

[LO-FI MUSIC]

All right. My name is Edgar Arceneaux. And I'm a 2021 COLA Visual Arts Fellow. My grandfather who was a self-taught painter and an inventor. And as I grew up, people would tell me that I look like him, I walk like him, I tall like him. And when I decided I wanted to be an artist as well, which was somewhere around I think the fourth or fifth grade or something. My parents were very supportive of it. But they also wanted to make sure that I got a good liberal arts education as well. So my mother really pushed me to go into psychology, which then led me into studying philosophy, and the sciences, and learn about literature, and the history of economics, and environmental sciences.

But that formative experience of being a child, and people telling you that you are like someone who is no longer physically here, I think, in a way, it started to open up my understanding of the world. And that the world is made up of not just visible things, but that there are these other forces that build reality. Partially because of the-- I should say the lockdown, not through COVID, but because of the quarantine. And a number of other transitions. It gave me a lot of time to say, if you're going to do something differently, what would it be? if you get this and that one little whisper in the back of your head, maybe that's the place you can go to discover something new about yourself.

Then ideally, there's a new avenue of possibilities for you to fall in love again with your work. So over the last year and a half, two years, I just been secretly painting, two went away. And I've probably made something like 30 paintings last year, probably more. And most of them aren't awesome, but I just had like-- I had to rewire my brain around how to make. With this way of working, I literally didn't even have the words to describe it to myself. So anyway, so I had to form-- I guess this basically what I'm saying is I had to form a new vernacular for myself so that I could fall in love with making again.

So I'm always trying to think about that connection between ideas and where they actually sit in materials. Or as they say the physical world that cares very little about human beings and how we use them. I mean it's like a hypothetical. But it's where those two things intersect, where there's like a feedback loop between them. It said something about the physical world. And it also said something about us and how intertwined we are. And as sort of another story of a mother, who was really, really beautiful. She just she just passed away a couple months ago, or a month and a half ago now. And she would do-- she used to models. So my mom would always be doing her makeup in the morning.

We were always fascinated by watching her. And when we moved to West Covina, her mirror that she had in her new M was one of these three sided mirrors. So it was one of the front, and one on each wall. And I just found it so fascinating to stand there and then look in there. And then see my reflection echoed in one direction, and you look at the other. At the time, when I was-- especially in my teenage years when I was so skinny, and nervous, and anxious. I was like, what if there a better version of myself in one of those variations?

What was life like it's like some of those other dimensions? Were they actual dimensions at all? And as I got older and started making art, I found myself coming back to mirrors again. I was like well, maybe there's a way that I can actually just take the mirror apart. What happens if you turn it around and actually, physically look at the back of it. And I found myself stripping the paint away and then being revealed that on the back of the mirror, there's actually another mirror. But it's a different color. But the mirror in a way-- I've been playfully calling them self portraits, but in the sense of-- not because they are pictures of me.

But there's an idea that there's a kind of-- there's an idea of the self as being a constellation. We are straddling experiences and people. And one of the most fundamental and foundational relationships with your mother, your parents, siblings, But those things are shifting dramatically and breaking on to something new. So the mirror reflect whoever is standing in front of it, but you can't really see yourself. It doesn't absorb you. It just refracts you somehow.

And for the students who may have a hard time with understanding abstraction, I hope that by my story with abstraction gives them a gateway, or a doorway, to enter into this kind of work. Ideally, they can see it as a space of freedom for themselves. So they don't think that just making pictures of things is the exclusive operation of ours. But that is a whole other world, domain of expression, that is available to them. They just listen to their heart.