

Interview with Professor Dean Ramos
Race and Oral History Project | UCSD

Christina: My name is Christina Bumann, and today is May 16th, 2024. I am interviewing Professor Dean Ramos through Zoom for the University of California, San Diego's Race and Oral History Project. Dean, do you agree to grant the university permission to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

Dean: I do. Yes.

Christina: Okay. So Dean Ramos is an artist and a professor of fine arts who obtained his MFA from the University of New Mexico and today we're going to kind of dig into his background a little bit as an artist and talk about some of his art and get into a little bit of his experiences as a professor at MiraCosta College, working with, college students in their first and second years.

And specifically, one of his exhibits that was that was installed the Oceanside Museum of Art back in 2021. So, Dean, my first question for you is to describe your early moments creating and what kind of drew you to the arts.

Dean: Um, thanks for having me. Early moments creating, as far back as I remember, I was always creating when I was, you know, a young child.

I think, I remember, I think probably most clearly around third grade is like my first strong memory of drawing and, I remember in school, both like teachers and friends, and they always wanted me to draw things for them. Always want me to make things for them. I think, like, by third grade, I remember, getting like awards and things in school and getting selected to display drawings.

I don't know. I guess something always draws me to keep creating, to keep making. I have like things that my parents have saved over the years that, I kind of look back at that, you know, things which I, like, I think I remember they have this plate that I made when I was like really little.

I don't remember when, and it looks, um, it's all scribbly and crazy, but at some point, I think I gained more control and more ability to actually, I don't know, like control my, my creative abilities, I guess, by third grade.

Christina: Wow. Yeah, that's really cool. And then from there, you started young. That's what, 10 years old, 11 around there?

Dean: Like my history of being creative is kind of, which we'll get into. It's like, as far as I know, there were no other creatives in my, like family, as far as I know, but the reason why I don't know is that I was adopted. So, you know, I was like one of eight children, the youngest, there

was one that was younger than me, but yeah, I have some, that's a lot of the way we're talking about here. I feel some disconnection from my ethnic background because of being adopted. So I know some of my family, you know, members, but not all of them that well. And as far as I know, there were no other artists that like, you know, in terms of my actual, um, Would you biological connection to people?

Christina: No, that makes sense. It can also be kind of like more like, 'cause I'm creative', but my family isn't very creative and it can be less about like your biological parents and also just like the culture that surrounds you. And some of the things that we're just naturally drawn to as humans, I think. It's such a beautiful way of like, kind of bringing that out, like that natural tendency to want to make something different and unique. So that's really cool. Thanks for sharing that. Um, so I'd love to talk more about the environment that you lived in as a child and you grew up in Chicago, correct?

Dean: Yeah, I grew up in and around Chicago. And so I think I didn't leave that area until I was probably around 25.

Christina: Oh, wow. Yeah. So you were in Chicago for a while. So how did that, I've never been to Chicago, how did that area of Chicago kind of impact your formations of you being the artist that you are.

Dean: I think that no matter where we grow up, it's going to be part of who we are for the rest of our lives, for sure. Like the environment that we grow in, the type of, I don't know, just the, the happenings of those places around us, the things that we see and things we experience. So definitely when you grow up in like a city like Chicago, there's lots of different people from different ethnic backgrounds. Like I had, you know, friends that were German, friends that were Greek, you know, I had friends that were Thai, I had friends from all different, like, ethnic backgrounds and things, and certainly, I think that fabric of being surrounded by people from different cultures, I mean, maybe it brings about at the time a certain amount of acceptance.

I think it's interesting, too, because I was adopted by my dad's like, Scandinavian background, my mom's Irish background, and I was, grew up around people, and I think I always felt accepted and never really thought of myself as an outsider, although, just hearing about, How do you put this? Just where I came from originally, I'm Puerto Rican is my original, I was adopted. My parents were from Puerto Rico. So, my parents had told me stories about how when I was originally adopted, my birth parents only wanted me to be to be adopted by like a Spanish speaking family.

People and that didn't eventually happen because I think it's not as likely that I'm not saying that it never happens, but it was more likely maybe economically that it was, they were more able to be more supportive than, I think economically, especially at that time, I think a lot of people were struggling from Hispanic homes and they were less likely to be adopted, you know?

Christina: yeah, no, that makes sense.

Dean: Yeah. I guess that kind of answers it, but, I guess I grew up in an environment with people from different eth ethnicities, and it was just, I guess I, I don't know. I always, at least I felt I fit in and I never felt like people were making me feel different. Although I imagine I did look a bit different. Because my hair, nothing else.

Christina: I've never been to Chicago, but I feel like it's, it is a pretty diverse city. Kind of like most cities. I think in the U. S. There is always communities that are all in one place. Did you see that too?

Dean: Yeah, there's definitely pockets in the city where there's certain neighborhoods that are, you know, like, Korean neighborhoods. There's, I think that's a lot of times what happens is that it's different people with different ethnic backgrounds, kind of, they settle in certain pockets where maybe they feel more supported by the community. You know, I think that happens a lot and, you know, you see that up in LA too. And, in New York city, but I think the neighborhood I grew up in, it's, I mean, nonetheless, there were different people from, there were, there was a lot of different people. I had friends down the block that the father was a Mexican, um, and, and, and it was funny and, and his wife was Caucasian and the kids were kind of from both different families and they remarried and so there was just like a lot of, you know, and I hung out with those people a lot down the block. So there was a lot, you know, just a lot of cultural mixing, I guess, in the city. That just happens.

Christina: Yeah. So cool. So with all that, which is, which is insightful, actually, how did that, I'm just curious if, if did that at all kind of affect your art making. Was that any source of inspiration or was it kind of through other things?

Dean: I think it did to a certain degree. I mean, maybe in terms of being very accepting, but you know, also, I think another reason why I've become accepting is that the home that I grew up in was a home, I think, of acceptance. Because, you know, who I am and of, like, I guess my parents were always very supportive of my abilities.

The other thing, my parents that adopted me, they're both, they're both Lutheran ministers, so, and they were always very supportive of me and everybody, I think, in the community, so I think that kind of informed me too, in terms of, you know, just who I am, and it made me accepting, I think, more accepting of others.

So how does that inspire my artwork? Is that what we're on now?

Christina: Yeah, kind of. We're kind of like getting down there, but yeah.

Dean: I think you're on the one that said talk about, is that the one where you find, I'm not sure, I'm trying to make sure, the fourth one?

Christina: Yeah, we kind of blend this all together. Kind of talk about where you find, and this can be like, Maybe just now, it doesn't have to be so much from your past, but talk about where you find your inspiration for your art. This could be just external people, places, or things that you more or less look for or potentially other values that you wish to be displayed.

Dean: Yeah, I think, I'm just trying to think it in terms of what the actual artwork that you want to discuss more than anything, the "Divisions" pieces. So, because that's what I'm going to show at some point. So in the "Division" pieces, there's in terms of like cultural influences, I'd say the wood carvings, and there were some somewhat influenced from figures that I had seen in Japan.

They were like, kind of these, I think I was interested in these big, powerful forms. Of these, busts, these wooden busts, there was a lot of wood carving that I saw, I get the entrances to the temples there, and I think. Just seeing those, there was some interest in the forms themselves, the power of the figures, but, and I think with those pieces, it also, there was a sense of like a certain amount of vulnerability that they want to do.

That's why I think the strong outward forms were broken and kind of opened up to become more vulnerable.

Christina: So, so, you said there were like these bigger figures in Japan, correct?

Dean: I spent time there, and in seeing those figures at the temples themselves, they were quite powerful figures, so I was interested in those wooden forms, those wooden figures.

And, like I said, at the entrance of the temples, the figures are quite powerful wood wood-carved figures.

Christina: Wow. That's really cool. I think we can start talking a little bit more about "Divisions", but I want to get at your experiences. And back in college in your graduate program at the University of New Mexico, so how did studying in New Mexico versus in Chicago, because you got your bachelor's in Chicago from a small school in Chicago, what were like the general difference between those places and how did they kind of shift or maybe, change the way you, you created, more or less?

Dean: Yeah, Chicago is a very different environment from like Albuquerque, New Mexico. It's, it's, there's a lot going on. There's a decent art scene in Chicago. There are a lot of galleries. It's a fast-paced city. It's just, I think when I was in Chicago and, you know, and when I left the area, I still had this kind of really kind of "go, go, go" mentality, which I still have, I think a little bit means to me, but it's not as strong as it was from being there. Because it's been years now since I left there. I moved away from that general area and I was like, 25, so that's like half my life. At this point, so, but it still has an effect on me, but definitely moving from there to New Mexico was like a huge move. I went there for numerous reasons. It had a good, it has a good graduate program. I think at the time their strength was photography. That was the number

two in the country at the time. And I wasn't going to photography. I was going to painting and drawing, but they accepted six of us at that point into the painting and drawing area.

So at that point, I was mainly just. Painting and I was, you know, I was focused mainly on painting. So I got into the program as a painter.

When I left there, I became, I was doing more sculptural things, which continues now. But the difference between Chicago and New Mexico is, New Mexico is very slow. At least that's my feeling. It was, it felt like a different world when I first got there. And it was, I'd say somewhat of a shock. Going from, you know, like a really busy city to just, I mean, definitely in the city itself of Albuquerque. It's a city. It's nothing like a big city. It's more spread out, but it's much more flat. It's, I think, overall, I mean, there's not as much there to distract you.

Yeah, it's just, and I think that for a lot of people that enter the graduate program there, that that's what they like. It kind of, you know. Facilitates more contemplation and I guess I'd say it's more of a contemplative environment that's quieter. You know, there's a lot more open space. It's like you're on the edge of the desert. A very flat desert. So, yeah, it was a very different, just, I think my first memory going there, I visited there, um, before I started the graduate program there. And I just remember it looked like, kind of like Mars to me because like there was red soil and the plants were very foreign to me.

Even like here in California, the plants to me are nothing like what I grew up with. Like there's no succulents or like agave and palm trees and things in Chicago. So, when I, when I got to New Mexico, everything just looked so strange and bizarre and foreign to me. Yeah, and I think my own tendency is when I grew up, I think because my parents were ministers, we moved around a lot.

So I think I moved every, at one point when I was younger, it's not the case now. It's definitely the longest place I've ever lived anywhere. I've been here now for 18 years, but before this, I think I moved every five years or so on average. So I moved around a good amount when I was younger, just because I had to relocate for various reasons.

Christina: Were they [Dean's parents] missionaries or?

Dena: No, just, they, basically they get what it's called, like being called. So basically you have to move.

Christina: Yeah, no, I know.

Dean: You're asked to go to a new location and they pretty much had to go. Yeah. So.

Christina: Yeah, definitely. That's really cool. Yeah, that's, it's interesting to think about how like environment kind of like shifts our perspective. I had a question about that, but it just slipped my mind. How long were you in New Mexico for?

Dean: I lived there for six years.

Christina: Wow. Dang. And was the program six years?

Dean: No, most people finish it in three years. They said you could finish it in two, but it's very unlikely. Like, hardly anybody finished in two, just because, what the requirements were, it just, it usually takes three years to get through the graduate program.

Christina: And, what kind, you said you mainly painted, correct?

Dean: When I got into the program, I got accepted as a painter. I was doing figurative paintings, paintings with people in them. Even in undergrad, I was doing mostly figurative painting. It was right before I got to graduate school, I was already kind of transitioning and the work was becoming more abstract.

It was still flat work but at that time, I was doing pieces that were looking at ultrasound images. At first, they were ultrasounds of like faces and things, then I started, I started getting interested in heartbeats, because I think I was trying to, which relates to the division pieces, the idea of making, I'd say, at least to a certain level, the invisible visible, I guess I can say that, um, and that was one way of doing it, so I was, so I was going into the, the, at the university, at UNM, they had, University of New Mexico, they had a, a medical school and I was going in there and collecting images of ultrasound patterns and using those to help create the artworks.

I think with those pieces they were interesting and they were somewhat abstract but I think over time I began to see them as like, if I kept making them, they seemed too formulaic, meaning that I ended up making the same piece over and over, kind of like, if you see a Jackson Pollock painting, a drip painting I don't know how he, at some point, if I kept doing them, it just became like a formula for reproduction, reproducing the same thing. And so, which I've faced numerous times, and I'm, I think I'm at the point now where I'm trying to figure out again what to do next, because I don't know. I don't like the idea of repeating myself over and over too long, although for, I think, a lot of artists, that's one way of making a career. They end up, just finding something that sells and just redoing it endlessly because it keeps selling.

So at the same time, I guess if I had to do that, I might. But because I've been teaching, I haven't felt I have to do that. I mean, I think a lot of it for people boils down to what do I need to do to live and survive in the world to earn money?

And I think that can create an environment for an artist to keep repeating themselves in that respect because they have to, you know.

Christina: I've thought about that before.

So, so yeah, I don't like the idea of doing that because I feel it kind of traps you into being less creative in terms of creative not being just creating things but creative thinking.

Christina: Yeah, it's kind of like it almost feels like this might be a heavy word but kind of like slavery. Kind of in the habit of creating and it doesn't feel as creative. That does not totally make sense. So what, what got you into sculpture, because you do have two pieces and then the, the burnt wood pieces.

Dean: And I've heard some other artists say the same thing I'm going to say to you recently actually, but yeah, I think what happens is that I think it's a longing for, being able to maybe interact with real forms in the real world, as in the act of painting, I think there's this kind of need to, at least for me, I think as I'm painting, I want to, I think it's maybe it's just the way I understand space too. I felt like I needed to go into the painting, you know. Like to enter and shape the forms in the painting, which you can't do because it's a flat, it's a flat surface, you know, and I think maybe that's why right now I've gotten somewhat interested in, like, working in a computer more or less the last show I did, I was, I explored the idea of like modeling things in a computer.

As you can rotate and move around three-dimensional space and form things, it allows you to kind of what's interesting about that. It's taking a 2d screen and you're going into it in a 3d way and moving and shaping things. But I think basically my point is what got me I started from 2d as a painter and I think I had this longing to interact more with the forms and I think it was also a physical thing.

It just seemed I didn't know like physically anything about the act of touching and shaping and forming the objects. Just felt more true to what I just needed to do. So when I entered grad school, I was already starting to do that. And then somebody who was a close friend of mine, pretty much early on, they told me that I was a sculptor.

Because there's just another person who was an artist. They said, you're a sculptor, you're not a painter, and she, that was probably one of the first person, people that, that I was, you know, at the time that said that to me, and I think they were probably right, although I can still paint, and I will at times, but the last real paintings that I did, I'd say were, it was actually an installation of transparent paintings that you could move around through.

So even in that case, it was still something that was three-dimensional.

Christina: So cool. Wow. Yeah, because a lot of the, well, briefly looking through your website, there was quite a bit of sculpture. So when I heard you went to grad school for painting, I was like a little bit confused. I was like, where did all this really cool sculpture come from?

Dean: So it's because I got accepted as a painter. Cause that's what I was doing. So my work was all paintwork. I submitted it when you go to graduate school. You have to apply to an area,

like photography or sculptures or ceramics or whatever. And that's what my portfolio was all painting at the time.

Christina: Oh, that makes sense. Okay, that's really, really beautiful. I think we can transition. This would be a great time to transition into talking a little bit in more depth with "Divisions". So, for context, Dean did an exhibit at the Oceanside Museum of Art back in 2021, and "Divisions", and I'm going to read the little excerpt to kind of explain, the background: So "Divisions" is on exploring how figures and abstract forms interact with one another. The spaces they inhabit and the materials by which they're formed. Ramos is attempting to portray the body as both a tangible thing and a place of universal experience. Faceless, silent poses represent the body as a physical yet elusive dwelling place. "Divisions" within and between bodies suggest psychological and emotional states, human relationships, and the connections which lie beneath the physical surface. I was kind of reading this and kind of contemplating on it this morning because I thought it was just really good. And the thing that stuck out to me the most was exactly what she said. It's, it's bringing the invisible to the visible. And I was making a note, a lot of this is, it's the invisible tensions that we feel kind of like, You know, like as a social species, we have a lot of tension with how do I create long-lasting relationships? How do I make a good connection with a person? You know, there's a lot of complexity between human to human, regardless of the relationship. I think that's such a really, just kind of powerful. I guess subject matter to kind of bring into the visual form. And I think that's incredibly challenging when we have this internal kind of like in-scaped experiences. And through our art making and through the materials that we've been given, we create that into physical form into like matter that we can see and we can touch and we can manipulate our desire. And I think that's just like the coolest thing about art is that, and this is why "Divisions" stood out to me because it was so different. It was like, this is truly displaying the tensions and also like the wonder and the beauty behind human relationship and interaction, and that's not, I don't think that's all of what "Divisions" is about. I think there probably could be more to it. So kind of based on that, everything I read from your website, maybe you could just kind of just loosely, just kind of talk about it. What kind of drew you to creating what is now the "Divisions" project?

Dean: I think I should share now, right? I don't know what you can see. Hopefully you can see the first picture there. Right. Beautiful. Okay. There's some extra stuff on my screen, but I'm assuming it's not on yours. I'm trying to think of the whole process of getting to this point. So yeah, definitely. I was interested in like, let's go back to talking about the ultrasound picture. So some, I think one thing that happens, which is sometimes I go more abstract and sometimes they go more figurative. These pieces were for the most part in the show, I think everything was figurative. And I think what's sometimes I drift away from the figure for a while and then I come back to it because at least the way I handle the figure, it can be very, heavy emotionally.

So, I think at some points it gets to be a bit weighty and I tend to back off for a while, maybe just to. To get away from that. So these pieces here. I think the other day when you talked to me, you said you were interested in the burned wood too. I think I did the burned wood for several reasons.

I think just the fact that I think it's more expressive. It gave color to the surface. It also brought out the wood grain and gave more texture to the surfaces. Those are some of the reasons why. But also, I mean, I think in, in general, you could say the, the "Divisions" were both, in some ways maybe, I don't know if it's quite broken in this cause the, the brakes are so clean.

It's more of an opening up. Opening up of the form. So a desire to kind of make the inside again, open so you can, but I think with the inside of these particular pieces. What's inside is, as far as we can tell, there's, they're empty. It's almost like a shell, right? But I think there's still an assumption that there's something that's, and for me, it's that emptiness isn't necessarily a psychological emptiness, but more of a mystery, like, you know, of what's in the inside and maybe an invitation to enter yourself into that space and opening to bring yourself inside that space as a viewer, if that makes sense.

Christina: Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah, so it's, it's kind of an invitation of sorts, and hopefully a way of relating or connecting yourself to the pieces. Wow.

Dean: So I think the one on the right here was probably that's one of the simpler ones actually. It helps to go back in time if I can do that. Which, let me see, these are the first ones. That's what I, I threw these, these were the first related ones, and these are from an exhibit in 2015. And I think they very much relate to the "Divisions", and the one on the right was actually in that show at the Oceanside Museum. Okay, so I think it helps to start with these.

Yes, the one on the right, I don't remember which show that was photographed in the one on the left, I think, was photographed in an exhibit in downtown Oceanside at the Wall Street Country Club, and also it was shown at the California Center for the Arts, the one on the left so this one's very much related.

Yeah, this one also had the burn, and it was, and once again, the form's opening up here to the inside, but it's different than the other ones that I showed a second ago, or the inside is, like I said, it's maybe it's a bit more of an invitation. I think these are more, more objective in terms of their this thing, there's, they're not opening up to let you enter inside the piece.

There's still kind of, you know, an opening to the inside. I think the one, I think these two in some ways are for me, maybe a bit more scary, aesthetically looking. Cause the one on the left is kind of jagged and rough at the bottom, almost as if it's been cut off of something and it's just hanging there suspended.

And the one on the right is just, it's got, they're not sharpened points, but you know, it's rebar that kind of sticks out in the space. It looks a bit more threatening.

But I also saw it as kind of what actually the piece on the left was supposed to when I first started it was it's supposed to have two bodies one on the left side one on the right and I didn't like it so I actually cut off the sides and then I thought these rebars had to be there kind of a way of the inside.

I think that that might be a way of the inside kind of exploding or going outward from the center on the right one. So there's still, I think, somewhat of that wanting to maybe take what's inside and reach out to the world around. But then with some of these pieces, what happens over time is and it's also at the exhibit at the, I go back and I go, it's not letting me, there it goes.

I have to go like that. Okay. Yeah, so yeah, I was trying to find, there, I was trying to find these. Okay, that was also in the same show. So, what happened over time, and I think it's also, there's another piece that I put in here, was the desired, a lot of the forms were just individuals. I began thinking is that they were just too centered on an individual person.

I became, I just started thinking about how to, like the necessity of thinking about a community, I guess, about the way that, you know, that we're not alone, that you're trying to draw connections between persons or bodies. I think what's interesting about these forms too, is that when I sculpted these individual little people here, in this case, they're probably maybe eight or nine inches from head to toe.

When I made them, I made them whole, but then I had both for the purpose of casting and also for the idea of being, I think it was just once again, wanting it to, to imply that the form could open. They have this seam in them, you know, that kind of suggests that you could open them up, you know, the individuals in the piles, you could potentially open them.

At first I was actually filling the seams. I don't even know if you can see it in the photograph. There were a couple of them, like the one in the lower left image, that one, I actually filled the seam with grout. And then I began realizing that it needed to be more vulnerable, and the scene needed to be more, have some more potential to imply that it's, that it, you know, you actually couldn't pull this thing apart if you wanted to.

It's almost like a walnut in a way, I guess I'd say.

Christina: Yeah, that's a great way to put it. Wow, that's so interesting, but I think in this particular, and then in this piece here, it's like, I think there's also this kind of vulnerable state where they all can just come toppling down.

Dean: Yeah. And I think when they were installed one time, I don't want to go into where, why, but one of the pieces like fell and then it slightly cracked, you know, and it's just the fact, even there's this kind of precariousness of the piece.

Being stacked that way where it looks like it could just all come tumbling down, you know, and I don't even know when I first made this that. I knew completely what it was saying. I, you know, I've always liked the idea of making pieces for corners, and I think I might, I mean, I've been thinking about it more over time, putting more pieces in the corner, because it's kind of this part of the room that's, you know, I guess, quiet, kind of, it's not utilized very much, you know, it's kind of this, like this place off to the side, maybe, it's like when you think of like a little

child, like, I guess the idea of go sit in the corner, you know, kind of this part of the room that's psychologically kind of, you know, away from things.

Yeah. And that's what this, this is stacked in a corner. So it's relying upon the walls in the corner to hold it up.

Christina: That is really powerful.

Dean: And then the other, and then these pieces too are, I was kind of like thinking about the one on the left, was it the, the vision show I showed it again recently, but I changed the base of it to concrete.

Originally it was wood in the Oceanside Museum show. I changed, I actually have, I mean, I, they're actually made from molds too. I have been exploring the idea of mold making for a while, which the wooden pieces are not. Those are one of a kind. But it's the piece on the left. The piece on the right was first here.

Christina: I think it relates very much, but the reason I wanted to put this in there is because it also relates the idea of like relationships, if not just an individual. I'm just kind of thinking about the idea of combining figures together in the dynamics that that creates. I think I like the idea if it's possible for a piece to be I don't know if the, I've used the word before. I don't know if it's the right word or not, but the idea of it kind of being iconic in a way of being something that there's a great simplicity to that almost becomes symbolic, um, cause I think at a certain level, if you can achieve that, it really sticks in your mind, you know, it kind of, you can't forget it cause it's got such a, this is some, it is partially because of its simplicity because of the power of the form.

Dean: There's something in it that it's, I think it's very hard to achieve that, that where it can say something powerful, but at the same time, be very simple for me. I think that's difficult to do, you know, to walk that line because I have made, if you, if you go on the website, there's one piece on there that, which I rarely do.

I mean, technically it shows off what I can do. If I wanted to technically do something very detailed or something that's, you know, um, on that level, but something about that, I think it, to me, it's just kind of, it's just showing off technically what I can do, but I think that's not really what interests me, you know, I think at this point now, it's more about the power of the materials to express themselves. I want the materials to have a strong voice and also I think the symbolism in the piece. That those are more important to me.

Christina: That's really cool. That's more than just cool. This, the piece on the left was the one that initially really caught my eye when I was just kind of exploring your website, because it's exactly what you said, it's like, there's something very powerful being displayed, but in such a simple way, and I think that's just honestly just showcases your talent, but also like, you know, the reality of us just as people like kind of living in this internal and external world at the same

time and trying to make sense of everything. So I think that piece was like, that kind of was speaking to me. That's really cool. Wow. And I don't know, like, yeah, what's, I think what's interesting about these pieces, like the way I described, I think the one on the, the right, and I think it applies to on the left, is that it?

Dean: They couldn't, I think on a certain level, they may be applied intimacy, but at the same time, they couldn't apply like almost suffocation at the same time, you know, so it's like you could read it either way, you know, because they don't have a face and make the way that they're jammed together. They're not breathing, you know, if they couldn't breathe, they couldn't breathe here. But at the same time, they're especially the one on the left.

At first, I'm trying to remember what I renamed it. First, I named it together, and then I changed the name. I think I named it "Reflection". It seemed more appropriate to me.

Christina: I was just thinking, like, because the, what was the name of the figures curled up in the corner? All those, was, is there a name for that, that one?

Dean: I don't know. I have to think. "Mass". That's right. Okay. Yeah, I named it mass both because I think the physical weight of each individual form, but also as they kind of make a whole mass together. Right. Almost like, I think it's the idea of almost like a clump. As a unified whole, they just become a big mass together, you know.

But what's interesting is on the bottom of it, I did put a few pieces that are kind of breaking off from that.

Christina: Wow. I like the idea of simple titles too, I think, because I think in a simple title, it says something but it doesn't say too much, and if I, if you say too much, you're telling the viewer what to think.

Dean: Yeah. And I don't, I don't entirely want to do that, I think, I would hope that, which is what you did, I think you brought yourself to it and saw it with a bit of your own experience. I think the danger of giving it to the script title is it prevents you from being able to do that, which is the danger of titling anything, you know what the artist is stamping it with what they say the work is by titling things.

Christina: Wow. So, I was thinking about you said, I would completely agree this is a very vulnerable piece. I was recently kind of exploring different artists from the early 40s and 50s and even back to the 1600s, their self-portraits and how their self-portraits were of themselves, like literally painting themselves, but in a very vulnerable state. And I think that's, to me, it like kind of similar to how art is just this thing that we can do that just really instantly is like, I'm so vulnerable that we can't always just put into words. So I think this is honest. It's pretty genius how you did a lot of these sculptors. It's really beautiful.

Dean: Definitely. Yeah. So yeah, I don't know if you want to, I don't know what else I have. I don't think I have; I didn't collect a lot of images. I tried to keep them. This one is, I just put it in there because it's very much related to the others. This one is related to the wooden bus at the beginning and to the ones at the, in the Oceanside Museum show. It's just that this one has this repetition. I just titled this one again.

Yeah, I think, you know, it's just, you know, kind of the inner one, it's either broken or opening and then it's like kind of repeating itself as if, you know, whatever the experience was, it's happening over and it could keep happening over and over.

It's kind of like, you know, what are those like Russian dolls in a way? I see a little bit like that, but that's not what I was necessarily thinking when I made it. You know, I think it's much more, although it might somewhat relate to that. I think nonetheless it's much more rugged and much more visceral. What's happening here, you know, it's almost shedding its skin, you know, kind of shedding itself and maybe I also consider this one potentially like a rebirth.

Is if you're kind of, you know, kind of maybe you're going into a new period of your life, and that continually can happen as you move forward.

That's really cool. It's kind of like the out, the outside takes the majority of like, I guess, like the, the hits, if that makes sense, while the inside is still kind of preserved. And maybe it's that rebirth, like, yeah, like shutting off skin, like the, the new underneath, the protected, the tender, but also like that new life kind of is like coming out while the, the outside is, is like shutting itself off.

Christina: That's cool. Something else you just said, like he said, it takes the hits or it's like almost like armor. I think these pieces, some of the other ones, I always thought it was interesting that they, they have a very tough exterior form, meaning they look strong, but at the same time, maybe that's like what, you know, like the protective self, you know, and then the protective self is becoming vulnerable because it's being broken or split open.

So it's like that shell that is there is not, you know it's kind of, you know, it's there, but it's not, it can't prevent. Everything, you know, and so, and I think that, you know, and I think maybe that's part of the reason why the interest in the textures to the textures kind of, you can, especially in this piece or kind of breaks into the surface and the solidity of the form and of the surface is a cement or this is cast concrete, which is a material I've been exploring lately.

Yeah, I don't think I have any of them, I don't have any of them or actually, I do this one here was something this one probably one of the more recent ones. And then I actually, yeah, I put a couple of there. I didn't know how many I put here. I'm just trying to see. Okay. So, right so this one here was, this was one of two new pieces that I did.

I wanted to explore the idea of, I think I first got into the idea of using 3d modeling with the idea that I could potentially just conceive of ideas. Yeah, but this one here, I modeled it in, in

the computer first, and it took quite a while because I had to repeat the modeling three, three times to get to a form that I actually liked.

It had to, I think I had to connect with it in the way that I connected with the materials in the real world, you know, and it had to, because it could become, I don't know, it could become computerized and become, you know, and it just wouldn't connect. But so, I had to model it three times. After I printed it, I didn't like the surface.

So, I rubbed clay over the surface, and then I made a mold off that and I cast, um, cast from that. And I think it finally worked, but it took quite a while because. This was the only one, like the one of the two figures standing together, I sculpted that in clay, like, from nothing. And this one I worked in the computer, but making that connection between digital space and the real world is, it's still, for me, it's somewhat difficult.

Because it's not as physical in the process of doing. Of making it. I and I think even after it was done and I printed it, I still wasn't connecting. So I had to go and actually apply actual physical texture to the surface. But this is cast concrete to you.

Christina: Can you explain the opening.

Dean: I made it first without the opening. And I think I just felt it was too boring. Partially because it was just too solid. And then I think I, once again, I just, I don't know what it is, but on a psychological level, I needed to open the form up. I needed to make it to invite the viewer. Into the piece and I think that that's kind of this.

Christina: I see it almost as a corridor here.

Dean: Yeah, narrow passage. I think I titled this. I think I might have titled this piece passages that enter through like kind of corridors. If this was like a huge piece, you could walk through the center column and go out the other side, you know. So I made more than this, but because I can cast them, I think I cast 10, but I only, when I put them together, I mean, it could be interesting to have more, but I think three works.

Christina: Yeah, that's brilliant. How come I'm curious, like not specifically for this piece, but just kind of in general, your pieces, they don't really have any way to identify the figures. They're really just humans. Is that intentional?

Dean: Yeah, I mean, yeah, I think so. I think the one thing that is somewhat identifiable, I think, is that, in most of them, I think the figures look more male than female, right?

Christina: Well, I think it's just because, like, the lack of hair, you know?

Dean: Yeah, yeah, it might be.

Christina: So, but I think you, yeah, and also, but yeah, in general, how come they don't have a face?

Dean: I think, I think when, once you put the face on something, it becomes for me more of a portrait and it becomes more individualized. And I think that's something that I don't know, maybe it, I think maybe on a certain level, I feel it's not letting the viewer relate as much, you know, because I think, for example, it's a lot of people don't want a painting of somebody else that they don't know hanging on their wall, because they can't, it's, it's a very personal thing at that level, you know, it's a very, it's a, it's a individual person.

And that, I can't say it's never the case. There's certain cases you can relate, but in many cases it's, if it's a portrait, it makes it harder for you as a viewer to relate. So I think that's part of the reason on a certain level why, I think I have at various points put faces on and usually they end up, I end up not wanting them, just because I just, and this one actually, in that respect too, the passageway is going right through the face area, right, right through the head.

And this one's kind of going right through it. I think one time when I showed work, somebody made the comment to me that they thought. Some of my pieces were, violent and maybe, and I think maybe the reason why they said that was because it was doing things with the body that you wouldn't do in the real world.

It's opening up, breaking things open, cutting through the body. You know, if you see the body is something, you know, but I see it, the reason for my doing that, it's more metaphorical. It's not to be violent, you know, it's maybe to make vulnerable and, you know. So, yeah, so they, they found that maybe some people could potentially find it maybe disturbing.

Christina: I didn't think of it that way, you know, that doesn't seem like you did either, but I guess some people could see it that way. I think vulnerability also can kind of feel like a little bit of like a violent experience in a way.

Dean: Yeah, maybe it's that, maybe it's that discomfort that they had with what I was doing.

Christina: Definitely. Maybe it's breaking the shell that, that you don't want to be broken for some people, you know. That's so cool. So, wow, that was really good, and I honestly feel very inspired, inspired to take one of your classes! I'm curious, like, so, and we can kind of close on your experiences teaching and kind of how you got into teaching?

Let me see. Let's see. Hold on. Okay. Yeah. So like, yeah, kind of like how did you get into teaching and based on pretty much everything we just talked about, how do you help your students kind of explore their own inner creativity, in a way, specifically in a way that has like a, an ethical principle to it? It's like, in a way, you know, does that make sense?

Dean: Yeah, I think I understand. I can talk about that. How did I get into teaching? Yeah, so when I went to graduate school, when I first went to grad school, I think at that point, I hadn't, I

mean, I probably taught somebody how to do something before, but I never taught it in a classroom setting like that, you know?

I was talking to somebody yesterday about going to grad school and I, and I basically, I was, I think I was about 25 when I started and, and somebody, um, a professor, um, at where I went to undergrad in Chicago he said, you should go, he said, go now, because, if you don't go, you're probably never go just because life gets, you get busy as time passes by, you get busy, you know, and, and other things end up making that difficult.

So this, this particular individual. His name is Tim Lowley. He's a Chicago artist. He never went to grad school, and he has been teaching at a college, which it's a private school. Usually you need a master's degree to do that, but he, because it's a private school, they were able to give him some kind of an honorary position.

Yeah, but he just suggested I go. So at the time when I went, I went because I wanted to focus on my artwork. I didn't know I was going to teach at the time when I first started grad school. I didn't, I wasn't sure. So I did. Yeah, I went to grad school when I first got there. They put us in a classroom.

They gave us a course outline and they said, go teach. And it was kind of. You know, a bit shocking. It's kind of like because never taught before and they didn't really give you any training. They just gave you an outline and said, go do it. You know, I think the thing that, that we had going for us, the students that were teaching is that it was an area that we had some expertise and experience in.

So we were teaching younger students that hadn't drawn or done as much, you know, because I taught drawing. So, yeah, in grad school, it was, it's very different teaching now than then, just because technology has changed so much, like, even the ability to do this interview, you know, like that, you couldn't, I don't, nothing, like this, two different places is recording.

Whatever. So it's made it better and easier in terms of sharing with other people. Yeah, it was, it was a good experience. It was, like I said, it was, I think it was harder because I couldn't share as easily. I couldn't just go online and pull up images of artists and things and share it. It was, but, and then after grad school, I think I went at least two years without teaching.

I went to I ended up doing, showing a couple of galleries. We're showing my work and I was doing some commission work on the side. Um, and then I ended up, doing an exhibit at, Mira Costa. I wasn't hired there, you know, I, and yeah, and I, and I didn't exhibit their drawings. Actually, it was drawings and some of those ultrasound pieces.

And then, and then I, there was a job opening and I applied for the job, not necessarily thinking, cause I hadn't taught in a couple of years thinking that I would get the job. And I ended up, you know, going through the whole process and getting hired. And I'd say when I first started

teaching, it was, it was, you know, again, when I started teaching again, it was, it was a lot of work at first.

I mean, there's no question. It was like a huge amount of work because, when I taught before, I was only teaching one class at a time. And then I had a whole course load, you know. Yeah, I think for the first, I'd say the first two to three years were a huge amount of work. Yeah. I was like constantly and, but you know, it's been a good experience for sure.

I enjoy teaching. It's, I think it keeps you, it's interesting working with students cause they all come to you with different backgrounds, with different interests. And, I think for me, I think that's something that you have to know and understand and see and nurture in the student. I think a lot, what's tricky about it, I think, as a student, as an art student, is, is that when you're new, you don't have necessarily a lot of knowledge or understanding or experience of art, or you see it, and I think, yeah, over time, there's so much more, like, in terms of art, what artists are doing in the world now, especially. That you might not understand.

I think maybe most exposure is to like popular culture as far as art exposure, or maybe to really famous artists like Picasso and Da Vinci and those kind of things. But as far as contemporary art goes, I think most young students don't really have knowledge or understanding of that at that point.

And that takes time. You know, you try to expose them to artists, um, that are, you know, both traditional and contemporary, and then, like, for example, now for a final project and painting class, they're, uh, I, I give them assignments at first, you know, and then as, hopefully as time goes on, they start researching and exploring what other artists are doing and trying to relate ideas that they're interested in to those art, those artists artwork.

I think I've never been the type of instructor that, I think that tries to push my style onto my students, you know? Yeah, no, definitely, I want them to bring their interests and what, who they are to the work, their work. I, I don't, you know, and a lot of times I just have to step back and let them have time to, to do things, without me saying too much.

Christina: Definitely.

Dean: I think what's different about university than a community college is a lot of universities. I think the students have maybe, more time without this, like, I want to, for example, I went to CalArts, I visited CalArts a while back, and I think the students spend a lot more time just working on their own than having the instructor always there.

So because I am there pretty much most of the time when they're working. I tried to make sure I don't always. Like, I don't want to always be there, you know, I think you could, there's a potential and you're always in the room with them.

Yeah, don't know if nag's a good word, but I try to, I don't want to be that.

I want to give the students space, you know, so, so it's, you need to be there present, but at the same time, you need to be to give the students enough time to, um, you know, to contemplate and to think their way through situations too, because I think it's very much problem-solving. Right.

Yeah. I think that that's the thing that as an instructor, you need to walk is how much, you know, you want the students to solve the problem, but you want to be there to guide them.

But you don't necessarily always want to give them the answer. You want to guide them without just giving them the answer because then it becomes your answer.

Yeah, it's the purpose.

So, yeah, if that makes sense.

I definitely feel that from my professors. I think that's the complicated thing about for me being an art instructor.

It's like, you know, is just walking that line, you know, in, in, in a way because everybody's different too. Every student's different. Every person is different. So everybody has different needs. So that's, that's the complexity of walking that line.

Christina: Yeah, definitely. How did you know that well, we kind of talked about how you got into teaching, but do you have any, like, how do, how does someone know if teaching is meant for them?

Dean: Well, just seeing people that teaching is not for, I can tell you, that's what I, I know people that start teaching and they just can't do it. Well, on that level, like some people just, I think maybe they're, I think there's a level of patience that you have to have, you know, um, and you need to, you know, be patient in terms of, you know, like I said, letting people have time.

And space that the students to kind of express themselves. And you have to, you know, I think art making takes time. It's not fast in most cases. It's not very quick. I mean, there's certain instances where it can be like, if you're doing a gestural drawing or something, you can get it done quick, but, um, the evolution of an artwork takes time.

As a teacher, you're there with them over that period of time. So it does take a certain level of patience in yourself and in the students, you know, to what, to kind of let things evolve over an expansive period of time. Then I think also some people that I know that, teaching was not for, and they seem to I don't know, maybe they're just, how do I put this, like, it just causes them a lot of stress being in the classroom.

I don't know if you've ever, it's just like public speaking, I guess, to a certain extent. Some people are just not public speakers, you know, they stress out, they get super anxious, they can't do it. They, maybe they overthink everything. They, you know, they get overwhelmed by everything. So that's one aspect that you need to be a teacher.

Christina: Great! Thank you so much for your time, Dean.