

# DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University  
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## **Style as Armour: Identity, Clothing and Self-Fashioning in History is Rarely Black or White**

Agnes Talks: History is Rarely Black or White Speaker Series  
2022

### **SPEAKERS**

Jason Cyrus, Julie Crooks, Nigel Lezama.

### **KEYWORDS**

History is Rarely Black or White, Fashion History, Textile Research, Conservation, Identity, Race

### **TRANSCRIPT**

**Jason Cyrus:** Welcome everyone to the third and final chat in the speaker series for the exhibition, History is Rarely Black or White at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Kingston, Ontario. My name is Jason Cyrus, the 2021 Isabel Bader Fellow in Conservation and Textile Research. I'm the curator of the exhibition and I am joined today by the fantastic and brilliant and wise professor Nigel Lezama from Brock University and Dr. Julie Crooks from the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Our conversation today is entitled Style as Armour, Identity, Clothing, and Self-Fashioning in the exhibition and within our works. But as we talk about clothing and as we talk about identity and race, we almost must talk about land. And it's important to know that the Agnes is situated on the traditional land of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Territory in what is now known as Kingston but has traditionally been known as Cataraqui. I, myself I'm Guyanese Canadian. I come from a South American country that has been the traditional land of the Amerindian and the Arawak First Nation. And as an immigrant settler, I have a very complicated relation to the land that is very layered. It's important to me that my work and the work that I'm a part of in this project with the Agnes is part of advancing reconciliation and decolonization and placing the stories and realities of marginalized identities front and forward.

I am so happy that you're all joining us today. We've been blown away by the interest in the exhibition and in these talks. We've had over 400 people sign up overall. We've had folks -- I'm just going to look over at my screen here so I can give you a good overview of just where folks have been coming in from. Definitely Ontario. We've got people from all over Canada, from PEI, from Nunavut, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Alberta, BC and Quebec, and that's just Canada alone. We've had folks tuning in from the U.S., a large contingent from the U.S., as well as the UK, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Brazil, Spain, Israel, and Norway. It's been fantastic to know that the work that we've worked so hard to put together has reached a global audience. And we've had over 2,400 folks access the online website again, coming from as many varied, varied places. And it's important that a conversation like this is heard and is had.

What I'm going to do, just give you an overview of how today is going to go. I will, first of all, introduce your speakers and read their bios and as well, I will give you an overview of the exhibition. For many of you, we've had the joy of understanding that many of you have signed up for all three sessions and you've been consistently coming. So I don't want to bore many of you with an overview that you've already heard. But I'd give some folks who are joining us and you an opportunity to just get a sense of what the show is about, what its core points are, and how it connects to our speakers. And then, I will kick it over to Nigel and Julie, who will share a bit of their work, introduce themselves to you, then we'll get into our chat because that's why we really are all here.

To many of us, Dr. Julie Crooks needs no introduction. She is the curator of the Arts of Global Africa and the Diaspora, the Art Gallery, of Ontario. Previously photography curator as well at the AGO. She has done many exhibitions and projects with BAND, Black Artists Network in Dialogue Gallery, as well as the Royal Ontario Museums of Africa Project. She holds a Ph.D. from SOAS, the Department of History of Art and Archaeology at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. She is also a dear mentor and friend. And I am so honoured and grateful to have her here today.

Professor Dr. Nigel Lezama also needs no introduction. He's an Associate Professor of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the Department of Brock University, as well as being the Graduate Director of French Studies. His work looks at -- examines rather marginalization and peripheral fashion luxury practices and how they transform dominant culture. Lezama also is coedited or has coedited rather the volume *Critical Canadian Luxury Studies, Decentring Luxury*, which will be published through Intellect Books. Nigel is also a dear mentor and friend. And I am extremely fortunate to have Nigel and Julie here to chat with us today. Thank you for being here.

What I will do now is give you an overview of the exhibition. And again, I'll try not to do that for too long so we can get into our chat, and then we'll get going. Okay. So *History is Rarely Black or White* gives you an overarching look at the connections between the cotton supply chain in the 1800s via the antique and historic garments at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre that are in our permanent collection. And the cotton supply chain and its connections to harmful resource extraction, exploitative labour practices in the form of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and the connections that these factors have to life in Canada and the way that Canadian diversity and identity has been crafted specifically in relation to Blackness. In this first gallery, you're seeing a setup that pairs the Agnes cotton garments with a map and artwork again also from the Agnes's collection. It gives you a sense of that wider supply chain. The artwork in the back shows a sense of the ports, the lands, the plantations, and the central figures that have created this wider supply chain.

The exhibition also uses or rather is in conversation with contemporary art. We've been extremely fortunate to have Karin Jones, a multidisciplinary artist from Vancouver create a special commission for us. This is called *Freed*. And Karin's installation is primarily made of raw cotton and Black hair that she has collected from salons close to her studio in Vancouver. And what *Freed* does is that it presents in a sense, a praxis or a methodology for the exhibition itself. It's a veil of cotton in here that surrounds a gorgeous wedding dress from 1893. And the point of the installation is to show that while we normally from a fashion historical perspective, look so much at the materiality of its garment and where the materials are coming from and how the material would have come through

trade networks, as well as the way that a garment is made and constructed, whether that be embroidery or corsetry or how the fabric is loomed, as well as the garments, social and personal biography, both its wearer and its maker. Freed tells us, though, we must also look at the humanity and the social and cultural history that is involved in the making of a garment. By inserting the garments with this veil, Freed and Karin's work talks in a sense says that we must also look at the humanity involved in making a garment such as this, whose history and whose very makeup comes from the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

The exhibition also uses conservation science. To tell this story we partnered with the Queen's Facility for Isotope Research to use a process called Isotope Analysis whereby you can learn so much more in detail about this process in our online exhibition created by Danuta Sierhuis, our digital director. What Isotope Analysis does is, it reduces the fibre or fibre sample from the garments to its core elements. Carbon, lead, strontium, oxygen, and hydrogen and based on the unique signature or makeup of those elements in each sample that we've selected from the cotton garments of the Agnes. You then can get a sense of where geographically the garments would've come from. This part of the project was spearheaded by the brilliant Anne-Marie Guerin who is the conservator on this project. And she partnered with QFIR to be able to use this process. I just spoke with Evelyne and Dan from the QFIR lab. And the process while we wrapped that up, I would say in September it takes very specialized expertise and takes a while to be able to interpret this raw data. And we are hoping to be able to announce that soon. So please check back into the website and see what else there's to learn.

So the first gallery, which is also behind me, like I said, set up this wider cotton supply chain, looking at mixing material, culture with social and political history, while also using science as a way of connecting these three pillars, these pillars, so to speak. The next gallery connects us now to the humanity of the cotton trades specifically in the 1800s. Here we're looking at the history of the Gullah/Geechee Nation, an amalgamation of different people groups taken through the Transatlantic Slave Trade and forcibly settled in the Southern Coast of the United States. And this is an installation created by Damian Joel, interdisciplinary artist who uses fashion, installation, photography, and film as his medium. And what Damian did was create a fashion story that tells the Gullah/Geechee Nation's past, present, and future. And this was done in conversation with the nation itself.

Now, we're moving into what I call in a sense the Canadian reality. Based on the fact that many descendants through the Transatlantic Slave Trade came into Canada through -- whether through different migratory routes. One central to the exhibition being the Underground Railroad. In this gallery, we were looking at routes from different American states and plantations that were there, and its connecting points to the ways that folks settled in Upper Canada also known as you know Southern Ontario and created a life here. We've got in the exhibition as you can see on the left different tintypes which we will speak to in our chat that show the ways that folks who came through the Underground Railroad used clothing and style and photography as this way of leaving their past behind and creating a new identity for themselves and reclaiming their humanity. There are fantastic archival loans from the Queen's special book library as well as the Ontario Archives of the very first, the very first printed copies of Uncle Tom's cabin that still contain two -- that still contain some errors and a name change of a character that -- rather an original character whose

name has since changed, as well as Benjamin Drew's: *A North-Side View of Slavery*. So while Harriet Beecher Stowe's book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is an allegorical account based on Henson Josiah's life. Benjamin Drew's book *A North-Side View of Slavery* is the actual account of folks who have been settled in -- who settled in Southern Ontario. And it shows there the atrocities that they went through, through leaving, and also during enslavement. And crucially to this part of the exhibition, the reality of their life in Canada, that Canada was while it was different to their existence in the States, Canada was not necessarily a complete safe haven. And that's what the artwork of Gordon Shadrach, the portraits that you see behind the clothing there speaks to. That so many things that are a part of our contemporary Canadian conversation, Black Lives Matter, social justice, racial equality, and many conversations that there has been a resurgence to after the summer of 2020. Gordon's work speaks to untroubled society of Canada and identity in race and Canada being this place where, because in relation to the States, we're seen as a place that's much better, racism does not exist. And Gordon paints contemporary creatives similar to himself in historic style. And he uses a very subtle and sophisticated way of portraying different identities in different ways, in different clothing -- with different clothing choices to really show how our way of seeing and our way of perceiving identity is linked in so many racially construed points.

And in a sense what the exhibition -- what I hope the exhibition does is show the historical precedent for that using the cotton supply chain as an example. We hope that folks can come through the gallery and see themselves represented, can see their stories represented, and this can be a spark for deeper conversation, deeper learning. That's the exhibition in nutshell. Please like I said, do come and physically visit, visit digitally as well. There will be some wrap-up events. Can't believe I'm saying that already. It feels like we just began in March. And I will kick it over to Julie and Julie will give -- show a bit of her trail-blazing work after which Nigel will share and we'll chat. Julie over to you.

**Julie Crooks:** Well, thank you, Jason. First of all, thank you for inviting me to be part of the conversation with myself and Nigel and trying to kind of think about style and fashion and clothing and attire through the perspective of your amazing exhibition. And congratulations again on it. Yeah, I guess I'm going to whizz through this so that we can really open it up to a larger conversation and questions from the audience.

So you mentioned the last gallery in your exhibition which is kind of devoted to the kind of Canadian perspective and Canadian story. And I organized a show even before I was hired at the AGO called *Free Black North* and that was in 2016, I believe. And that was, of course, the year that Canada was celebrating the sesquicentennial. And I can kind of had that in the kind of back of my head when I was thinking about this show. And that's why the title the *Free* is italicized really questioning this, exactly what you brought up in your opening remarks, this notion of Canada as this refuge of freedom. When in fact, you know, a lot of the descendants, of the folks who came through the Underground Railroad experienced a lot and continuing, you know, anti-black racism and marginalization. So I wanted to kind of highlight that is kind of tongue in cheek, I guess in the show but really use the tintypes, these objects to tell a story of kind of the individuals, you know. We don't know a lot of their names but the kind of subjects who too descended from that history and were living in places like Amherstburg and Chatham and Buxton but who either find themselves, you know, going to photo studios and taking -- getting their photographs taken. Or these photographs

are kind of handed down. They are circulated, you know. Michigan is right across from, you know, Amherstburg and, you know, then through a kind of larger American, you know, space of circulation of these objects. So either way, the objects end up in the Alvin McCurdy Collection at the Ontario Archives. And I think that for me, I kind of wanted to highlight these histories. And then kind of the happenstance, they're kind of self-fashioning, right, in the tintypes. And of course, you point, of course, you would. You pointed that out to me when you first visited the show. And I kind of took a closer look at that, and yes, you know, if these individuals are going to a kind of itinerant photography studio in these areas, they are going to dress up. They are going to present themselves the way in which they want to be seen. So I've always kind of been fascinated at that little moment of realization that it isn't only about the objects themselves, but the way the subjects are presenting themselves.

Next slide. And these are other objects, a cabinet card, and a tintype again. And I think these objects really showcase the way that Black individuals, Black women were presenting themselves in studio photography. And the tintype with the women with Niagara Falls as a backdrop is my personal favourite because it's, you know, it is a backdrop, of course, it's not Niagara Falls. But you know it's a kind of quintessential, you know, tourist, you know, idea, you know, that is being presented that, you know, here we are, we visited Niagara Falls and we want to commemorate that moment. And I would say that the studio image is the same thing, commemorating perhaps a special occasion in this young woman's life, but who knows? But I do love the way they're kind of presenting themselves.

Next slide, please. Yeah. Then in 20 -- who knows what year that was? 2019, I think.

**Jason Cyrus:** 2019, I think so. Yes, yes.

**Julie Crooks:** Yes. No, I think it was 2018. I organized a show on the work of Mickalene Thomas, queer African American artist whose kind of signature work is kind of highlighting Black women. So that's the title *Femmes Noires*. And of course, doing it in, you know, a way -- yes, 2018. Great, thank you. Really giving voice and presence and power and representation. And of course, you know, a kind of sartorial larger than life, again, presence for Black women. So these collages, the collage paintings are embedded with crystals and you know, African fabric as a motif. And you know, in this example, you know, a golden Afro. So really highlighting not only trying to kind of empower Black women in representation and rethinking and reclaiming art historical, the art cannon, actually that, you know, put Black women in the shadows or, you know, behind the White women or the servant, you know Mickalene Thomas is thinking about, you know, really rethinking those kinds of associations and reclaiming Black women, Black beauty, whatever that means. And it was really a wonderful kind of intervention in the museum space to do this exhibition. So here again Mickalene photograph. This is the painting -- the photograph for the original painting *Le Demoiselles* -- Nope, it's -- I'm sorry, I've forgotten the title.

**Nigel Lezama:** *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*.

**Julie Crooks:** Yes. Thank you. Yeah. So this was the kind of *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. Thank you. The photograph that was used for the painting. And again, presenting Black women riffing on that painting taken in front of MoMA. You know, so there are all of these interventions that Mickalene is making in this work. And of course, *Fragments of Epic Memory*, which is, you know, a completely different exhibition that is exploring a historical archive of photography from the Caribbean, from the 19th century to the 1940s. And I mirrored the, or I combined the historical with the modern and contemporary. So the modern and contemporary are in conversation with the historical. So ending on Ebony Patterson's incredible triptych video called *Three Kings Weep*. And I think we'll talk about that because I think my time is done.

**Jason Cyrus:** Certainly. Thank you so much, Julie. That was a phenomenal overview because what I think is so impactful about your work is the way that you mine historical research and connect it with contemporary art using -- looking across different medium, whether be installation, photography, or art itself. And putting front and centre these identities, whether be uncovering them from history in the way of, like the way that Mickalene's work really challenges those narratives. And also showing the multiplicity of identity in the way that *Fragments* has done in such a powerful way. But we'll chat about that very soon. But thank you so much. And of course, as someone who studies style and fashion, the clothing is always front and centre. Clothing as a way of crafting identity and subverting it and challenging it and creating it is front and central in your work. And we're fortunate to have you. Thank you. Dear Nigel. Can you continue, please? Thank you.

**Nigel Lezama:** Yes, of course. Thank you very much first of all Jason for bringing us together. And as always, your work is impeccable. It's just beautiful. And I've gone through the website for your show and was moved in places. And I was made aware of things in other places. It was really quite a wonderful work that you've done as you've been doing since I've had the pleasure to know you. And Julie, it is a pleasure to see you again and to have this chance to talk and to hear about your work. And as I was saying earlier, it's a pity that we couldn't do it in person. But on the *pandémie oblige* we do it how we have to. So I thought I would present some of the work that I have coming out imminently. So in the next few months which kind of situates sort of my thinking on things, and this is sort of like, it's a perspective sort of that I think that I've had for a very long time but through these analyses that I've been doing, I get to build it out a little more and understand my own practice and see how it ties into a larger, I would say, a larger community of practices.

I have a book coming out with a very good friend and colleague, a historian of 19th century British Empire, Jessica Clark. And this book is coming out in April, it's called *Canadian Critical Luxury Studies, Decentering Luxury*. And I think that's the most important part of this project is that we want to take -- what we wanted to do when we came together and thought about like, you know, this object of steady luxury and luxury being this representation of power, of privilege. And that's something that was really closed off to many. We wanted to understand the functioning, like the political functioning of luxury. But I think what, as we gathered other colleagues and friends in the field in various fields, it's an interdisciplinary book in that sense. I think Jessica and I we came to understand that there is a luxury that is outside of the centre. And so for me what was instinctual, an instinctual understanding before, but I think as I read through the different interventions in the book and we were crafting the introduction and the epilogue I came to understand that in fact, it's the individual who creates luxury and it isn't luxury that is imposed from a metropole or from a

dominant culture or from an elite group. There is a luxury that is created by the individual, and it's a luxury that comes out of an idiosyncratic investment. And that's the word that I use a lot. So it's the person who creates the luxury because luxury will in fact enrich that person's life in some way.

So my work in this book, my case study in this book is on Eaton's in the 1920s and the Made-In-Canada campaign. And so I looked at the ways that Eaton's created for its consumers a value that was beyond use and an exchange value in their consumption so that ordinary people could feel like they were buying something special, a luxury item. And so that is really the theme that runs through all of my work. And so when we'll see from some of the other pieces that I have coming out, that I'll always try to look at individuals that are outside of the centre, that are operating in the margins, whether it's in the 19th century. And we're talking about *la bohème* and the poor artists who are working outside of -- on the margins of a society that is becoming more and more bourgeoisie, that is becoming more and more middle class and more and more industrialized, and with the values that entail the capitalist values that that entails. And I think Jason, we can go onto the next slide. And so my work can be quite eclectic in a sense because I was trained as a 19th-century literary historian. I'm working in critical luxury. But it's always the margins that carry me through these objects of study. And it's always like my curiosity about the margins.

And so Cardi B came onto the scene like in 2016, and she's changed things. And one of the things that she's changed would be the expressive artistic manicure. And so I have a piece that's coming out in a volume that's entitled *Dangerous Bodies. New Global Perspectives on Fashion and Transgression*. That's coming up later this year. It's edited by Jacki Wilson and Royce Mahawatte. We met at a conference in London at an art historians conference in London. And they'd asked me to participate in their volume. And so I'd been thinking about Cardi B's nails. And what had struck me was that, at that time, I was out shopping, I'd be out, you know. And I think it was maybe a Tom Ford beauty counter or something. And then I looked, and I was like, all of the girls have these nails. And these nails were like prior to this not well regarded, right? And so I wanted to see, I wanted to examine like, well, is this -- and at the time I was thinking, you know, through Pierre Bourdieu and so is this a habit has changed of the mainstream society or is this Black style as costume and what was going on here? And what is the value of a manicure? And so when I started to examine salon culture and then it spread into mainstream culture, U.S. I didn't want to say that, I say Black American salon culture. I came to understand that the manicure was not just a manicure. So the salon was a space where women could build relationships. It was an opportunity for self-care. And so the manicure itself was not just adornment. There was a value that came outside of that, and that becomes that surplus value that I'm always looking for, that indicates to me that it is a luxurious experience. And so the study that I did on Cardi's manicure, it started from that perspective. And then I questioned, well, what happens now when this and in specific, luxurious experience in Black culture, what happens as it expands out into a wider field? And obviously, I think obviously, I found that something is lost from that. And so that what was signalled to me, and it's another sort of theme that runs through the things I do is that while there may be an opening up of space for these expressions that come from outside of the mainstream, there's still change that needs to happen in terms of the structures of power. And so that the introduction of like this excessive style that comes out of Black women's experience into the wider culture does not come with a full-on acceptance of this subjectivity, I would say.

I think we can move on to the next slide. And I have another article coming out later this year. This one is in a volume that's edited by the fashion scholars Vicki Karaminas, Adam Geczy, and Pamela Church Gibson, and the volume is called Fashionable Masculinities, Queers, Pimp Daddies, and Lumbersexuals. And this is a study that had been on my mind. This is something that had been on my mind for a while. And Jason helped me with this, with the archival research. He gathered a lot of the images that I used in this analysis. And I've chosen this one because again, as I talk about the difference between these luxurious expressions when they happen within, I guess, an originary culture. And then when they're adopted or adapted by a wider culture, there is -- for me, there's always something, or at least in the things that I've been studying thus far, it feels to me that there's always been something that's been lost. So Puff Daddy is I think a bit of a controversial figure in hip hop. And so his emergence in the 1990s. There's a shift I think from, and we've read about the problems with this movement from like a gold aesthetic symbolizing, some kind of like hip hop authenticity to this platinum aesthetic where that is tied to like neoliberal ideas, to the mobile masculinity. And then, which sort of ends with like the idea that Puff Daddy has sold out to mainstream culture at that time, right? And these are the tensions that play sort of in his aesthetic. So I looked -- when I thought about Puff Daddy and I gathered all these images that Jason had collected for me and I was going through them. It was his shine that like was the most problem, the shine of his materials, of his furs, of his leathers, of his skin, of the sequins, and the diamonds, the bling, all of that. That was really quite significant to me. And that shine is in fact an aspect of Black style. And so when I looked at his videos and I compared them to some of these mainstream images, the shine was prevalent in both, but I think the shine expressed different things. And so that, whereas in a video like, and there's a moment in this case study where I look at Mo Money Mo Problems, that video. And there's these moments in the video when Puff Daddy is sort of outside of time, Puff Daddy and Mase, and they're floating around in this space. It's a space beyond what seems to me, White supremacy because there's a story. The storyline in it is the storyline of White supremacy with the White golfer and Puff Daddy playing a figure like -- what's his name? Golfer, Tiger Woods, playing off of a figure like Tiger Woods. But then in these outside spaces where the shine is full-on, it's bright-coloured suits covered in plastic overlay and shiny watches and things, there's this playfulness. And that's also something, there's this pleasure that is really quite integral, I think to Black style, to Black culture, and to luxury. And then I would say that, and I've been talking a lot, I know. I'll close it off by saying, but then what happens, when it goes into the mainstream into this Vogue feature, for example, is that the shine changes and there's more of a question of objectification that happens. And so what I had concluded in that piece is that Puff Daddy becomes a penis in furs emphasizing his object, like his status as an object, of the gaze. And I'll stop there. Thank you for keeping me in line, Jason.

**Jason Cyrus:** No, no problem, Nigel. Thank you so much. And I thought probably we could chat more about the Tissot image in relation to --

**Nigel Lezama:** Yeah, Yeah, exactly. Thank you.

**Jason Cyrus:** Your focus, I think on decentering notions of luxury and what you said so articulately idiosyncratic, what was the other word? Frameworks or what?



**Nigel Lezama:** Investment, investment.

**Jason Cyrus:** Investments, idiosyncratic investments. I think it's so important to this framing of the self of using clothing and using objects to be able to create that sense of identity and who we are, and we'll chat about that in relation to --

**Nigel Lezama:** Yes.

**Jason Cyrus:** -- what, you know, in the ways that even when you -- with your Cardi image how, you know, she was using different versions of luxurious objects at a specific time in her life to create an image and how that perception will shift based on who's using those objects and how --

**Nigel Lezama:** Exactly.

**Jason Cyrus:** -- that's even connected to the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the cotton exhibition that we're chatting about. Julie, I want to go back to Free Black North. And as you said, the exhibition was really formative in my understanding, I think of what historical research could do, I think in terms of how -- I think we can look at objects from a perspective of not just their place within history, but their place within our presence. And as you know, fashion is always my lens. So I walked in there and immediately it was the clothing, it was the way that the -- even that beautiful image of - I can bring it up so that we can look at that instead of hearing me blabble. But it was just the way that the folks who were in those images, in the way that they chose to portray themselves, their sureness, their confidence. And I was so deeply struck, I think, by the ways in which the exhibition did that. And I'm wondering -- and of course, the archives McCurdy fonds that you activated in the exhibition. I also looked at for the -- for History Is Rarely Black or White. And I'm wondering what -- you know, like five years on now -- five years? About five years on now, what were your takeaways from the show, this being your first exhibition at the AGO? I mean, I remember the place just being filled with people who look like us. Looking at the images, there being this murmur, this chatter, this excited engagement with the object, which is very similar to what I saw in Femmes Noires, and most recently in Fragments. So I mean, as a curator yourself, like what were your takeaways from just seeing the audience interact with the objects, and and how you used them?

**Julie Crooks:** Yeah, I mean, you do a lot of reflecting, you know, post exhibition. And of course, during pandemics you -- that also allows for a moment to, kind of, reflect on your practice. And I think I've been doing a lot of that. When I was thinking about this talk, I was thinking that actually there is a little bit of a -- there is some connective tissue in terms of like, a subliminal interest in attire style, fashion, textile. My very -- one of my earliest shows was a quilt show that I did at -- I mounted at the National Film Board. It wasn't even a -- you know, it wasn't a proper gallery. But I gathered quilts from, you know, Buxton and Nova Scotia, and just telling the story of, you know, how those quilts were used and passed down through generations and, you know, the kind of legacy of quilt making, of you know, stitching together, you know, histories. And then when I think about the kinds of shows I've done, front and centre, though maybe subliminal, there is this notion of self-presentation through clothing. And so I was thinking about a small show I did that someone reminded me about the other day on Teenie Harris, a photographer, Black photographer that lived

in Philadelphia, is shooting kind of the local communities, local Black communities in the '40s. So imagine the fashion, '30s, '40s, '50s, right. And it is all about that. It is all about, you know, women in very fly suits and men in their, you know, Stacy Adams and hats and really, really again -- and he had a studio. Going into the studio, getting themselves, you know, photographed etc., at a time that was of course fraught with racial tension in a place like Philadelphia. And then fast forward to Free Black North. So that association, I think, with who the subjects are and how they're trying to present themselves and using clothing as a kind of weapon. And because I have -- you know, I come through photography, I think about people -- photographers like Gordon Parks, but I also think about Frederick Douglass when I just did a short talk about him at the Power Plant on Sunday. And you know, the reason that he was the most photographed American of the 19th century -- not Black American, American, because he was so conscious about how one could use the medium to intervene and try to dismantle all of the, you know, awful ways in which Black people have been represented, right? In terrible, terrible ways. And so he literally talks about using the medium as a weapon. And so when I go back to the objects in Free Black North, and I think about that -- the engagement of the audience with these objects, I think there was a lot of wonder. You know, wonder at who these subjects were, their histories, the kind of hidden history of photography and, you know, Black subjects in photography. So I think that really percolated in a way. It was a tiny show as you know, but I think it had quite a big impact. Because of all of these elements. Then at the time, and you know when you're curating, you don't realize how many different tentacles, you know, that you've kind of thrown out there and what -- you know, what's going to stick actually. And the depth of the objects and their, you know, resonance, I guess with a larger audience? I hope that answers your question.

**Jason Cyrus:** Absolutely. I think what's -- I think why the notion of clothing and style so often comes up in your work, and at least for me anyways is that -- especially for marginalized identities, clothing is not a benign thing that's interacted with. It always has an extra layer that's attached to one's intersectional identity. Whether it's armour, as exploration, you know, as this way of encouraging oneself. So to look at Blackness, to look at the ways that different people go through the world, clothing and style always comes into that, because it's just a way of using it as a tool. Nigel, in terms of this, I'm just looking at these images, and I'm struck again by your phrase -- you're going to have to remind me. Idiosyncratic innovation?

**Nigel Lezama:** Investment..

**Jason Cyrus:** Investment, thank you, investment. And I'm so struck by that thought in these images, because you just think of the history of these folks.

**Nigel Lezama:** Absolutely.

**Jason Cyrus:** And what their realities would have been like before landing in Canada, and the investment in themselves in this clothing. You know, the fact that it's their own clothing. It's too perfectly tailored to their bodies, and fits -- in terms of the corsetry and the shoulders.

**Nigel Lezama:** Yes.

**Jason Cyrus:** And you know, they have the clothes in too -- a natural way for it to be something that's just in the photographer's studio that they're wearing. And I wonder if you could just speak a little bit about the idiosyncratic investment in the way that in a sense, do you see -- kind of perceive that in these images a bit?

**Nigel Lezama:** Absolutely. It absolutely is.

**Jason Cyrus:** -- a sense of luxury, right, before --

**Nigel Lezama:** Totally. I think for a couple of reasons, right? I mean one of them is the material reasons. I think these are fine materials, I think there are furs, there are pleats, there are pleated fabrics. And these are fine materials, right? And in that sense, yes, these are, I think bonafide luxuries, you can call them that. But like to go back to something that Julie had said, like when she was talking about Frederick Douglass and that the -- I think photography was a weapon that he could use, I think style in that sense is like the bullet that you -- you know, right? And so the style that -- so these clothes, they can be standard, right? I mean, so these are clothes that would have been worn by other men and women at the time. But they mean something different. And what you're getting at Jason, I think it means something different on a Black body. So the photo -- one of the photos that we saw was the man standing in the white trousers and the jacket and waistcoat.

**Jason Cyrus:** Yes.

**Nigel Lezama:** And yes, there it is. And like, you know, I thought that like -- I mean white is such a -- you know, it brought me back to part of my argument about Puff Daddy and that white fur. White is the, you know, the most delicate of colours in that sense, right? That is the colour of idle living, right? It's not a -- and Black bodies were not idle bodies, were not perceived as idle bodies. That changes the meaning of white trousers on this body, you know? And that's that idiosyncratic investment. And so for me, there's something subversive. There was a choice, you know. And even if the choice isn't there, the investment happens in the use of that. Like if that was what it happened to have, that it would happen to have in the studio, to put it on is to feel a certain way is to, is to see -- is to be different, right? And so luxury -- one of the other sort of undercurrents of my thinking is that luxury always has to be subversive in some sense. Luxury does not answer to ideology. And so this outfit, these outfits on these people to me are subversive. Even if they are the fashions of the day, of the time on these bodies. There was some -- there was a method of subversion in there somewhere.

**Jason Cyrus:** Absolutely. Speaking of -- yes?

**Julie Crooks:** Sorry, I just wanted to pick up because it's such a brilliant thought. I think we can talk about this forever actually, at least for a longer time that we have lauded because in my research for the quick talk I did on Sunday, I came across a South Carolina slave code that is related to dress. So this idea of subversion is fascinating because basically under the code, slaves were not allowed to wear fine clothes. So, you know, you would wear the roughest kind of so-called Negro cloths, whatever that is. So the fact that you then contest that, as you said Nigel, by wearing -- by dressing

yourself in the finest is exactly that, kind of, you know, thoughtful, intentional dressing, which I find really, really fascinating. I mean it's something that I wish I could write about more, but yeah, I think that it is what -- and who knows where the clothing is actually coming from? I mean in, you know, some West African studios, the clothing might be supplied by the photographer. But it is that kind of intentional act that I think disrupts the power dynamic, right? In --

**Jason Cyrus:** Yes, absolutely. And in our last session we chatted quite a bit about the whole notion of where the clothing could come from. And from a fashion historical perspective. We can think of folks like Elizabeth Keckley, Mary Todd Lincoln's dressmaker, who, you know, used her own dressmaking skills to, you know, to buy herself out of slavery, enslavement, as well as, you know, to therefore then create a business, so she had, you know, wealthy clientele. But in terms of just looking at, you know, the way that the folks are presented, and how they're in the clothing and how, in a sense, many of these garments predate our notion of ready to wear pieces. Where you can just pick something that's, you know, on a rack. And even like you're seeing in West African clothing, how it's cut completely differently to the body. Its relationship to shape is completely different. So the fact that, you know, you can't necessarily do that with tailoring, especially in the late 1800s. So just -- and how this brings up a whole number of questions as to well, where do these skill sets come from? Were they passed down? Were they taught in communities? Was there a quote-on-quote local market? Like a local Black economy that supported the use of these skills and trade? But so much of this that we don't know that I think it's important to find out and I think to research more.

**Nigel Lezama:** Absolutely.

**Jason Cyrus:** -- on that point you just made about the Negro cloth, and how the use of this clothing then is this --you know, this investment, this subversion. And Nigel again, critically speaking to this notion of luxury, because this brings us to Damian Joel's relation in the gallery. Where what Damian has done so brilliantly, is use the trappings of luxury, as we know from a fashion business perspective, editorial styling, beautiful fabrics. Using cinematographic ways of portraying the collection in this beautifully shot film, with gorgeous vistas, and that's even he's presented these -- what he's going to call them -- it's not a collection, it's a story because it's telling a wider narrative. And these are not actually garments that are available for commercial sale in the store. They can be ordered almost like a couture garment, so they can be made to order. But Damian really wants to share a wider social narrative here. And what to me is I think so telling about both of your comments recently is that, you know, Damian is now using these trappings that we're chatting about. Like this -- the ways that the garments and how they fit, and you know, whether they're pleated and the specific things he's using. But he is going against the grain. These are deadstock fabrics, and they're all made himself. And he's speaking to, you know, the way that Julie you're saying with the Negro cloth, how the Gullah Geechee had to use what they were given, thrust on them. You know, the first thing that happens to you when you're off a slave ship is that, you know, every marker of your identity is ripped apart and you're now just a cog, the number in a larger supply chain. And how then they-- they then still asserted their identity, they still in the little things - - again, Nigel, coming back to your comments about this, like idiosyncratic investment, they still found a way to create that personal luxury in themselves. And I bring up Damian's garments

because I'm wondering if we could just chat how in a way, from my perspective anyways, the garments speak so strong to those topics? Nigel, perhaps you can kick us off?

**Nigel Lezama:** Yeah, you know, I -- when I was on the website for your show, and then I saw the video and I listened to the interview with the designer, Damian. There was something that he said that struck me. And he said -- when he was talking about putting together the film, the fashion film, and he said, "I don't call them models." So the people that he used. "I don't call them models, they are -- "

**Jason Cyrus:** His muses, his tribe, yes.

**Nigel Lezama:** Tribe but they were like living recipients of an archive. Something along those lines anyways, but there were something about being archives, they weren't models, models, because models would take away agency. Models, that term, right and likened that to industry, right. And so he wanted to differentiate from that. And again, it's that same -- that the body in these outfits is what's making the meaning or drawing out the meaning, right? And so materially, I think, you know, as you said, we're very much in a luxury production, in a traditional conventional luxury production. In terms of the bespoke, they are ordered, made to measure. But what's more with these garments and with this practice, is that the wearer is made central to it. And it's the wearer who creates meaning through experience, right, I think he said in the video, right, that, you know, there was the attachment to land through -- you know, these people were barefooted and feeling the land under them, feeling the air and the water. So there's the -- you know, it's the lived experience that becomes luxurious, more than even I think the material aspects of the making of the garments.

**Jason Cyrus:** And so much of luxury and fashion is this Western Eurocentric way of looking elsewhere for inspiration, and then bringing it back and then creating this idea of what is construed as a luxurious garment or a luxurious object. And so what Damian is doing here, too, is placing that front and centre but in direct collaboration with the Gullah Geechee Nation.

**Nigel Lezama:** Yes.

**Jason Cyrus:** And you know, you're seeing -- you're not just looking at beautifully made pieces, you're also looking at their history, their past and their presence. On the far left, you've got rice, you've got Indigo in the middle, and then you've got cotton. Three central crops that are so important to Gullah Geechee life, past and present. And you know, with this Moko Jumbie [assumed spelling] outfit on the left, its connections to Yoruban spirituality, with Jordan river in the middle, this whole notion of crossing the Jordan. Whether that be the Jordan River being referred to as the Atlantic and, you know, their journey over. But of course, the Jordan River, the way that it was referred to in the Underground Railroad as this, you know, way of getting into freedom, kind of being that place. And with -- it's a little hard to see in this slide, but in Green Sally Up on the far right, you know, Damian has left the back open and exposed to speak to the backbreaking labour that was involved making cotton. And with Jordan River too in the middle, how like the Gullah Geechee now are fighting for land rights, as well as to take care of the eroding coastline of the southern United States. And yet, you know, as you're saying about the sense of luxury, we can speak about all these things and still have it be a garment that is quote-on-quote "luxurious." Like luxury

and social impact and historical connection are not diametrically opposed. You know? And this whole notion of luxury being the identity itself. And, you know, Julie I see that so much true in the Mickalene's exhibition to be honest. In the way that -- Nigel with shine. My word, like, so much of her pieces are glistening and glittery, and, you know embossed. And how much so that -- you know she's really troubling this like, sense of agency, and also luxury in that as well.

**Julie Crooks:** Oh, yeah, I mean I think that is -- even as she grows as an artist, I see her associations with Gucci, and you know, Dior and, you know, making specific work for -- you know, those high fashion houses, you know, and how she -- while she's doing that she is, you know, a big Black woman, a big Black queer woman.

**Jason Cyrus:** Big Black queer woman, yeah.

**Julie Crooks:** You know, what I mean? Who is inserting herself within that industry, within that particular fashion house. And I see it always as a disruption. And I think that the -- her large-scale paintings with the rhinestones -- I mean she's been doing that for a while, even before it was kind of fashionable, you know? She was asserting Black women, and beauty, and definitely luxury. It's you know -- and I think it's so complicated, you know. On the one hand I think people sometimes think of it as a, kind of, you know, assimilation politics, you know. That one wants to kind of ascribe to owning an Hermes bag, or, you know, being on the cover of Vogue or whatever. But I think that it's -- as Nigel is doing in his work, and yours as well, Jason, it's to trouble that. To be really -- to be able to kind of dig a little bit deeper and be critical about the ways in which we are thinking about all of it, style, luxury, self-possession. Because I think it's at where one is coming from. You know, I was for some reason yesterday, listening to a lot of Jay-Z. It was like a compilation of Jay-Z. And if you listen really closely to Jay-Z, it is all about -- you know, I grew up in Marcy Projects, and now I'm driving a -- I don't know, Lamborghini and in the middle, I was -- you know, it's that -- it's like a social history of, you know, that movement but really about style and definitely about uber luxury. So yeah, I think that that's exactly what Mickalene and others have been -- are doing in their work, but particularly Mickalene. It's definitely a statement and Ebony.

**Jason Cyrus:** I think this -- even, I was just going to bring us back to this for one second. This notion of trajectory, and you know, this understanding where we're coming from is so central to the exhibitions narrative and to what we're chatting about. Because there would -- you know, this, as we've just previously said, this use of style as a tool specifically to Black and marginalized people, you know, is in conversation with, or is in opposition to rather, the notion of Blackness as inhumane, as an economic cog within the transatlantic slave trade. As something to be policed and controlled. And this is -- reason why we focused on the 1800s for the exhibition is that, historically it's a time where you really see -- yes, slavery was happening just before, late 1700s. But into the 1800s is when it's not only the largest number of, you know, enslaved Africans or Africans who are enslaved moved across the ocean, through Empire, but it's when you really see this collusion of the slave trade commerce and this global economic system. That then makes this way of seeing Blackness systemic. Because it now joins this capitalist interest that connects with industrialization. You're seeing the mills in the UK then having to change and adapt to be able to process the raw bales of cotton that are coming in. You're seeing folks leaving, you know, the rural areas and working in factories to be able to process the cotton. Child labour, the use of coal that's being taken from the

environment in harmful ways, so that it can power these factories. And then you see where wealth is then being concentrated. And meanwhile, this is creating obviously huge political change, both in Canada and in the American South. You're looking at, you know, the American Civil War, and so forth. And cotton is a huge part of these things. And so many ways of seeing never change over time. In fact, they've just become more entrenched. So therefore then, that's what then connects us to the use of these tintypes. Of -- sorry, the use of clothing and photography in a way of challenging what has come before. Mickalene's own work of challenging -- when she's reaching back forth in art history, but as well of challenging what Blackness is. And Nigel, as you so brilliantly said in your work, in terms of how then we can still in the contemporary moment -- how you mentioned like this whole notion of yes, people will -- how when you're at the Tom Ford counter and the use of the nails and how in a sense they're these trappings of Blackness and from Latinx communities, but yet - - so it's taken away from its core, and the way that it was used then. And how so often people wanted a sense of trappings of the swaggers, you say, the style, but you know, they don't want, you know, what comes at you with the Black identity. And I'll move us on quickly to the last question, which is to me what -- and I'll let you both speak. It's just to me this is what Gordon Shadrach's portraits in the exhibition so brilliantly do. If you look at the painting on the far left over here, and you look at the painting on the far right, it's the same person that Gordon is portraying. Elicser Elliot, who's a well-known Toronto artist, who also works in graffiti as well as painting in different ways. And he's portrayed in one and you know, the clothing of his metier. And he's got his mask, he's got more urban clothing. And then in the other one, you're seeing him dressed, you know, in a more historic style that could not -- that is quite similar to what you were seeing in the tintypes. Or as you mentioned, Frederick Douglass, how he would be portrayed. And what I love about this juxtaposition is that you're looking at the ways that -- how he's portrayed might affect the way that we perceive the same person. And Gordon is taking some -- you know, he's taken some liberties with Elicser's skin, and his hair, and how he's portrayed him. But in the ways that, you know, all Black men know that depending on how you portray yourself, how that will also affect how you're perceived and relation to safety. So what I love about both your works -- and Julie this is where you come in, how your exhibitions have -- specifically here I'm using one of the archival images from the Montgomery collection in Fragments, as well as we three kings' installation that made me cry the first time, I saw it. And I've seen it now four times in Fragments. The way that you challenge this notion of what is a hegemonic way of looking at Blackness? Of like this idea that the Caribbean diaspora looks like this, or Blackness looks like this. And Nigel too, just here how you are, you know, juxtaposing -- I'll let you speak to the Tissot painting but in a sense, I just love the juxtaposition of these images. You know, you've got Annie Leibowitz, who is the photographer of these luxurious sittings for Vogue. And you think of the fact that Puffy and Kate Moss are in Paris for the couture shows and they're wearing luxurious clothing and it's a -- this is a highly constructed shot. And then you've got the Tissot painting that could not symbolize more similar things of masculinity in the patriarchy, and clothing, and what clothing meant to that epoch in relation to modernity and change. So Nigel, perhaps you can kick this last part off. Just in terms of maybe chatting about the juxtaposition of these images and how it ties into a sense of looking at -- centring these notions.

**Nigel Lezama:** You know, it's only as you said it, that I was like, oh, you know? Like there is like a real construction in both of these images. The construction of power that happens in the body department, in the materials used to express elegance, and power, and place in society. I used this

image because there's another project -- the Tissot image that I've been invited on tying together art and fashion. And it's really at its like rudimentary stages. And it speaks a lot to the work that your exhibition is doing and what I'm questioning, what I want to question is by the Paris capital of fashion in the 19th century, by looking at well, what made it a capital of fashion? Where are these materials coming from? Who was making these materials? And so -- and this image has always struck me. It's something that I've always wanted to work on. So I put it in there because it's going to force me to have to think about it and I'm thinking about the wood, and I'm wondering, is the -- you know, if that -- is that wood native to France? Or is it coming from Central America or from the Caribbean? Like the top hats, we know, you know, have I think a long colonial history. But by this point, this is like 1865, I think they'd already like decimated beaver populations. So we've moved on to silk, right?

**Jason Cyrus:** Which has connections to Canada, of course.

**Nigel Lezama:** Exactly. Right? And so it's those kinds of stories that I'm looking to tell through art. But it's -- but as you said, it's really quite striking the differences and the similarities in these two. And I don't know what the link is. Whether it is in department, in the presentation of the body, or it's in the comfort of wearing exceptional clothing, you know? But there is something that is similar nevertheless to the merits, I think I could do a deeper dive.

**Jason Cyrus:** Because I mean, of course, Baudelaire and his push for artists to get out there and observe these subtle shifts in fashion, and what that meant to someone's station in life, and what that meant to -- what was the cultural change. And here are obviously quite wealthy men, styled and presented in ways that represent respectability and their station in life. And we can think of the spaces of -- on even how this is gendered. Like what is considered a gendered space of femininity? What is considered a space of masculinity? The use of clothing to do that. And Tissot's then portrayal of this in a sense to immortalize this for time. And then Sean over here, and Kate Moss, and the clothing, and the couture. And as you were saying, how -- what he was using to kind of create this image and Julie, as you were saying with Jay-Z, how -- as you listen to his music, how he's -- you know, he's giving you this trajectory of his life, and how it's these markers of luxury that are a point of showing that progression, so to speak. Like that, not just like to have things but to show the come up, as we say, you know? The way of transcending and liberating oneself from an identity that was quite restricted by systemic oppression.

**Nigel Lezama:** There's something though, that as we compare these men, it makes me think of the We Three Kings. And that in the Tissot image, I don't know that we have -- I think we have like, the Le juste mesure of -- so things are just right in that image, right? And so those -- it is not a portrait. I think from, I think our sensitive eyes, it's a portrait of excess, but I don't know that they, the sitters, view themselves as excessive. I'm not sure yet if they see themselves as excessive in the same way that Puff Daddy is presenting an aesthetic of excess. And that the way that We Three Kings is, again an aesthetic of excess. It's pushing beyond what --

**Jason Cyrus:** And it's this stripping of that excess actually. Because by the end of the video -- they start the video Julie, if I'm not mistaken, they start the video and then it's in reverse?



**Julie Crooks:** Yeah, it's Three Kings Weep is the title. Yeah, and they start semi-dressed right? And then they're dressing themselves so they're actually armouring, protecting, putting on. By the time - by the end of the video, they've kind of crowned themselves either with sunglasses, a bandana, or a hat. And I've always kind of seen this triptych, you know, it's an altarpiece really, with the fact that this is about extracted labour. If I think about your exhibition, Jason, the production of cotton, which is produced into glamorous, you know, excessive clothing that they are putting on to armour themselves, to protect themselves. And the fact that they add the bling, all of the jewellery, the earrings, the kind of slave cuff even, are all connected to extraction, slave trade, labour. And so I see it less -- you know, a lot of people look at it and say, oh, it's -- you know, it's about bling, and it's about, you know, popular culture. No, it's -- and the fact that they are weeping, they are weeping because they are tied to those histories. And I think that's why it's really important for Ebony that this work is presented in a place of reverence. So that you are forced to sit in a darkened space, and contemplate, and reflect on these histories. On the wounds that they are covering up, on the -- you know, on the --

**Jason Cyrus:** They're pulling off that armour, right?

**Julie Crooks:** Yeah, exactly.

**Jason Cyrus:** They literally are removing that armour, and then putting it back on in reverse.

**Julie Crooks:** Yeah.

**Jason Cyrus:** It's those histories, that pain that is tied to this -- you know, everything that we're chatting about today, that clothing enables, it puts a -- but also sometimes this -- it can also be a trap, you know. It can also be like this, because there's this idea of --

**Julie Crooks:** It's a performance as well.

**Jason Cyrus:** -- what you should look like right?

**Julie Crooks:** Yeah, I think it's a performance. A performance of agency, subjectivity. You know, the - what do they call, the Sapeurs in -- is it Congo? You know, men who -- right, dress up. I mean they have little means but they hyper-dress. Like I mean, this is a -- the kind of epitome of -- they throw everything into it. You know, the couture, you know, the --

**Jason Cyrus:** Yes, like hyper dandy, yes.

**Julie Crooks:** Dapper, bespoke. I think that's what it is. It's a performance of their identities, of aspiration, of the things they see in magazines that, you know, they may not have access to, but then they created. I think that's the height of creativity and a kind of longing, and -- okay, I've forgotten the phrase too, idiosyncratic --

**Nigel Lezama:** Investment.

**Jason Cyrus:** -- investment.

**Julie Crooks:** Investment, right.

**Jason Cyrus:** Yes, yes, yes. If there's ever a hashtag for it --

**Julie Crooks:** Yes.

**Jason Cyrus:** Yes, yes. trademark that. Yeah, that's copyrighted. Yes. Oh, we could chat for much longer.

**Nigel Lezama:** This is wonderful.

**Jason Cyrus:** I want to respect our time. We've got five minutes. I see two questions in the box. So I'm just going to refer to them quickly and I'll wrap this up. Michelle would like to know Nigel; will your book be available for purchase in Canada?

**Nigel Lezama:** Yes, yes, it's on amazon.ca. It will be on amazon.ca or it is on there I think for presale. And it is coming out from Intellect but I think it will be also available internationally. Like you can buy it..

**Jason Cyrus:** Okay. Fantastic. Fantastic. Fantastic. Looking very much forward to that. both for my own studies as, as well as just in general. Corey would like to know -- although I think we've touched on this question in terms of answering it but Corey mentions that we've all touched on this topic, but she's or they're hoping that we might say some more about strategies that Black artists used to create clothes and luxury in the context of dominant white culture, and anti-Black racism? And I believe what we were talking about in terms of Mickalene's use of shine and the subversion of that, and with Ebony's work, and Gordon, and as well as Damon in the way that clothing and aesthetics becomes this way of pushing against this hegemonic ideal, but perhaps you can both maybe put into sense in that regard?

**Nigel Lezama:** Do you want to start, Julie?

**Julie Crooks:** I think we've more or less covered a lot of the ground. I'm not sure I have anything else to add. Nigel?

**Nigel Lezama:** Yeah, I would like to add, like in terms of like excess, and like, as we were looking -- because I haven't seen that triptych and it's at the AGO, I'm coming to see it like --

**Jason Cyrus:** Hopefully soon we'll see it.

**Nigel Lezama:** Okay.

**Jason Cyrus:** Julie, is it this weekend?

**Julie Crooks:** February 21st.

**Jason Cyrus:** Okay.

**Nigel Lezama:** Okay, cool. Cool. So I will be there, I need to see it. But this aesthetic of excess, right, and I think one of the other things that I try to explore with excess is that it isn't necessarily a mode of appropriation, or there is a change of meaning that happens with excess. And excess, like you know, if you think about the lowlifes in the '80s, that hip hop -- or that they were a gang that would go in and would boost in the store. They'd take all the Polo off the racks and pile them out one on top of the other, on top of the other, on top of the other, right? And so in this aesthetic of excess, you're also pushing back against the meaning of luxury, against the -- like it doesn't mean what you're telling me it means. Like look, because I'm putting on four, five, six layers of something and it's not changing my status inside. I'm still looked at in the same way. So it's -- what I think that kind of aesthetic, that aesthetic strategy does is it undermines the hegemonic meanings that are attached to these objects that we call luxury.

**Jason Cyrus:** Beautifully said. And of course, as is topical, nobody for me more embodies that recently than our dearly departed André Leon Talley. In the ways that -- I mean he in his very identity, in his -- the way he moves through the world used excess as this way of creating for himself a space that was uniquely his and inspire so many like myself and us. And you know --

**Julie Crooks:** And as a way of protecting himself.

**Jason Cyrus:** -- probably in that spirit, we should dedicate this chat to him and his memory. I cannot thank you both enough for this chat. One of the joys of putting these things together is that I get to speak with people I admire and love, and whose work I am so impacted by. And I'm very, very grateful that we've been able to chat together. So this recording will be available online for folks to revisit, and please check back in with the Agnes. We will have some in-person events hopefully, knock wood, in March to close the show. Please follow Nigel's book that will be out in spring and make your way -- if you're in Toronto or in Ontario rather to the AGO before February 20th?

**Julie Crooks:** Twenty first.

**Nigel Lezama:** Twenty first.

**Jason Cyrus:** Twenty first, to see Fragments. Thank you so much. And this will be our last chat with the Speaker Series. And it's been a complete joy to host you and to share our work with you. Have a good evening.