

[MUSIC PLAYING]

My name is Umar Rashid. And I'm a COLA 2021, art fellow. So my journey as an artist has been interesting one. In it that I've been doing this work all my life because of my family. My father is a playwright, my mother was an actress. My father is also a painter and a director of theater. My grandfather was a jazz musician. So it's like the art has always been a part of my existence.

And so I've always been writing, since I was a kid. And I've always made drawings and I've always explored the realm of fantasy. Because even as a kid I realized, I didn't really have too much in common with this particular world that we live in. I didn't like the way that history is weaponized against certain people. Now you can call it white supremacy. You can call it whatever you want to call it.

But it's just ultimately when you-- I decided to look at-- when I was able to look at the earth or what human beings have gone through a cosmic perspective. It shifted a lot of things. And so history became even more important, like the way we tell our stories became more important to me. Because when you're looking at it from this corporeal existence. Like it's just all misery and doom and gloom. And it's just one disaster to the next.

And so I didn't want to look at history that way. I thought history combining history and mythological elements of history could create a third stream. A different place to observe and interact with history throughout time past, present, and future. So I'm combining all these-- condensing all these realms into one to create this majestic. I should say majestic, but this very long and convoluted narrative that I've been working on for the past two decades.

Oh when I look at Los Angeles. I mean, I've been here for about 20. This year would be 21 years, since I moved to Los Angeles from Chicago. And I just look at the changing landscapes and the gentrification. And all these things that happen to cities over time. And then knowing the history of this place. Knowing that this actually used to be New Spain. And then subsequently Mexico after independence. And then the trumped up Mexican-American war in 1848.

And the history of these places. And then how everything just shifted, and now it's like the home of the wealthy and just California in general. But talking about Los Angeles the home of Hollywood, where all these ideas are exported. So this is a very place because America. In addition to his military power, I think America's greatest strength is its cultural output. But its cultural output is fixed to the backs of all the marginalized people who will be kicked out of these gates.

So I wonder-- so when you think about gatekeepers and people in power like I wanted to create a gate. And there's only so much that I can do and represent physically. But I want to just talk about the idea of people excluding people-- so you have these like ancient symbols. So the symbols on the gate are contorted. It's like the-- what is it? It's like a mestizo. So there's this Spanish influences, his native influences, African influences, and all these things that exists on these bricks on this gate. But only certain people are able to pass through it.

So everybody can pass through it, but when you get to the other side is a totally different story. So it's like-- and I'm all intellectual. It's like science, fiction, and things about portals, wormholes, and all this stuff. But I'm not even going to go there because this thing will take forever.

We're all individuals. But to the greater structure, overall arching the overall structure of government or governance or whatever. We're all just little heads just walking around. So I always like cap. And I just like the word, like PC perhaps I don't know. It's just a great word and so-- but the sculptures are mainly busts. So it's like heads. So it also talks to the-- and then the story about the actual gate itself that I'm creating.

And there's all these people going through. And the idea of gates and like that border fence that particular border fence that they're building down. And well, I guess hopefully construction on that is halted. But just fences throughout time and gates. And people just move through it and people come through and some people are remembered and mostly forgotten. And so but it's like hey, so it's a lot of things. I mean, you're never going to get an actual straight answer out of me. Because every time I do something, like I'm living in like eight different dimensions in order to create this work.

So there might be things. And I'd like to leave it up to the imagination of the people who view the work, or however they see it and how-- because everybody has an opinion. And they're going to say whatever they're going to say anyway so. But for me, I just try to just-- I forget or maybe purposefully forget about what it is that I'm doing. Because I want there to-- I want this work to live beyond the space of its existence.

But what I want people to take away from all of this. Is the fact that, we live in a complex society. You live in Los Angeles. You live here. And you have to be-- you have to understand the multilayered history of this place and to truly understand it. And once you understand it, hopefully, you might become a better person, more compassionate instead of reactionary. And maybe we can really truly create what I think is the-- we can create what I truly believe is the goal of all humanity. Is to create a system of harmony.

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