

[MUSIC PLAYING]

I'm Jedediah Caesar. And I'm a COLA 2021 Visual Arts Fellow. I think one of the things that shaped a lot of the way I work is that I became involved with education pretty early. I've been an educator for-- oh, I should've count this up ahead of time. I don't know. I'm going to stay in the neighborhood 17, 18 years.

A lot of the time that I've been an artist, I've also been teaching. So I think first teaching sculpture. I think that sort of led to, for me, an awareness of having sculpture be a dialogue, a dialogic space. And that in turn, I think, made me think a lot about spaces like that in the world, in terms of relationships between objects and their environment. And how they're read, how that reading shifts and changes between individuals over time.

I approached this project thinking about my understanding of the whole site. And the stories that I heard people telling and information, for example, about Frank Lloyd Wright's house. And it's use of what's called Mayan revival, which is an imagination of a kind of Mayan aesthetic that gets transformed, in a sense, into this kind of ornamental project. So I was thinking about how to make the Municipal Art Gallery into something that had its own kind of-- well, back up. And say, that kind of idea, that idea of taking on another culture, and of using a formal aesthetic cultural language as ornamental language, reminds me of architectural forms that are called follies, which you often see in gardens.

And there are often kind of wealthy individuals curating, or commissioning, a building that is sort of quasi-functional, and has all these kind of fantastical elements. So I thought about this Frank Lloyd Wright house as essentially a folly, and the Barnsdall as the the civic art. My thought was to use that building as a space to add an ornamentation to it. And to then reflect on that Frank Lloyd Wright house and the whole totality of space, pure intervention.

So ammonites are part of a continued fascination I have about landscapes and material. I think fossils are particular, the interesting material. Because, in this, case of the ammonite, for example, and as it relates to a kind of architecture, like the Barnsdall. What we know of it is this kind of shell of a creature. There's never been a fossil that records the soft tissue of an ammonite. And so we don't know what an ammonite looks like.

When we say ammonite, we mean shell of an ammonite, which is, I think, in itself kind of distinct and interesting. We understand it by its architecture. I had been looking for-- I thought we were going to be scanning ammonites, and using those as the basis for this project. And then, I was just looking for references a long time ago. And I was going through notes of things I collected, and realized that I had this sheet of drawings by Haeckel

And so I was looking at these things and thinking about the way that he's already re-imagining the object. Looking at the drawings, you can see that they're elaborate. I feel like his work was-- in terms of thinking about these ideas, it felt, again, like a great foil to the Frank Lloyd Wright. He's not an architect, but he's a creator of a visual language. He's a maker. And so I felt I could borrow it essentially.

But then further it gave us something to transform ourselves. So those drawings then became the basis for digital drawings, which became the sort of three dimensional renderings that we have. So I was really lucky to collaborate on this project with two young architecture students, Jenessa Cua and Vincent Arnado. And so they're doing a lot of the imagining with me. What we're doing is building these ammonites and then doubling them. In other words, making them symmetrical, which is a strategy of ornamentation, to take it asymmetry.

And take a thing that you recognize in the world and turn it into a motif through symmetry. So we're doing that. And so they look a little bit more like-- a they're a little bit more eyeball like. They're circular. They're not just one spiral that comes in. They kind of double in on themselves. So even more than I think like a regular ammonite, they have a gargoyle quality. Because they're something else. They're not just a reproduction of an ammonite. They're actually-- there's something that doesn't exist in nature. They're something more perverse.

I'm really aware of this unadorned building. To me now, when I look at it, it looks like it's been stripped of ornamentation. Because I've already in my mind adorned this building with all of this ammonite. So it's just kind of funny now. It looks completely bare and unfinished.

I hope that people come away with the experience that, in kind of untangling this project, it encourages a set of tools for untangling other spaces I tend to think of my projects-- I tend to think that my projects are successful. There will be some resonance in other kinds of spaces, not necessarily even art spaces. And that that's how I understand their value. They kind of bleed out into the world.