah, I do. And I think other people felt closer to it as well. I mean, you know, it's not a thing we can just make appear. But I always feel like if we don't work towards these better futures, we're just going to be stuck in the same loop of things that are, you know, harmful and super-destructive and oppressive to all of us in some way or another. So yeah, I did feel closer to it. And I felt closer to all the people. It was pretty, it's pretty fun. And some of them connected with each other and formed these like long term friendships—it's pretty cool.

19:13

(Isaac) And I think that's really powerful. (Kristin) Thank you. (Isaac) Thank you so much.

19:16

(Kristin) Thank you, I appreciate it.

19:29

Hey, it's nice to see you again.

19:43

(Erica) So I'll start. I'm Erica. I am an Art History and Journalism major. And we're going to be talking about "A Planet of Our Own." "A Planet of Our Own" is a series of images that feels dreamlike--almost like a utopia in a sense, I wanted to ask, how would you imagine a combined and influenced culture with Turks, Armenians, Kurds and Greeks?

20:09

(Kristin) Yeah, I mean, I think like we were all -- after the like, invasions and colonization in the Middle Ages, yeah we've been linked together for a long time. And we develop this, like, shared culture, which I really think is wonderful. We share ideas about yeah, music, and art, and food, and things like that. So I definitely feel like, if we stop engaging in denialism, and we begin to just accept that these, you know, when acts of foundational violence happen, we can't go back and fix those things. But we can stop doing those things now and in the future. And that would be what I envision, is that we have a respect for our shared culture and a respect for each other's uniqueness, which is a thing I feel like we need to learn in the United States, especially because we are basically a country based on immigration. So if we could, if we could do these things--that's what I imagined. And, and yeah, I feel like it is, in a way, the choice of making it to be dreamlike, is very intentional, because it is that at this point. We-- it does have to be something we collectively dream and work towards. Otherwise it's just not going to happen.

21:34

(Erica) I wanted to ask about like the role of technology, because it feels like it's present in those images. Would you prefer, would you prefer us to be one with nature?

21:46

(Kristin) I think, I think it's, if you, if by being one with nature--yes, I would. But if that means we're not going to use technology, then no, because I think that's completely unrealistic. We have technology, we've always had technology. The moment we learned how to pick up a rock and crack something

open, we had technology, right. So we've always had that. And, but I think the situation now is that we've unfortunately gotten to this level of ability to use technology as merely exploitative and an extractive device that in some ways, makes our lives better and easier, but also, in many ways, is really disruptive. It's obviously really disruptive to the planet, but also it's oftentimes destructive to us. Like when you think about when you need to take a social media break, that's purposeful, because you just feel like-- oh my god, how much more of this can I take? And I think that that's, that was my intention with these. Can we, can we -- because I believe we can-- find a way to harness technology in a positive way. We're not going to go back to some imagined nostalgia that never existed without technology, but also to understand that our, our planet is a living thing. And we are part of that larger ecosystem. You know we are animals -- part of it. So that's kind of what I was thinking with that series.

23:15

(Meghan) Our group notice that several of the photographs included animals that give the image a familiar and almost humorous feeling. For instance, "Transfiguration," a group of lemmings gather near a behind a woman meditating. In "First Contact," the faces of cats, or maybe lions, appear amid flowers as figures--or as a figure explores the terrain after landing a spacecraft. We wanted to ask if this was your intention by including these creatures.

23:45

(Kristin) Yeah, okay, I had a couple things going on there. I wanted to create some like new like species of animal that might be on another planet. And I did more than this, but at some point, I was like, okay, we're going to have a couple of these in here. And I really want to focus more on the landscaping, the people. So, so yeah, so that was intentional as well, not to overdo it, but a little bit to lighten the mood because I don't -- I wanted, I wanted viewers to think seriously about like, how we can imagine and create a different future over time if we're intentional about it. But also, you know, there would be, if we were in some other place, if you could walk through that portal with me, we would see different creatures, right. And it's a, it's I think it's interesting -- I've been really, really influenced by science fiction writers who are, who take a very realistic view of the things that were, that we have and are living through, but also take a really optimistic view of potential futures -- like I think Octavia Butler and River Solomon and Becky Chambers -- these are all writers -- there's, there's many more, but I noticed that there's a lot more women writing in this way. And I think Butler is kind of like, I think that, you know, the foremother of this style of thinking amongst women. Anyway, so I, yeah, I really wanted to just kind of have a touchstone that would be familiar for people. Yes, we're in this other place, but there can be all these familiar things. And of course there would be. And we have to think about like, other animals as part of the eco system, and not just here for our exploitation.

25:37

(Meghan) In "Galaxy's Child," the figure in the foreground holds a pomegranate, and others are scattered in the background. In Armenia, as well as other countries, pomegranates are associated with fertility and prosperity. And in this photo, a boy and girl appear, along with robots in the background. We wondered if it would be fair to link the pomegranates in this image, and others, to the goddess Persephone, who ate pomegranate seeds offered by Hades and thereafter had to spend part of the year in the underworld, thus leading to the seasons when nature rests.

26:07

(Kristen) Okay, so I would-- that's, that's actually a really Eurocentric view of things. And I don't, don't look at it that way. Pomegranates are first of all, a symbol of hospitality, the way pineapples are in Western culture. And secondly, they are more a symbol of like, for instance, in Armenian culture, the goddess Anahit-- or the other, or one of the other primary female gods, Astghik, and also Ishtar, and various other indigenous God figures from the region. And that's what I associated that with. Also, that idea that there was a woman; she's a mother figure, and, you know, she is obviously harvesting the pomegranates because you see them, you see the tools are there, and they're all around her while the children are playing in the background. The robots are toys. So, so that was kind of my thinking about that. But yes, you're like, your connection with, like, the ancient, different religions of the region. Yes, true. That's kind of what I was thinking.

27:16

(Erica) I think I just wanted to know, the -- I noticed in some of the images, there are like multiple figures. And I wanted to know if you could expand on that, why they're--why that is.

27:27

(Kristin) Okay. So if you're thinking about "Ascension," first of all, so that, that I had, I multiplied his figure there. And here's what I was thinking -- as we, as we try to, you know, maybe like, improve our spiritual practice or ourselves through time-- we grow, we change, we evolve as individuals and, and also like, as humans, hopefully, as a species. We go through a lot of steps and stages, we don't just go from like, you know, here I am, to this thing that I envision is as being a better place. So that kind of was my thought about that. You, you see him multiplied, and he's going through a lot of stages to reach this point where he feels this kind of like, really strong spiritual connection to the world, and to the other people around him, and to the creatures, and so on and so forth. That was my idea with that photograph. And, and then you see two figures in "The Girl Who Made the Stars," and kind of my idea with that was to think about the power that women have as creators, since we're the ones that create the next generation. And, and, and the power that we have, especially when we as women work together. And I think that that's an important thing that most of us know, but oftentimes, we find things in the culture, in our cultures that kind of put us at odds with each other, and with the kind of support we should be giving each other, in a positive way, and not to -- and that was, so that was purposeful with that -- the way we women can just be the creators of so much if we joined together.

29:22

(Erica) To go back to "Ascension," I was wondering about the building in the background. I've noticed that in another set of your images, too.

29:30

(Kristin) Yeah. Yeah, I really liked that. That's actually, that's actually a building in Morocco, I think. And it's a, I liked the shape of it, and I really liked the photograph catches it at a really nice angle. And I wanted to give a sense of, of the figure, kind of like, anchored in the world, so I chose a building, and I really thought that shape worked really well. And also just a place in the region that I liked, but, but also that he's in this kind of celestial realm spiritually. But he's a person anchored to whatever his presence is. So that was kind of my thought.

30:14

(Erica) So yesterday, we mentioned, I think it's the Tower of Sleep,

30:18

(Kristin) The Tower of Silence.

30:20

(Erica) Tower of Silence [in "Keepers of the Sacred Places"], I'm sorry. (Kristin) That's okay. (Erica) How does that fit into this planet, in that world?

30:26

(Kristin) So, so that I was talking about a little bit yesterday. That's, that's an actual Zoroastrian site in Iran. It's really beautiful. It's really spiritual. It's incredibly hot. And I think I told you guys, I was crazy and went there in August, because I could get a visa. But it's really--and it looked probably more stark then, in the heat than it might at other times of the year. But the way that connects to the planet is, I wanted to make a like connection to, some strong connections to these sites of different indigenous religions, in order to think about how we might connect ourselves to the ancestral, and in terms of moving forwards into the future, and using the wisdom and experiences of our ancestors. Also, I really love this place. It just has this like wonderful spiritual quality. And I think I felt like the people that we met were really -- though they, though they may not practice the Zoroastrian indigenous religion anymore, they're very connected to their past and very engaged by it. And I really love the idea that you can be whatever, you know, religion, your spiritual journey bit is, is of -- but you can also be connected to different places, and different, you know, kind of just different cultural influences. You don't have to cut that off, because you chose some different spiritual path in the present, that's actually okay. And it's just, I love the idea-- also, this is a place where people bring their dead. And the whole idea that that, that the body returns in some way to the natural world and becomes part of the planet in the natural world again. So that's how that fits into that.

32:30

(Meghan) I personally noticed that in most of the images, the moon shows up pretty prominently. Was that intentional, or was that just because of like, the visual of the moon (words indistinct)?

32:41

(Kristin) It's intentional, okay, I just, I don't know, I love looking at the sky at night. And I love the way that the moon feels both, like, cold and distant, and familiar. And kind of, you know, when you see a beautiful full moon or that perfect crescent, I don't know that I get this really wonderful feeling about it. It's just like this connection to the universe. So I purposely did that, and also, because I thought, well, who knows what we'd see in another planet, maybe there'd be one moon all the time, maybe there'll be six, maybe there were two suns -- we don't know. And let's just have this like, really wide open imagination about what we could bring to the future. So that was my idea about that. Yeah. (Erica) Well,

33:31

thank you so much for sharing your art and answering these questions. (Kristin) You're so welcome. Thank you

33:35

so much. For all the great questions; for coming in looking at everything, I really appreciate it. It's been really fun to talk to you all.

33:46

(Susan) Any last minute questions? Could we ask you to think about the four themes and your, your title, "Reparations of the Heart"-- how do you tie all of these together?

33:58

(Kristin) Yeah, so um, so -- I, when I gave my artist's talk last night, I was telling people how this project started. So my grandmother and I, this is long ago, because my grandmother is not with us anymore, but um, we had coffee, and it was just, you know, whatever. We had coffee, and I was like, Oh, read my coffee, read my cup, grandma. She was like hmmm --well, she did anyway, she did read my cup. And when we turned it over, there was this ruined church and mountains in the cup, and I had just made this promise to her. She was like, oh, you have to go -- like I was far from motherhood at that point in my life -- you had to go, and you had to bring your children, and you had to touch the soil of our land. You had to (words indistinct). I really liked that. And I was like, I'm gonna do that. I promise. I'm gonna do that. And then she reads my cup, and this is there, and I just had this really strong feeling like it doesn't matter if governments remain in denial, and, and keep putting out denial as propaganda -- our government does that, so why wouldn't other governments do it -- so it doesn't matter, because what, what I need to do is, I need to repair my own heart, I need to make these reparations for my family's experience within myself, so that I can have closure, so that I cannot have this like victimhood feeling and, and so that I can empathize with other people. So that started this off, and that, that that was where that idea about reparations of the heart came from. So then I, I, it was really hard. I was just like, putting all these pieces together in my mind, and I started dreaming about it. And I, I made that dreamscape that's in the video. Because that night, I went to sleep, and I dreamed about mountains and a church, and it both looked like a specific place in Armenia, and not. And I just like, I got up and it's like, I'm making this now. And, and so then I --, I went through this whole --going, like, we find our village, we go back, we have this like really emotional experience. But then I started thinking like, I don't want to just leave it there. And then when the war on Armenia started in 2020, I mean, I just, I realized the only people who understand our situation, and who really, like, support us, and understand how devastating this is, are other people from the region who are living through these experiences, or have recently lived through them, or their families, you know, have this history also -- these are the people who really understand, and I want to, I want to make this connection, because we need to figure out some way to re-vision a future that doesn't always include --we're going to commit, you know, these horrific crimes against humanity on each other. And so that's how that kind of, that's how that developed. And, and so this, this came kind of first, and then I was really imagining this all along, because I just kept thinking about the future. Yeah, this stuff happened in the past, and we can't go back and undo it. But we can make this change going forward, but only if we're intentional about it. And so that's how this whole thing morphed. And the, the "Ancestors" series came as I was saying to you

before, from me thinking I really want to recreate these portraits. I want to bring my aunts to life again, because I can't do it in the present. And then, you know, "The Republic" series came from that, as I started thinking a lot about-- Wow, nobody else really understands this. But if we connect with each other, and we can understand -- anyway, well, that's, that's kind of how that came about.
(Students clapping)

37:53

(Kristin) Thank you. Thank you, everybody.