Chase Hall’s paintings in coffee and acrylic on cotton canvas investigate generational celebrations and traumas encoded throughout American history. In 2023, his work was the subject of a solo exhibition at the SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah, Georgia and in 2022, he was commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera to produce a large-scale artwork for its opera house in New York. Previously, Hall has been an artist-in-residence at the Skowhegan School for Painting and Sculpture, Maine, and he is currently is an Adjunct Professor at NYU.

Henry Taylor lives and works in Los Angeles. He is currently the subject of a major survey exhibition at the Whitney Museum of Art, New York, organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Taylor’s work was featured in the Whitney Biennial (2017) and the 58th Venice Biennale (2019).

Libby Flores Welcome to FUSE: A BOMB Podcast. In each episode, we bring together artists to discuss their work and creative practice. We’ve been taking this approach since 1981, delivering the artist’s voice. Here’s how it works: BOMB invites a distinguished artist to choose a guest from any creative discipline—an art crush, a close collaborator, or even a stranger they have admired from afar—and we bring them together. For this episode, we asked artist Chase Hall who he would most want to speak with and he selected mentor and visual artist, Henry Taylor.
Chase Hall  “Why did you pick Henry?” And that totally stemmed from—one of my initial relationships to art was seeing your piece Untitled, 2011, in the MoMA collection in 2013, of a man sitting in a chair. And I remember seeing it, one of my first times in a museum after moving to New York, and just crying in front of the work for the first time ever. And being self-taught, and not having art in my family in any way, it was a . . . kind of like, broke me in a really beautiful way. So, thank you for that, Henry.

LF  Henry Taylor lives and works in Los Angeles. He is currently the subject of a major survey exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Taylor’s work was featured in the Whitney Biennial in 2017 and the 58th Venice Biennial in 2019.

Chase Hall’s paintings investigate generational traumas and celebrations encoded in American history. His approach to representation and use of historically-informed materials creates work both wide in scope and deeply intimate. This year he opened a solo exhibition at the SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah, Georgia and in 2022 was commissioned to produce large-scale artwork for the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

In this episode, they discuss their memorable first meeting, lucky brushes, and how an athlete-inspired work ethic influences their processes.

Henry Taylor  I don’t even know how to really respond, because it kind of caught me off guard. But I do appreciate when people appreciate my work, you know, whatever work that might be, you know what I mean? Some people have appreciations from one painting and, and not the other. So, sometimes you, you know, throw up a shot and you make the basket and sometimes you don’t, but whatever. As long as you rebound, hey!

CH  (laughter) Right.

HT  But anyway, yeah right on, right on, man. Thanks for that.

CH  I don’t even know if you remember, but it was your holiday party, I believe it was 2018. I remember walking into your home, and you know, seeing a lot of great art on the walls and all around. But mostly, I remember me and you kind of catching a look at each other. And I had long dreads at the time. And you were kind of sussing me out. And I remember you walking up to me and grabbing and kind of pulling on my dreads just going, “Bob Marley, Bob Marley!” And I’m a people person too, so I loved it, and we immediately hit it off. And you go, “What’s your name?” And you had a Sharpie in your hand, and you wrote, “Chase Hall, tall mulatto painter,” and my telephone number on your washer and dryer. And I’ll never forget that moment in my life. So, I think since we broke the ice, it’s been an incredibly catalytic relationship. Really, I just consider myself a mentee to the great things you’ve brought to art. I wanted to give you flowers and just make sure I stated that first, because I think what you brought to the canon of art has allowed a lot of younger artists to see themselves and to express themselves outside of the kind of like, codified Blackness of rap music and dancing. So, thank you for that. There’s a lot of spirituality in that that I’ve allowed to access on my end. But yeah, we got to follow up the board, no matter the shot.

HT  You’re still pushin’. So, you know. And that’s a good thing, you know? It seems like you’re in it for the long haul, you know?

CH  I think for me, a lot of the idea of like, leaving it all on the field is kind of this relationship to the studio, where like, there’s things that happen before or after, but kind of in that moment, in that flow state of making with the music and the environment and kind of, things coming together. Do you find any relationships, I guess, in that idea of like a playoff mentality, or maybe some sort of like, working harder than the next, in the studio?

HT  The word complacent comes up, maybe. You know, I remember, I had a neighbor who was a mechanic, and he lived one house over. And my studio, which was just in the backyard, it was, like, one of those sheds that you could, you know, put down a foundation and just pop it up. But he would work in his, in his, you know, shop really late and I said, “I’m not going to stop until George stops.”
So, sometimes you use that as something to motivate you. I don’t know if this, if I’m answering that. But, you know, I think it’s a, from that you get this sort of, not even a competitiveness, but I think once you’ve chosen something that you want to do, I think if you don’t know that you got to put in work, then, you know, nothing’s ever gonna happen. I mean, I think we are aware of people who would, who are great, and there’s some, they all have some sort of characteristic that’s similar. You know, I mean, like sort of dedication, and you know, like, even if you’re not like, outstanding in the beginning, you know, we all hear the story of Michael Jordan who got cut from the team. You know what I mean? I had peers like the Hernandez brothers, who could, were great draftsmen in the seventh grade. I mean, it’s like genius. You know, Gilbert, Jaime, even the sister. So, already I was aware of my peers in sports: my brothers ran track, my neighbor played at SC, played on the Vikings, you know, and I grew up with these sort of people. So, you know, Hey, man, like, I’m not gonna run track, I’m not fast, you know? But so you had to pick and choose and you know, I think that there is the beginning of aspiration or something. You wanna, you know, I’m the youngest of eight kids, so you like, you want to maybe stand out or just, you know, you want to win at something. When I say complacent, I don’t want to be a loser, you know? I might lose, but don’t throw the R on me.

CH I love that, it like, reminds me of “hard work beats talent when talent doesn’t work hard.” And I think that is a very real sentiment.

HT I mean, also, I think about, you know, golfers like Corey Pavin, being aware of people like Terry Pendleton, who won the Golden Glove. And I’m like, damn, I’ve played against like, Pendleton, and he was just average, or, maybe slightly—you know what I mean, but maybe average. And then, and then knowing Corey Pavin, who played at UCLA, and, and all of that golfin’, I’m watching him when I’m sitting in the park, you know, smoking with the, with the bad boys, and I’ll say, look at that little guy, and he had an older brother, and all of a sudden, he’s the man. You just don’t ever know. You know, so you put in a little work, it might be there. You gotta, you gotta nurture it. Recognize it.

CH Yeah, that kind of reminds me of this video I watched about Kobe Bryant in relation to compounding interest. So, this idea that Kobe was practicing from four in the morning ‘til seven, eight until twelve, two until five, seven until ten, where everyone else on the team is just practicing seven ‘til ten. So, that idea that if you’re working ten more hours in the studio than the next artist, a whole year, and then a whole year, there’s kind of this, like, dedication and persistence that really kind of like, cracks open what we can bring to painting. And I think I definitely pull that from sports, and even similarly in jazz music, or musicians, as well. I know me and you have talked about album mode before. How do you feel like preparing for a show? Or do you feel more that you’re just always kind of in that album mode with your work, where you’re just pushing it regardless, and then you almost just kind of edit together something for the show?

HT Well, I’m never thinking of anything really grandiose, maybe I just want to make sure I’m thinking and conscious about just subtle things. But like, you know, just like when I came here, and we’re on the 18th floor, and I look out the window, and I say, Oh, man, this is a nice view. And I was thinking about this possible project that involved this LA rapper and, but simultaneously, I thought about, maybe it might be a song or, you know, you’re just like, in the moment, and also, in anticipation of this conversation, I’m thinking about the Hollywood Sign, which I don’t see, but it’s still, you know, you’re looking at the Santa Monica Mountains, then Ed Ruscha pops up, you know, are you walking to this recording studio, and you see this black? And like, just, you know, prior to, I listened to a Laurel Hoffman interview talking about Mckaela Eichmann and, and then I saw, you know, this Rashid comparison, you know, to like, some other work. So, you know, I think we’re all, as an artist, I mean, I’ve had a nine-to-five, you know, you know, and some jobs you don’t want to take home with you. And, and I think I’m just always probably thinking about, just, like, I was just talking about permeating, it just comes through because there’s, you know, once, sometimes you just stay busy and like you said, shows, even if it’s not shows it’s, maybe you’re thinking of something different, maybe you’re tired of doing representational work, maybe, you know, I want to play jazz, or, I’m sure a lot of people go through it. You don’t necessarily change
careers, but the genre or whatever, you know, Ah! Maybe I want to, you know, decide, huh, and you want to do sculpture. You’re not known for that, but you want to do that. But you know, I just look out the window and you think about, territorial, like, LA, you know, you’re in LA, and LA, rhymes with, to me, Ruscha, sometimes or, it could be a lot of other people. You know what I mean? They’ll, you know, they’ll say, Oh, why’d you mention that, but no, you know? I might get in the plane and not think about Diebenkorn.

CH Yeah, I think Ed Ruscha, Diebenkorn, and kind of that Los Angeles lineage, you’re very much a chiseled face in that Mount Rushmore of Los Angeles. How do you find Los Angeles is affecting your work now? You mentioned the palm trees, the Hollywood Sign, I know you’re from Oxnard. Would you mind elaborating on your relationship to LA, and like, I know you love traveling, is that in relationship to like not resenting LA when you come back? Or how do you, how does place affect the work?

HT I think it affects it in a lot of ways. Even though you might deny it like, you know, like even if you watch a rap video, might be Nipsey, you know what I mean? And then, I don’t know, I was just thinking about different sort of iconography, like Kobe, if I were to do this particular piece, you know, but then you always, sometimes you come totally within, but you know, what, like, I was, you know, going down the street and I was thinking, I mean, I got different projects going on. So, I was like the tents, you know, I go down Sixth Street, you know, downtown, you know, working as a nurse in a mental hospital, I mean, these, even a place, that was a place, an institution where I spent ten years. And, and so that would, you know, come through in the work. Or downtown, I mean, hey, David Hammons was here, you know, and he put tents in the Hauser, you know, in the gallery, and I see that every day. And then, you know, then that might take you somewhere else. And like, you know, or like just driving around, like, maybe, yeah, you know, when you start looking at the signs man, and you just, you know, yeah, and then you think about, I mean, you can’t help but to think about certain people and artists, even if it’s music, and you’re watching some videos, whatever you’re into, it just, the way that it manifests itself, you know, is it comes in all, creeps in in all different ways, you know? You know, you’re seeing guys in the lowriders, but then it’s a part of popular culture, you know what I mean? I mean, they’re using it, you’re using it, you know, so, we’re all using it. And I guess that’s why we can all sort of relate, you know, musicians and artists, you know, and so forth. Even if you’re, you know, a writer, you know, Charles Bukowski, you’re talking about it, you’re talking about the grit, the grime, LA, and you tend to want to know your surroundings or people who come from your, your area. And then you, then you go, well, I mean, we’re all aware of, you know, Picasso or some, you know, if you’re into this or that, or some German artists, some anime, you know, I think sometime, something about home, it’s just like if you’re Creole you’re gonna, you know, you know, Cajun, you know what I mean? You have that certain flavor, right? If you’re from, you know, you might be from Oxnard, where I’m from—Chiques!—and you know how to make enchiladas, tacos, and, you know, you know what I mean, you have a recipe for these things. You know these things.

CH One hundred percent.

HT You know what I mean? If you, maybe the East Coast, you’re from Nantucket, you’re making clam chowder, I don’t know. You know what I mean, so that’s a local sort of a thing.

CH That reminds me a lot of, I was watching this video on Denzel Washington the other day talking about agency, and his whole concern is that everyone wants to call it a race thing, but it’s so vague and this like, I guess, downfall of a monolith. And he was speaking about the cultural education that we can bring to anything creative is what creates a sort of authorship. And he was thinking about, thinking about a hot comb going down the back of your hair, in that relationship to whether it’s a barber shop, or your neighborhood, and showing that in your work, because like you said, it allows people to see the world in a different way that they, I guess, could take for granted. And it also reminds me of the act of close looking. I think, for me, the camera has always been this tool to look closely at life.
HT You know, like you said, the debris of something, I thought about like Anselm Kiefer, or something, you know, like, hay and dirt and all of that.

CH I think there are a lot of ideas of LA and a lot of ideas of humanity in looking at each other, and do you, do you think about the eyes as like, a window to the soul? That’s me projecting, but when I engage with people and kind of have that reciprocity, I feel like that body language says so much. Do you feel similarly?

HT You want to believe that on your best day, you know, I went out to dinner with [inaudible], and I was, and we were talking about meditation, and we were just talking about the mountain pose, you know, and just being grounded. And some days you can be really sensitive, and then other days really insensitive. So, I think that, but we see these things, you know, like, I’m just saying like, it could be an individual or a group, right? My dad used to say, “Meet me, Mr. nigga nigga,” you know, but (laughter) I don’t even want to say it, but he used to say, quote-unquote, “Meet me,” and I used to say, “What the fuck does that mean?” But it was like, you know what, sometimes people don’t know you, you know what I mean, and sometimes you don’t know them. And sometimes you don’t get, you don’t even care to know them, you don’t have any empathy, you don’t give a fuck, you know?

CH Right.

HT So, and sometimes you do see, and sometimes it’s hard. You know what I mean? I mean, who, you know, I mean, only a sick human being likes to see someone in pain and suffering and masochists, oh, yeah, you know? I mean, I worked at a hos— you know what I mean? This, these experiences I mean, there are human beings like that. But, you know you’re gonna find something, it’s like, things begin to be very blurry. And then it’s like painting, then if someone’s sitting for you, or you, you know, I mean, that’s my, I’m thinking about that, then you know, something becomes, it becomes more clear, you know, you might think you see it, but you don’t really see it in the beginning, you know, you just, I don’t fucking know— Hey! What’s up, baby! (laughter)

CH One of the most, I guess like, potent and like mind-blowing experiences I’ve ever experienced was being in one of your paintings in the garage, watching you at work. And I have this vision of you cleaning your brushes in a bucket like a knight taking a sword out of the sheath. And I’ll never forget that for sure. How does like, I guess your relationship to subject, like, how does that come up? Is it something that you feel in someone? Or is it more out of like, you know, we’re just hanging out, we should do the thing?

HT Shit, I thought I was gonna ask you that!

CH (laughter) Yeah, I mean, I guess my question was, like, how do you relate to subjects? Like, is that something that’s innately like a magnetism? Like, do you feel it around you and you want to engage with it? Or is it more about, like, the aesthetics of a person? Because I’ve seen you around many people, and there seems to be something maybe intrinsic about the relationship to people you paint. Or, is it more about, like, more of a coincidence?

HT You know, so I think, like I said, it’s a little bit of both, because sometimes, like I’m sitting here with my assistant, and one day, you know, maybe you’re in that, you’re working in the studio, in the house, or wherever you might be that day. And I have, you know, if I want to paint in my house, there’s paint in the garage, and you just want to stop, it could be very abrupt, you know, not planned. I don’t have that sort of structure where I’m in my studio ten to four, you know. Mason Plumlee, friend of mine, dropped by, dropped by, on, you know, from London, eleven-hour flight, and we was chitchatting, he brought his bags in and I didn’t know if he wanted to spend the night or, or what, but he ended up leaving, but before he left, I started his portrait in the garage, you know, and so, it’s like that, but it’s like, it’s like jamming to me, that’s the closest I can get to like, you know, saying, Hey, if you’re fucking playing, you know, out there in Memphis, and, you know, Otis Redding pops through, you want to jam with Otis! Then some people can inspire you to
do something, and so, it’s that combination, and you know, and to them, I’m sure, hey, if they walk in, you take advantage of that and that’s a moment and you’re recording, that’s just, that’s something, an historic moment for you or for them, for everyone.

And, and then, and sometimes, you know, you set up, I’m in the studio now, sometimes you make an appointment, you know? And that sometimes is rare for me, you know? But not, you know, I mean, there’s certain people, Oh, you in town? You should come by. It’s very tentative. So, I’ll make some work in that way. And then I’ve just pulled people off the street. I don’t do that too often, but it happens. You know, there might be, you know, my studio is near Skid Row and you might see somebody, but you know, I don’t know, you know, so your whole process sometimes changes.

[Music: “Tramp” by Otis Redding]

CH I really like what you said about jamming, I think that that really puts it into perspective, even similarly to rapping, thinking about just making a beat, and you’re just ciphering with a few friends, like kind of just having that reciprocity. And I think that, you know, we’ve been, I guess, told not to have those spiritual relationships. But I guess through that intimacy, there is like a great connection that comes through with that. And yeah, it’s almost like thinking about compositions of sound, if there’s something that’s intriguing you to create compositions on your canvas, kind of, you know, think about you as like, the pianist, and a lot of these other people are just maybe chiming in on other, other elements, or you kind of composing these bigger scores of life and humanity. And I think that your emotional spectrum is so large and your experience and your experiences in and around paint making are, I guess, like, incredibly humane and also like, always going, and it’s exciting to hear how much everything has informed the decisions you’re making in the moment, especially in terms of like subjects or actual paint coming off the brush. Do you ever feel like certain brushes are, like, speaking out to you? Like, Oh, this is the brush, I know it. Sometimes when I’m in the studio, it’s like, what am I—Oh, there it is! And I just like, see one in the cup next to forty other brushes, but I know that I can trust that one.

HT That’s funny, because I was starting to think about baseball, you know. Or maybe it could be, you know, some movie like with Robert Redford, and he says, you know, when he says he has to go get that bat! And you know (laughter), You got to hit that home run. (laughter)

CH Exactly.

HT You know what I mean? “Get that one for me, Johnny.”

CH Yeah, the lucky one.

HT (laughter) Yeah, I do think about the brush, you know what I mean? Because you got to think about the strokes, you know what I mean? Because sometimes, after you’ve been doing something a long time, it’s like pitching, you know, you can only, you may only be able to throw so many pitches, and that, it really does come into play. You know, if you have, you know, a five-by-seven painting, you ain’t gonna use no little tiny brush, you know what I mean? So you want to get some, it’s like golfing too, and I’m not a golfer, but how many irons you want to bring, you know what I mean? If I wanted to get four brushes, I might get you know, a four-inch flat, a round, and a Filbert, you know, you say, I want a Filbert, a little one for, you know what I mean? Those are like pitches, you know? I gotta have my fastball, I need my slider, you know what I’m saying?

CH Yeah, it kind of reminds me of George, your mechanic friend, it’s like, when you can rely on your tools, you know they can get the job done, and it sounds like you have a deep relationship with whatever tools you need in whatever time to make sure that you’re liberating yourself and your spirit.

HT But something new happens. You always try to make things work, you know? Maybe your palette becomes limited: Oh, I’m out of this color. So sometimes it’s, you know, I know sometimes I’m visiting people and I’m just like, Hey, well, I’m only gonna use these three colors, you know what I mean?

CH And what are your go-to colors, Henry?
HT I don’t know, but you know, Imma always want black, maybe, you know what I’m saying? (laughter) You can go light on it. But that’s when it becomes like, Hey, you know, it’s like a fire. You don’t have to turn it all the way up. You can slow cook it, you know what I mean? You don’t have to go hard with black but yeah, you know, it’s like having at least a pencil. I can’t think of another color I would want if I only had a choice of three, I’m like, Damn. Say like everyone is given primary and then maybe three extra colors, then I might want a chromium green or some shit.

CH And the reason I wanted to talk about technicalities and just, like, painters painting is because I think being Black has this caveat for people to enter our life just based on tragedy and pain and this idea of like, quote-unquote “resilience.” So, I appreciate you just giving us some of the, some of the trade talk, because it is important for us to focus on the composition, to focus on the paint coming off the brush. And I feel like you leave so much for us to feast on as a viewer, looking at your work, that I’m always thinking about, kind of like a reverse engineering that’s going on and really just looking at the paint, for paint. And I know you studied under James Jarvaise, and one of the quotes you shared with me was, “Sometimes the straight line has to be crooked.” And ever since you told me that I just, you know, I still get chills thinking about it, because I think it’s a profound statement that I still don’t understand.

HT I think there’s no real downtime. I think we’re always, we’re like, always fish and like, we’re always in the water, you know? Because I think of, like, Einstein or somebody, you know, you know, like, I think that anybody, it’s not like a discovery but a conception or an idea. They come—you don’t know when they’re gonna come—they come all the time, and sometimes we’re too lazy to write them down. You know, so downtime is a good time too, you know? It’s as important, I think. But I think and then there’s times when you’re just contemplating. You know, you’re just . . . (laughter) You know what I mean? And then you just bang out a painting and then it’s like, yeah, because you’ve been thinking about it a long time. You know, it’s nice when you have little notes and sketches, but sometimes you just glass it. Yeah, and I think that’s why things just come out and like when your brain starts, sometimes things just come up because you held them there so long it’s like your impaction. Your shit is all on fire. I don’t know, you know, all this feces and shit, maybe, you know? But we ain’t talking about you, man! I don’t know what’s up, like, you know I’m up here, I’m like, damn!

CH Yeah, ask me some stuff then, that’s all right.

[Music: “Verse thirteen Keago Missa” by Maredi Maredi]

HT You know, I was hosting. I mean, you know, he stands out, he’s a tall guy, he ain’t as tall as Mason or some of my friends. There’s not too many people that are 6’11” or seven feet, but, you know. And I mean, you know, he’s in my house and you better be approachable or you gotta go, you know. I try to you know, like I said, in those situations, you know, you got to attend to a lot of people, so, I can’t, you know, not that, you know, he wasn’t worthy of the time but we talked, but I knew that we’d catch up. So, I think since catching up, we’ve been, you know, we’ve sort of sustained this sort of relationship that has grown and, and things like that. When I’m in New York, I might holler, I mean, shit, you know, we always seem to hook up for something, if it’s a drink, a beer, just, you know. So,
but yeah, that’s, that was, that was the beginning, you know, and sometimes, it’s, that’s all you need, you know, you just get things started, you know what I mean? And then there was time, but, you know, over time, you know, you just, just keep watching him and he comes to LA and, and works and, and, you know, I don’t visit a lot of people’s studios on the regular, only because I get busy. I love to, you know, I wish I could do more of that, I mean, my assistant asked, like, you know, like, I usually like to have people look at my work before I send it off, and sometimes I’m just finishing up and they’re ready to go, right when my canvas is wet. So, but here I go again. You know, it’s just nice to see, to watch people progress or just this to watch, you know, see what people are up to and doing and it’s always, it’s been great to see, you know, you know, I’d rather go to a gallery than to a—well, nevermind, let me shut up. You might have to edit this shit out. (laughter) I don’t know where I’m going.

CH You mentioned that there were some badass draftsmen in your class in seventh grade. What shaped your artistic, I guess rigor, in that childhood stage? Did you already know that you were, you know, feeling as creative as an artist?

HT I mean, a lot of times, I think, you know, where you might know, be privy to, like, you’re always, like, when I was growing up, I knew who was the fastest runner in the class, you know? Or you might’ve known who you thought was the smartest person, or who’s gonna get the best grade in math or this. And just like, you know, for some reason, you might be aware of who was the best person, best draftsperson, or handwriting. I was like, I knew all of that shit, you know? So, but in junior high it was like one of the Hernandez brothers in junior high. And say, before that there was someone I knew, Jeff Meyer or somebody. You know, but you know, it was just something I paid attention to. I mean, you know, you did your regular schoolwork and this and that. But you were a little aware. It’s not like I was in the commons, or we, I met with this guy after school to draw, but we kind of knew that we had the similar interests with, along with whatever. But, I did take an art class in seventh grade with Mr. Oshevsky, Mr. O, which I really enjoyed. But I don’t think Richard was in that class. He was just probably dropped in on his PG or in the mart, you know what I mean? But I did start going over his house a little later, like in high school where I’d see that’s when they were really serious, like, Gilbert and Jaime was just doing their thing, Richard just liked to play baseball and do this, you know what I mean? And we just, yeah.

CH It sounds like a lot of life kind of outweighs your studies in that sense. Do you find academia, like, a part of your process? Or is it something that’s kind of just informed ways to speak about what you do?

HT I was recently with a friend of mine that I went to CalArts with who I consider like, Oh, and he’s like, always smart, and we were just talking about, you know, things. I said, Oh, do you know who this person is? And I was surprised. I don’t know and it’s, you know, a white guy, and I brought up Fred Moten and, you know, there’s, there’s a lot of people that I haven’t read, and you know. But you know, at the end, you know, you got to do you. It’s, you know, you can talk about it, I think that’s what happened at CalArts, just like, you can feel like, Oh man, I didn’t read that person, and I was working full time, I mean, you know, you’re aware of the different people, the different movements, different artists, you know, post-Black, you know, what you’re curious about, a lot of different people because you, I guess, sometimes you might feel a little left out. But like I say, at the end of the day, you’re gonna make your work, you know? You can be the best, you can be Prince, and Prince may not know what, blah, blah, blah, or whoever it is. At the end of the day, if, you know what I mean? It’s, there’s nothing wrong with knowing. I’m interested in what about Adam Pendleton. I’m interested about Rashid Johnson, I’m interested what Glenn Ligon is doing. You know, I may not know everything about it, but I’m looking at these people not trying to imitate these people, but just, you know, you want to have conversations with the present, the past, you know, you, you know, if you’re making music, you might refer to James Brown, you might refer to Mah, you might, whatever! You know, so, academia is a whole lot of things. Academia is just something that I mean, you know, we think about this institution, you know,
you know, you know, if you’re making music, you might refer to James Brown, you might refer to Mah, you might, whatever! You know, so, academia is a whole lot of things. Academia is just something that I mean, you know, we think about this institution, you know, but then that’s not gonna make me not love Bill Traylor, you know, I’m gonna look at him, you know. I’m thinking about the women of Giza, you know what I mean? I look at Joseph Beuys, and then look at this, and, you know, because you’re curious, you know? And, but I just roll with it, but just, you know what I mean? And then there’s people who go to school for a year. Hey, look at Miles. He might have went to Julliard and said, “Fuck it, I don’t need this shit!” You know, sometimes you get it, you know? Nolan Davis, hey, you know, he went to Cooper. Ah I don’t—you know what I mean? You know, maybe you’re self-taught, but you really, you do research and you think, but there’s a lot of, maybe even Arshile Gorky, you know, Gorky was probably I think something, but you know. Hey, maybe your mom was a teacher, you didn’t need to go to college like, maybe you know you, I don’t know, you know what I mean? But you just do it, the Hernandez brothers, you, you know?

**CH** Yeah, I mean, I have an interesting relationship to academia because, I mean, I didn’t go to school at all. So when I moved out to New York in 2013, it was just like, I’m gonna make images of people, and maybe one day, I’ll work for the *New York Times* and make images. And like, through that I was so obsessed with walking. I’d walk like 15 miles a day. I’d go to all the museums, all of the galleries and I just started to like, I guess, see myself and my experience as some sort of personal education that you actually can’t be taught. And I was able to kind of posture my experience against a lot of people that have the kind of same merit, and almost like a miniature of their teacher. And I think like you said, there’s ways to read, there’s ways to engage with artists, and you know, many residencies that can give you that level of criticality, or academia. And I think what makes us actually interesting is that we can bring our own experiences in.

**HT** It needs to be a balance too. A balance of all of that, you know what I mean? Like, you know, what if Nina Simone finished school and didn’t like, take this turn, come on, you gotta, you gotta, like I said, we go back to like that, that where you come from, that flavor, you know what I mean? You just can’t, you know, change it. I don’t think that’s possible.

**CH** Yeah. It’s inauthentic. You know, I think that kind of goes into the body language I was talking about earlier, when, like, when someone’s being true and authoring their own story, you can feel it.

**HT** James Brown had to play funk! James Brown had to play funk. Okay? It’s just like that. James Brown had to play funk.

**CH** One hundred percent.

**HT** You know?

**CH** And it also reminds me of something Piero Golia told me when I was doing the Mountain School residency in LA, he would always say, like, “Write books, don’t read books.” This idea that like your life is what informs people to look at your work as an artist. We can’t be the curator, the writer, the theorist, the painter, the gallery, it’s a lot of work. So sometimes, I find that theory and academia can get in the way of someone just actually living a life and responding.

**HT** Well it stopped a lot of people in their tracks.

**CH** Yeah, exactly.

**HT** It’s like an armchair Marxist. I don’t got, somewhere in academia, I’m just, and all of a sudden, I’m the shot caller, I’m just gonna do it like this. I’m not gonna, well, you know. I’m just saying that, you know, you hear about people and then they just totally abandon the practice that, you know, was really them, or something. Yeah, I can’t get with it.

**CH** I guess it’s a short battle. Because, yeah, I think the most beautiful thing an artist can bring into the world is their own life and their own experience and how they’re responding. And I find that in
your work, and I’m trying to bring that to my work. And I see that in a lot of artists I’m looking at. So, I appreciate that, your sentiment, and how that kind of resonates in there.

HT You know, a lot of things can prompt you to do, your peers can prompt you, just, you know, remaining open can prompt you to do things differently though. That’s like when I think about academia, but that’s pretty much it. Did you know when you wanted to become an artist, or . . . ?

CH I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, and I moved throughout Chicago, Las Vegas, Colorado, Dubai, Los Angeles, and now I’ve been in New York for eight years. So, the first twenty years of my life, I moved every year and a half or two years. And I think from that, like, nomadic experience, there was a lot of eyes and ears to the wall. And I didn’t come from an art family. You know, my first time engaging with art was in 2013, moving to New York. So, for me, I think that the term ‘an artist’ is really vague, to me. And I think if it means to be someone who’s like speaking truth to power, or questioning life, or agitating things, I feel like I knew that I always had that capability from a very young age. You know, even thinking about how I’m leaving a lot of the cotton canvas exposed in the painting, like that stemmed from a relationship to vanilla bean ice cream, and seeing Blackness in this like white, kind of perpetuated sweet. And it’s like, to be four years old, contemplating identity in this kind of like, biracial construct, what does the Blackness mean in the vanilla? Like, I was always critically thinking, and I always knew that some shit wasn’t adding up. My mom was, you know, someone who was always doing something on to the next. And I was always aware of like, how the cookie crumbled. And I feel like I carried that with me, and I didn’t know how to articulate it. So, it’s like a mix of loving color and material and texture and like being, frankly, like, ashamed to talk about it with my friends. But knowing that like, deep down, those were actually the things that made me, I guess, excited or happy. I don’t know, I mean, painting happened, because I was walking 15 miles a day making photos, and I’d get home and I would just see all of the people I saw, when I’d close my eyes, kind of like this mix of like schizophrenia, and like something being stuck in your head. And

at the time, Lauren, my partner, was studying painting and sculpture at Parsons, and she was like, “Dude, photo’s not gonna cut it, like you got to come get some shit off your chest,” and just shared a lot of the ideas of like, art making, pigments, stretching canvas. And I think I just became so obsessed to the point of like—every day, I’ve always, I’ve always kind of questioned the man in this way. And I think art has allowed me to really break down life and how I’ve seen it. So, in I guess a long-winded way of saying I knew that I was thinking differently than the people around me my whole life. But that was just due to experience and like having to be kind of on the go.

HT Yeah, I kind of wonder how, I mean, if Lauren was say, say, taking English or writing, for example, you know, how maybe, she’s like, “Oh, you need to write that,” and then you would’ve become a writer instead, you know what I mean?

CH (laughter) I think she saw me, she saw me react to the piece I mentioned in the beginning. And, you know, my father, I grew up with a single mom, but my father is a badass painter, a great artist. And I think it’s this kind of intrinsic relationship to spirituality and ancestral spirit. And like, I don’t know, allowing to, allowing yourself to create something and bringing it into the world is a really special feeling just on the surface. And I’m thankful for that experience, I guess, in the technicality. But in terms of painting, I think it was just a relationship of wanting to understand humanity, and have deeper relationships with myself and my experience in trying to make sense of that.

HT But you’re also, I haven’t formed this into any question, but, you know, the walking, you know, that’s such an important part. Like, you know, I drive around, I do more driving in LA than walking. But, you know, I, I mean, I source that way. I mean, you might source in a, you know, subconsciously or are you just bringing things in, and then physically grabbing things and then, you know, you using the, you know, the photographs, I mean, I mean, are you still making photographs? You know, like you’ve taken, either taken probably, maybe shorter walks, maybe not, you know, your weapon? I think, you know, you’re still hunting and gathering these images and . . .
Photography, for me, was just a way to keep that kind of studio practice alive. I think it allows me to look closely at a crack in the ground or architecture, or almost like a reason to speak with someone, and I’m definitely still making images every day. I don’t leave the house without my camera. But I studied under Catherine Opie at the ACA and one of our big, one of her big concerns was like, like, What are these photos doing for you? And why do they need to be shown in this relationship to—? You know, photography for me is a reason to sponge up the world, and I just absorb, absorb, absorb and have kind of literal proof. And in the paintings, it’s almost like my experiences intrinsically start to show up in that composition making as well. So, I think they, they really kind of bounce off each other. And I’m thinking about photography, even how I’m working with light and tones in the photograph or in the, in the painting. And then also just compositional visual languages and subtleties, subliminalities, there’s a lot of things that photography has shown me and I guess through that viewfinder was like, in a way, this almost like a superpower to look closer at the world and be able to share with others what I saw in it, but just for myself to kind of speak to that inner child who was like, gaslit at those ages of knowing what I wanted to say, I just wouldn’t know how to say it. So, I think through these different mediums, I’m just trying to articulate some of those early conversations and experiences.

I think you just got to amass just all sorts of things, you know? Maybe it’s clippings, maybe, you know, you pick up things, and then later on, it becomes an awesome vase or sculpture. But I also think about, like, I was earlier thinking about, like, you know, like when you talked about vanilla bean, and, and how we represent, you know, you know, like, say skin tone, and talk about, you know, like, when I was, like Kerry James, you know, it’s like, you know, his black has always got to be this, this and this, maybe it’s ivory, maybe it’s carbon black, but it’s black, you know, and, and he talked about that in his book, and I was just thinking about, that was when I was thinking about texture. And you know, and how you, you know, because sometimes, you know, you start, we go, you know, you go from front to back and back to front, like maybe you start off covering every bit of the canvas. And then later on, it’s not important, you start to, not necessarily, I don’t want to call them shortcuts, but, but I know, you know, just to hear you say that you started off maybe with some, you know, the raw canvas is a part of the pigment and, and just that whole, you know, thinking about identity and representation. And sometimes, you know, this is, you know, this goes on throughout even though when, yeah, so. Yeah, so if you want to talk about any of that, or, are, did you always just start like, like, like, say there’s pointillism, you know, and, you know, dot, dot, dot. But this is not, you know, I mean, you could have approached this in a number of ways, but how you came up with that, and I think a lot of people are interested in that. You know, but it’s so uniquely you now, you know? And sometimes that’s what it is, maybe somebody, you know, this unorthodox, maybe somebody, the way somebody holds a bat, and people try to tell them to do it a different way. And, and something you just, sometimes you just stick to your guns and . . .

For me, the cotton canvas was thinking about originhood, and I’m using coffee and espresso and staining that whiteness as a way to talk about that slippage of you know, being a Black man but having a white mom. And I think it’s showing itself in many ways in society, and I never wanted to, I guess, like, have that white card be pulled in some sort of way that would be used against me. So, it was kind of accepting, like the fuckery of being both. For me, the cotton canvas was, you know, the only whiteness I’m engaging with, and I’m using color palindromically. So, I’m thinking about how I can add black coffee, staining the whiteness, or add colors and pigments, but the only white I’m using is that cotton, and I want the cotton to stick through as a way to kind of interrogate or complicate the images. There’s a lot of Rorschach testing, like when a doctor puts a blob of ink, and is like what do you see? And you’re like, “I see my mom, and my—and my brother!” And you know, it’s like, obviously, they aren’t there but it’s a lot of your own kind of traumas that are coming out. So, for me in that pareidolia, it’s almost like seeing faces in the clouds that I’m trying to stop from fleeting, and then in relationship to surrealism, trying to engage with those marks I’m making, and kind of like shaping and forming these stains and washes as a way to, I guess expose the cotton, but not think about it in any way other than that kind of interrogation or relationship to whiteness that’s
happening not only in the art space, but also in my own biology. And I think that slippage is really complicated. And I, instead of like talking about white paint, I wanted to use black coffee, thinking about seeds coming from Africa, exploitation commodities, agrarian labor realities, and how that stain could show up on white and what does that mean to have this whiteness almost like bouncing around the subject like an oscilloscope, but it kind of creating this like haunting abstraction.

HT So, you know, like when you made that sort of, step to painting, like say like, you know, you were saying how your partner Lauren, Lauren was like, you know, you’re mainly doing photography, but when you, when you started, like, it’s kind of interesting that you started in a particular way, you know? Which is cool, you know, like some people say, oh, you know, this is just the way they do it. I mean, Kusama, I mean, that Japanese artist, or I mean, anyway, I’m thinking of different people. You know, Cerrá, or something.

CH I think it completely kind of bleeds into the idea of the institution and experience and education. And I think, you know, speaking frankly, like, my upbringing was incredibly fucked up. And in that it’s like pressure cooking coal into something else. And I think there was a part of me that knew from how much I was engaging with the lineage, whether that was conceptual thinkers, whether that was paint makers and image makers, and like, for me, it was just about 5:30 in the morning ‘til midnight, seven days a week, every day for ten years to find some sort of, I guess, reason of why I’m even painting. You know, I looked at you, I looked at Colescott, I looked at Kerry, and many other artists and I didn’t, my biggest concern was being derivative. And I guess bilaterally, to looking at painting, I was looking at Mark Bradford in the paper. I was looking at Theaster Gates in the tar. I was looking at Hammons in the rock and I started to be obsessed with this relationship to material and how it’s authored by these artists. And for me, working at Starbucks as my first job at 14, I was making these doodles and like, I guess, smearing coffee on them, and it was about just like, not making excuses. You know, I’m coming from walking those miles, going to dumpsters at NYU and SVA, pulling out 90 paintings from the trash every semester and re-stretching them, and I couldn’t afford canvas, or stretchers or paint, so I would use the coffee that I’d have, kind of on the tail end of my walks, to like start making marks. So, for me, it was like, there was a lot of conceptual ideas, a lot of relationships like starting your day or, or like Blackness coming from somewhere and being exploited. I think the sweat equity of Blackness, especially in America is a lot. And I wanted those concerns to be in that blackness of the coffee, but also staining that whiteness, that’s kind of this origin of Black portraiture in America. So, it’s a lot of conceptual play.

HT You the same color as Malcolm and the same height, so it’s kind of like by any means necessary.

CH One hundred percent.

HT You know, well that’s what I think about, you know, being, and sort of egalitarian, like, I mean, like, also sort of, resourceful, resourceful, like, when I think about Haiti and, and how people just, you know, just making, sometimes, you know, maybe, smithing, maybe, you know, all you have is rocks, you know? I don’t know, you know, but . . .

CH It’s become a very alchemic, like personal relationship to making pigments. You know, I’m getting a deeper brown from finer grounds in higher pressure systems. So, espressos or stovetops, and lighter tones from coarse, drip coffee, and how did those things show up? How can I find, you know, four tones of brown in every bean that has their own biology similar to, like, olive oils. And, you know, when I, when I was able to close look at my work, and just try and like, break the facade of life and the system, the whole thing, it’s like, it was liberating for me to say coffee was a paint. It was liberating to say fuck you to the cotton, and then put blackness all over it. And it’s liberating to tell stories about things that gave my life value. So, it’s kind of this like, Sisyphean complex, and man-versus-nature, and hero’s journey, and just trying to like, you know, in relationship to academia.
HT Yeah, the metaphors and everything just keep changing. But I also think that, you know, maybe like, a generation, you know, and what you are, I mean, people are doing everything it’s like, I, when I think of when I ran into Mustafa, and, you know, the fact that he works with Kanye, Kanye is a rapper, he, but he designs for, you know—I mean, these relationships and how they inspire things, because we, you know—I mean, you know, these are people who are closer to your age and your generation, I think about what, how everybody’s just sort of doing a lot more. Like when you, you know, it’s like, hey there’s more mentors, there’s more people like, oh, yeah, and then not having to be told it, you know, it’s like, hey, you know, I mean, like, kinda say you can’t tell me nothing. I mean, people are just doing it and I see, you know, and but, you know, there doesn’t have to be, you know, your medium isn’t just acrylic, or your medium isn’t just oil, it’s everything.

CH We absorb life and just try and get it off our chest. And I think there’s, there’s something really liberating about being creative and just trying to make something that didn’t exist. And I think, you know, over the last ten years, I’ve developed a lot of bad habits that I’ve been able to find a language for. And in terms of academia or theories, like Stuart Hall’s idea of being and becoming, or bell hooks and how to look, and all of these different relationships to people that have language for what they do, and how can I find language to talk about what’s exciting me, and like, what am I bringing to painting? I think it was a very kind of vague question. But during my time at Skowhegan, that was like a big concern from Sondra Perry, who like, changed my life. She was like, “You’re half white, where’s that in the work? And what are you bringing to painting?” And you know, it’s been a few years, I’m like, Oh word, like, that’s actually what my story is adding a pedagogy to, or like this, this experience. It’s not necessarily about just hoping that no one questions my white mom, it was like, oh, no, I had to deal with whiteness in my own relationship to maternity, and in relationship to proximity. And the first thirteen years were low-income areas and the second thirteen years were wealthy areas in LA, Santa Monica, Malibu, where I was using dark money to try and act like everything was alright, so it was like, I always knew that I was not around the same people that were coming from my experience, whether that, whether that was Blackness or whether that was like, dark money type of thing. I say that like, vaguely, because I don’t want to get her in trouble, but it’s like this idea that you just have to live life no matter what and if we let people hinder us, we’re just kind of like, playing their game. And I love the idea of just like, fighting back or like, questioning things.

HT And sometimes, you know, like being a, you know, like a student or for somebody for lack of a better way of phrasing it right now, when you said that, you know, a person’s said where are you in here? And I wonder how long we have to tell these narratives. But guess what, we’ll tell them a long time, but I always just think about that, you know? Are they gonna give us less representation? A lot of, I really don’t know, these are just things I’m just throwing out there. But you know what? I’m just saying, there’s just so much. And I’m kind of feeling this room here. I’m in this cubicle and it’s like, ugh! But, you know, sometimes you, you, you want to address that. So, when the subject changes, I mean, you know, this is like, me talking about the moment, you know, it, you know, it’s like, when I went to the, I don’t know, you know what I’m thinking about work, thinking about the time, the cubicles, the plexiglass, and all these parts, you know, the times. Like, it’s a sign of the times. But it’s like, you know, when we can just, like you said, liberation and freedom, bro, is all I think about sometimes now.

CH I’m right there with you.

HT Hey, man, but you just keep doing your thing. You know, that’s what I want to say when the straight line can be crooked. You know, you’re hittin’ everything, hittin’ everything, and then, and sometimes it’s like, even rappers, sometimes they talk about the coochie. Sometimes they got the boochie or the this or the that. But I think we could just cover all of that.

CH Yeah, I could talk to you forever, Henry.

HT And long as we continue to do that, and to listen to what’s inside of us, you know?
CH Yeah. And just let it out by any means, like you said.

HT All right. All right. Hey, I’m gonna take these headphones off bro.

CH Yeah, it’s a little hot. I’m feeling the room too.

HT Hey, man. Do your thing and keep up the—

CH (laughter) I’ll talk to you soon.

HT Hell yeah. Peace out.

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