

# THE BODY AS AN ARCHIVE

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VISUAL AIDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript: Joe De Hoyos + Alexander Hernandez

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**[00:00:24.170] - Alex**

Well, hi, Joe. How's it going?

**[00:00:25.490] - Joe**

Hi, I'm good. How are you doing?

**[00:00:27.350] - Alex**

Pretty good. My name's Alex Hernandez, and I'm from San Francisco. We're currently living there. I heard that you used to live there, too.

**[00:00:36.960] - Joe**

Yeah. I lived there from 2000 to 2008. I loved it. I loved it, too. Great city. Great city to be a gay person in and a great city to get HIV services.

**[00:00:56.500] - Alex**

Exactly. I think that's probably my move there. So when did you... Wait, you said you went there because of school or because of your job?

**[00:01:04.870] - Joe**

I went there while I was in New York before that, and I had been working in fashion retail. For the last year, I switched to being a graphic artist. When I got ready to leave New York, I realized that that was a good option for me as far as work in San Francisco because of the dot-com thing that was going on. It enabled me to make a smooth transition because I signed up with an agency and was working all the time for about a year, and then it crashed. But yeah.

**[00:01:55.440] - Alex**

That's always fun. I moved there in 2010. I had been... Well, I got my diagnosis, I remember it's April 2010, and it was right after I moved back home from Denver to the Western Slope. It was right after the recession, so there was really nothing. That's why I had to move back. I didn't know what to do. So I applied to grad school at CCA. Right before I was about to move, I got diagnosed. So it was a luck thing

that I was heading there anyway because I knew that San Francisco had great HIV services. But I also feel like I... Because I know it had already been a few years since the epidemic, but I think when I was diagnosed, I was more embarrassed than I was scared. Does that makes any sense? Because up until that point, I was very careful. I was using condoms, and I just felt like a... I just remember thinking, "Oh great, I'm an artist with HIV." I felt like a stereotype, if that makes... I felt like it could have prevented it. I think that's why I had great shame in it.

**[00:03:21.350] - Joe**

Right. For me, I tested positive in '85, and so it was a totally different thing then because there wasn't really meds yet. If you heard of somebody being HIV positive, then it was in reference to it being a death sentence in a way. That's what you heard in the media, too. For me, I think I was really afraid when I found out for... I think I was shell shocked for about 10 years because I just thought, I'm going to die. I didn't say to myself, "Why plan for a future?" But I think that's how I was living. I was not planning for a future. I wasn't making long-term goals or anything like that.

**[00:04:27.100] - Alex**

You were living in a moment.

**[00:04:30.160] - Joe**

Yeah. That was in '85. But then by '93, I had gone to college right after that, too. By '93, a lot of things had changed, and I decided I wanted to move to New York to try to do something with my artwork. I've always loved fashion, and so that just seemed like the place to end up.

**[00:04:58.700] - Alex**

Did you feel like because you didn't know how uncertain those times were, that that's why you plunged into going to school and college?

**[00:05:12.320] - Joe**

Well, I actually went to university pretty late. I think I was 22 when I decided to go. Wait a minute. I was... Yeah, I was 22 when I went, and I was also just short of 23 when I found out I was positive. I was going for art. I was going for graphic art, and there was an instructor who I had to take a class with who did these special one-on-one classes that you could take. I don't know if they offer that in universities anymore. But he was a collage artist, and I thought, "Oh, I want to try that," because it felt to me like

painting is like, you have to have money to be a painter. You have to have money to be a photographer. And I'm like, "Collage? I can do that with scrubs of paper or whatever." That became my medium.

**[00:06:29.810] - Alex**

It's a similar story, I guess. Well, I went to undergrad for painting, but I ended up switching over to textiles. But for me, it was more because I feel like sometimes painting, there's too much freedom in the sense that you have to create that world. You have to start in a black canvas and you can't... You have to have it... Getting ideas is hard, if that makes sense. You have to mix colors and you have to like... To me, there was a lot of... There was so much that you can do that there was limiting. I don't know if that makes sense. I started When I was a new undergrad, I started getting into... Well, I was really into Rauschenberg at the time, and so I was really into found objects. My college was right behind a thrift store, so I would go to thrift stores. I just started playing with materials, and I started adding fabrics on my paintings. Then eventually, I started sewing, and I just ended up getting into patchwork and embroidery. It was also because I actually wanted to do fashion stuff when I was younger and to do some sewing, but my mom didn't want to get me a sewing machine because she said it was for women.

**[00:07:56.340] - Alex**

Then eventually, I guess I found, did it all on my own. I just was really into patterns and mixing textures and all that. Also, I think that because the limit of my materials also helped me... If I only found these patterns and these fabrics, there was some creativity that happened in me that like, "Oh, this is how I can make them work." That helped me shape where my look went is having materials that were there and they were limited that helped me be more creative. I guess the same way with collage, too, you have to work with what you have, right?

**[00:08:45.960] - Joe**

Yeah. I just also thought with painting, that it's such a classical art form, and it's one of those things where you have to know all the rules before where you can break them. It just felt like with collage, there weren't really any rules. You can just make up your own. I just challenged myself to make each body of work different. I challenged myself to not make it be the same every time. It was more free.

**[00:09:32.720] - Alex**

Yeah, right. For me, sewing, there are similarities in the sense that there are rules because you're supposed to iron and like... There's all these... But the reason, the way that I stumbled into sewing ended up being a plus because when people learn how to patchwork traditionally or so traditionally, there's certain fabrics that you're really not supposed to mix. There's certain things that you're supposed to think about. And I just kind of went for it. I was just like, "Oh, I like these materials and these materials." Then I

met somebody in grad school who said that she liked the way that it makes fabrics because you really aren't supposed to mix, let's say, satin and felt because they're just different. You have different warps and different textures. They're hard for them to work together. But I wasn't also making any garments. I wasn't making anything that was really supposed to be used. It worked. She actually said that because I didn't learn these rules, I wasn't afraid to play with materials because for her, her grandma taught her to iron and to do all these things that hindered her from being creative with materials because of the way she was taught.

**[00:10:56.020] - Joe**

When you mix your fabrics, did you... You weren't really concerned about the types you were mixing. You were doing it because of the patterns and the colors?

**[00:11:09.530] - Alex**

Exactly. Also, sometimes there's also a beauty in juxtaposing fabrics, burlap and denim totally. Or there's also textures there. Yeah. I just started experimenting with all that. Also, I really got into finding unfinished embroideries and unfinished patchworks, and there was something beautiful in that. I remember finding things that, I don't know, a tablecloth that was almost done, but somebody just missed it. I started cutting these things up. Also, I went back to my... Also in high school, I was a Hot Topic, like wannabe goth punk kid. I also got informed by that because I used to love putting patches. That's where my work has... That's why I think patchwork has been a really great way for me to bring all these identities together because I'm gay, I'm Mexican. It's a way for me to mix all these things together to make this Frankenstein type of work.

**[00:12:36.630] - Joe**

I always refer to my work as reconstruction because it was bringing together different elements that by themselves were nothing, really. But when you put it together, it's almost like in my mind, I was creating a future for them to continue living. I've always created my work as a positive affirmation. A lot of my work has to do with my HIV status. Because of the paper that I use, there's a lot of color. It's very pop-looking. It made it more joyful. It was beautiful to look at, even though the meaning behind it might have been dark or scary. But my intention was always to take the fear out of it for me. It was always a positive affirmation for myself, really.

**[00:14:14.230] - Alex**

Well, I didn't start bringing up my status until my work, until grad school. Even then, I was tiptoeing in that area. It hasn't been until the last recent years that I really went into to that because I just felt like there was just so many layers to my work than to add another layer was... But then I realized that was actually... But I was also using the perfect materials to sew all these different things together. I also

started doing a series of work. Some of my work can talk about my Latin identity, but then some other series can talk about my status. When I saw the AIDS quilt, I was really moved by it. But there was also something very dated about it. In SF, I started working at Larkin Street, and then I actually ended up working with youth with HIV. And there was still this gloomy, sad... They still thought they were going to die. I really started to tell them, "No, we're in the 21st century. It's not the same as it used to be. You can live a fulfilling life." I started making work that reflected that as well.

**[00:15:52.180] - Alex**

I also feel like this is also true in cinema. Every time somebody makes a movie about HIV, it's always people dying. I understand that. I understand the history, but I want to see a movie or a show about people with HIV that are thriving and having normal lives. I actually did a series of portraits of people living with HIV that was still doing well. I did a portrait of Mondo and Angina and Rudy. I forgot his name, the skater.

**[00:16:25.940] - Joe**

Galindo.

**[00:16:25.990] - Alex**

Galindo, because he lives in the Bay Area, too. I started... Yeah, because I just wanted to make work that was also talking about surviving and also how that... It also becomes another layer of identity, I think, to all of us, especially for people of color, where I know the way that I deal with my status in the Latin community is way different than I do with the mainstream. I don't know if that makes any sense.

**[00:16:57.810] - Joe**

In what way?

**[00:16:59.110] - Alex**

Well, you know how there's code switching? I still haven't told my mom that I'm HIV positive because I don't know if she would understand. There's still a lot of stigma and misinformation in the Latin community. It's a lot... You just have to approach it differently.

**[00:17:24.940] - Joe**

I didn't tell anybody for the first 10 years. I think I had a few friends that were gay, but I didn't let my family know for 10 years.

**[00:17:41.670] - Alex**

My sisters know, but... My mom had a mini stroke, so I just don't know how she would handle that.

**[00:17:52.040] - Joe**

Right. Yeah.

**[00:17:58.900] - Alex**

How many years have you been positive when you moved to San Francisco then?

**[00:18:07.380] - Joe**

Well, let's see... '85... 15? 15 years. Up to that point, I really had not had any health issues. The first year I moved to San Francisco was fine. Then, I swear it was almost a year, like almost a year to the day of moving there. I was at work and I was feeling like I was coming down with a flu or something. I didn't know what was going on, but I was really fatigued. I left work early because I think I had made a doctor's appointment. They ran blood work, and he basically said, "You are down to 10 T cells. You are going to have to go on disability. You can't work anymore." He basically told me what I needed to do. I resisted. Also, I had never been on a cocktail up to that point. I knew that I had to from then on. A lot changed all of a sudden. I had to... I had to accept that I was going to be on disability. I just thought, "What is that going to sound like when I tell people I'm on disability?"

**[00:19:53.540] - Alex**

How old were you?

**[00:19:56.510] - Joe**

That was 2003. Yeah, because I was 37, 38. I remember them telling me, "You're not going to be able to work for two years because if you go on disability and you start working, you can lose everything." It was a big change in my life. Then the other thing that saved me, too, at the time was, I think that happened in January. Then in February, the dot-com crash happened. I had no choice. I was out of work. I was going

on disability, but I also was able to collect unemployment. It took a while to get the disability approved, and when I did, they managed to do it where... Because that was in 2001, they backdated it a year, I think. I really was okay for a while after that. I was able to deal with the side effects of the medicine because I was on a cocktail now, and that was rough.

**[00:21:38.030] - Alex**

Was it a time, like you had to take it every four hours or anything?

**[00:21:43.600] - Joe**

I think it was three times a day because I'm down to two times a day now because I haven't switched to the one a day yet, only because I kept having to switch every few months because things just weren't working or they would become toxic for me. It took a while to get it right. I would just have this diarrhea or nightmares or whatever. It took a while before I found the right thing that worked. I haven't switched now because I feel like, all right, this has worked now for... What I've been on now, I went on when I moved to LA, which was in 2008. That doctor put me on a different medical... What do you call it?

**[00:22:47.400] - Alex**

Regiment?

**[00:22:47.100] - Joe**

Yeah. It's worked the whole time. That's been 14 years, 14 going on, 15 years. I just feel like, I'm just going to stay on this. If it stops working, then I'll have options because I'm afraid if I switch and it doesn't work, I'm screwed.

**[00:23:09.610] - Alex**

That makes sense. I mean, that's one of the reasons that I didn't start medication for a couple of years, maybe three or four, just because I knew it was a commitment. Also because my doctor was like, I didn't know about being different strains, and also some medication wouldn't work. I knew that if I did switch, I could only switch a couple of times. I didn't take medication for a long time. Then I eventually started Atripla, which was actually, I think, one of the first one-a-day, but it was also at the beginning of all those one-a-day pills. It was actually really hard to... I got all the I got all the worst symptoms that you can get and none of the fun ones, because one of the fun ones is supposed to be having really vivid dreams, but I don't even remember anything. I just remember being on the bus, being on the new airport, and just



feeling like I was on shrooms. The first time, it just felt like I was just like, "Why do I feel drunk?" It took me a while.

**[00:24:25.950] - Joe**

You had the dreams while you were awake.

**[00:24:27.180] - Alex**

That's probably what it was. I just I felt like I was just like, I ate a really potent brownie. I just couldn't function. Then I was also doing a teaching fellowship thing, so it was always a little loopy. Eventually, I switched to something else, and now I'm on Triumeq that has been no issues whatsoever. I think I also didn't want to start for a while because I knew that my insurance had to be right because I think that's something that other people don't understand. I think that's also why people are advocating for universal health care is that people don't understand. If I quit my job, I have to figure out how to get insurance again or get on Medicare. Then if I do start a new job, I have to wait three months. It's just stuff that people don't get, like conservatives and other people don't understand about people who have compromised immune systems that we can't just... For example, I've had issues at my work for a long time, but I don't want to switch unless it's something that's going to be certain. You know what I mean? Yeah... So That's how it's been for me for the last few years.

**[00:26:04.310] - Joe**

Well, since I was laying low while I was on disability, I went back to school at City College in San Francisco. They have a fashion department, and so I decided I was going to go for merchandising because they didn't really have a design area. Sorry, I lost my train of thoughts. There was a reason I was going to say that.

**[00:26:39.980] - Alex**

Disability insurance, switching, impacting medications...

**[00:26:45.160] - Joe**

No, that's not it.

**[00:26:50.290] - Alex**

You're going to say something great.

**[00:26:56.830] - Joe**

We had something to do with the meds.

**[00:26:59.920] - Alex**

Were they making you loopy or?

**[00:27:03.800] - Joe**

No. Fuck. That's what happens when you get old.

**[00:27:10.710] - Alex**

Well, did you have to go to... Were you on Medicare?

**[00:27:16.420] - Joe**

Yeah, I was. I was on Medicare because I had to go on disability. I was on Social Security. Then they put you on Medicare to get your health services.

**[00:27:32.480] - Alex**

That's the other thing, too, because I've worked with youth that had to do that, but then they feel like they have to get stuck. They feel like they can only get certain... If they get a job that gives them too many hours and they lose that. That's also like, it's been a crazy roller coaster thing for all of us. In a way, it traps you in I don't know, not class system, whatever you call it.

**[00:28:04.660] - Joe**

Yeah, in poverty, basically. Yeah. You just reminded me what I was... The point I was going to make was that when I finished school, I moved to LA because I had been seeing a boyfriend, somebody who was long distance, who lived in LA. I moved there partially because he was there, but also because the

fashion industry was there. I attempted to go back to work, and twice, I had to stop because it just ran me down. For the longest time, I had this fear that I was never going to be able to work full-time again. I pretty much haven't done it, but I keep forgetting. I keep losing track of what I was going to say. But luckily, I was always able to jump back onto disability anytime I lost my job or wasn't able to continue working. But I've used, I messed up all my luck for one thing, and all my... What do you call it? When you go off disability, they give you a grace period where you can work a certain amount of months and still retain your benefits. I was able to do that. I was actually able to do it twice because the period had run out between the I was able to stay on disability for almost about 18 years while working full-time for a bit.

**[00:30:14.300] - Joe**

When I moved here, I jumped back into DJing. Up until living here, all my DJ jobs had been paid under the table because that's how bars did it in the old days. All the bars here, they're above board. I guess the city is a little... It's a small town, so I guess the city can keep track of stuff. I was getting paid as a contract worker, so they were paying me with a check. They were paying me really well, which was why I decided to do it. I just knew that it was going to mess, finally mess I got up in the social security. But I just, like you were saying, you're basically living in poverty level as long as you're on disability. You can't save money. You can't own anything because you can't save money. I just was ready to give it a try, and get off of the safety of being on disability. I went ahead and did it. I had the DJ job for two years, and then I lost it. Because it was a contract job, I had all these taxes I had to pay back. It was like, all right, well, I had just two steps forward, and now it's like one step back because now I got to pay all this back.

**[00:31:59.190] - Joe**

I've done everything I can now to just not go back on it, even though now I'm not on Medicare anymore. I'm still receiving Medi-Cal. It's only because of the pandemic because they're not taking anybody off their benefits, I guess, until I think it's happening this year, maybe, that they're going to finally make changes. But yeah, I've been protected all this time. We'll see. Things are going to change.

**[00:32:33.340] - Alex**

I know. I have student loans. I mean, they're not that many, but I'm just waiting for it because that's been on pause, too. I don't know. Sometimes there's moments where I want to leave the US and go to Madrid or Berlin. Also, they take care of their artists better there because... Do you feel like your artwork sometimes... Getting into art, I went to art school, and when I went to grad school, I didn't understand. I was 23 when I started grad school, so I didn't understand that grad school was pretty much one big social circle thing where you have to make connections and it's up to people. Then after grad school, I realized, "Oh, you have to become... You have to become your own PR person. You have to become your own person to put yourself out there." I learned that in the last few years. But do you feel like being an artist is not what you thought it was going to be, or did you fall into it?

**[00:33:50.030] - Joe**

Well, when I moved to New York, I had been doing collage for five years. I managed to do a bunch of group shows, and then I discovered Visual AIDS. I was able to do group shows also because I was a member of Visual AIDS. That kept me going as an artist. But I've never really been the artist that can go into a gallery and sell myself. I just prefer my artwork to speak for itself. It's always been very hard for me to talk very personally about why I create, what my motivations are. I never learned that, I guess. I have a love-hate relationship with being an artist because I do it because I have to do it. I love being creative. I always need a creative outlet. But the business part of it is the thing that is frustrating for me.

**[00:35:17.830] - Alex**

Yeah, because I think when I went to school, I thought, "Oh, I'm going to be famous, and I'm going to be Andy Warhol or Rauschenberg." Then you realize, oh, wait, they had all this support and all these connections, and I don't. It's been a weird having a regular job and then having to do art on the side. But like you said, I'm not in it to make money. I just didn't think that I would be spending a lot of my own money.

**[00:35:55.520] - Joe**

Or not really making any money from it. Right.

**[00:35:59.760] - Alex**

Or... Or galleries want to show my work, but then they want me to ship everything, and then you know what I mean?

**[00:36:05.070] - Joe**

Framed.

**[00:36:06.160] - Alex**

Well, that's actually... One of the reasons I love working with my materials is I don't have to frame. I make a lot of stuff that's not conventional

**[00:36:15.400] - Joe**

Oh, that's true.

**[00:36:16.500] - Alex**

I also make a lot of things that are light so I can make something huge and send it and not worrying about shipping or having break or whatever.

**[00:36:24.750] - Joe**

Do they just thumb tack it up or whatever?

**[00:36:28.100] - Alex**

Yeah. Well, I usually use C-hooks. But I started actually putting D-rings on the pieces. It's just easy for people to just hang. I didn't know that there was going to be so much work into being an artist. I just thought that, "Oh, I'm going to make amazing stuff, and people are coming to come to me." Then now I realize, "Oh, wait, no, I have to make stuff and put it out there and hope people fall in love with it." But at the end of the day, I just make it for myself anyway. Like you said, I have to make work. I just collect a lot of fabric and because I always buy clothes, I ended up starting to make patchwork with my clothes. Then last year, my ex passed away, who's also my roommate. I actually started... I waited for me to heal. I started to use his clothes to make some pieces recently. It's been like a crazy... There are moments where I doubt myself. What am I doing? What am I... Why am I still trying to be an artist? Why am I trying to do this and that? Then I have some people remind me, you're actually in a place that other artists wish they were at.

**[00:37:58.510] - Alex**

Even though everyone's journey is different, maybe I am taking a really hard road there, but I just eventually said, "Oh, you know what? I'm actually having fun, and I am living in a more interesting life than I thought I was." I came with terms with that last year. I know it's not going to be a fun journey, but I don't see myself doing anything else.

**[00:38:27.940] - Joe**

Yeah. I guess you're right about artists making it because they have the right connections and know the right people or whatever. I never really thought of that. I just blamed myself for not being a good spokesperson for myself. But it is frustrating when you look at it and you see artwork and it's like, I don't know, why is that? Why is that artist?

**[00:39:03.040] - Alex**

Well, when I went to art school, there were so many rich kids that I went to school with. Then I realized they're basically just selling to their friends and to their family's friends. It's like that's... It just made me realize, "Oh, I just have to do things differently now." I just realized I do need to connect to people and go out there because that's where money is. But it's just finally realizing the light bulb. It's just, yeah, you have to become friends with people that are out there, and I'm still doing that right now.

**[00:39:42.870] - Joe**

Yeah.

**[00:39:43.560] - Alex**

And hopefully, Visual AIDS will help.

**[00:39:45.160] - Joe**

I'm not going to lie.

**[00:39:48.700] - Alex**

Also, a lot of artists have moved out of the city in the San Francisco, and they've gone to Oakland or Sacramento or LA. People tell me that I should move to LA because my work would do so well there. But I just... The city, San Francisco is... I mean, I have a love-hate relationship with San Francisco because I feel like I love San Francisco, but San Francisco doesn't love me.

**[00:40:13.740] - Joe**

Why do you feel that way?

**[00:40:15.550] - Alex**

Because the art people that are there don't really... They know I'm there, but I'm not really invited to things. A lot of the stuff that I've gotten have been outside of the city or have been in San Jose or South

Bay. But at the same time, I feel like San Francisco is one of my ingredients, if that makes sense in my work. It's like another material for me. It's just being there. Because, for example, when I was working in the Tenderloin, I started getting fabric from the stuff that people would leave there. And that's what turned my work from... I really got into patchwork in a different way because of that. And I'm still informed by it here and there. And then there are moments where I'm like, I need to move. And I'm going to need to get out of here. And then I go to Boston. And I'm like, "Okay, I think I'd rather pay an extra \$600 to live in San Francisco than to be here or to be..." I mean, I would love LA, but I just don't... I just don't like having a car anymore. I got so used to not having a car.

**[00:41:33.150] - Joe**

Yeah, there's no way you can live there without a car. No way.

**[00:41:37.460] - Alex**

A lot of the successful artists that I know in the city have very supportive partners or sugar daddies. No, it's true!

**[00:41:51.210] - Joe**

Where's ours?

**[00:41:52.500] - Alex**

I know. I know. I have to tell myself that I just need to figure it out, and I made it work before, and I can still make it work. I'm lucky I have rent control. I'm in a pretty good position than other people wish they were at, like I said earlier. It's just probably not going to look the way that I wanted it to be. I think that sometimes just knowing that, just letting stuff go. A couple of years ago, I had an identity crisis because all my friends were doing all these shows and getting all these big grants, and I felt like I was not doing anything. But then I just realized it's just we all have our own journey, and each person's road is different. I also feel like my work has gotten way better in the last few years, and maybe my work just wasn't ready then. I don't know.

**[00:42:52.990] - Joe**

Yeah, I guess my definition of myself as an artist has evolved. It's just as long as I have a creative outlet, and if I can make money from being creative, that's great. But I need time to at least do something creative, whether it's with music or with collage or with fashion, because I've always... Until October, I've

always dabbled in vintage clothing, and I just closed my shop here in October. That's something I've done since the late '80s. I have various outlets. Sometimes I make money, and sometimes they don't. I just have accepted, I guess, that my artwork is not going to be a big money maker for me. But yeah, so we'll see.

**[00:44:03.860] - Alex**

I just think we have to create them. I don't know. But then I think sometimes there's also pressure that we think that we have to make it when in reality, for example, some of my favorite artists, like one of my favorite artists, Henry Darger, made art for himself, and nobody knew he was making art until he died.

**[00:44:26.870] - Joe**

I don't know that name. What does he do?

**[00:44:28.030] - Alex**

He's actually an outside artist, but he... They think he had special needs, but he drew all these little girls and drew all these illustrations. He was very self-taught, kind of collage. He learned how to make copies at the... I don't know if it was the '50s or '60s. I don't remember, but he was in Chicago. He also wrote a book, and all this stuff was just in his head. Like I said, most of his drawings were on butcher paper, and he just made this work because he had to, and nobody ever saw it until the landlord found it.

**[00:45:11.800] - Joe**

After he died?

**[00:45:13.060] - Alex**

Yeah. Now, his stuff is collectible and super expensive in collections and blah, blah, blah. I just think I have to remind myself like...

**[00:45:25.560] - Joe**

We just have to die to become a famous artists that's all.



**[00:45:29.880] - Alex**

I mean, hopefully not. I mean, I don't want my work to be like that, but I'm just saying I hope that this love that he made for his work. I hope that that translate into my work, too. Hopefully, it sells. Hopefully, it takes me... At this point, I don't even want to be Andy Warhol, I don't want to be Jasper Johns or anything like that. I just I wanted to be part of my life and at least taking me to places. I just want to be invited to Japan or Berlin or something.

**[00:46:13.570] - Joe**

That's all.

**[00:46:15.260] - Alex**

I don't need to be super famous at all.

**[00:46:22.920] - Joe**

Sometimes, I think there's been a couple of artists, and I can't think of their names, but they I didn't really have an art career until they were over 60. I don't know, maybe sometimes it has to do with your artwork finally hitting the right moment where it looks and says the right thing at the right time. It just took decades for it to happen. Hopefully, fingers crossed. But, yeah, some people hit it as soon as they start. I don't know. Maybe that has to do with connections. It doesn't always have to do with talent, that's for sure.

**[00:47:18.060] - Alex**

But also, I think taste is always... What's the word? It's just like what... I mean, stuff that I love, people don't get it. And also, I think sometimes some of the work that I make, I realize that sometimes I make art for other artists. Other artists, other painters love my work because they love material. They love that I'm using found objects and fabric and stuff. They get it. But they're also other artists, and they don't have any money. But you know what I mean? Sometimes I realize I make art for other creative, other artist people. And that makes me I feel... I mean, do I wish I was making more money? Yes. But I also know that I am making something that other people that I like or enjoy. I know that my work is not for everybody, but I know that there is an audience out there. That also keeps me making stuff.

**[00:48:25.840] - Joe**

In the old days, we had to have photographers photograph our work onto slide, and then you take your slides around or whatever. What do you do now? Scan it? Or do you just use your phone?

**[00:48:45.660] - Alex**

Actually, I'm sure some people can because the phones have gotten better. Well, yeah, I have a really... I have a really expensive camera that I don't even know how to use, but it takes pictures, and I just edit them on Photoshop. Then I have my website and there's also a lot of things.

**[00:49:03.390] - Joe**

Oh, see, that helps.

**[00:49:04.630] - Alex**

But also a lot of things now are like you submit to things, like Slideroom or Submittable. There'll be open calls, and you apply to it online. People don't go to galleries anymore. And then eventually, people will refer to you. I still have connections. I have been connected to people that have helped my career, and that's also helped me. I still keep in touch with curators and stuff that I've worked with, and they've referred me to shows, or they've gotten me into things. So I think, yeah, connections are important. And I think one thing that I'm realizing now is you just have to just remind people that you're still alive. You just have to... Because I have an Instagram now, and actually, it got a little... Instagram posted one of my pictures, and then I got a little... I had got a lot of followers from that.

**[00:50:07.190] - Joe**

I didn't know Instagram did that.

**[00:50:08.920] - Alex**

Yeah, they post... Well, they post different things for businesses and whatever, but they wanted to do something like queer stuff for Pride. So they put one on my pieces, and then I got a lot of interesting followers. But I kept in touch, and I try to post one thing or something so people know that I'm still making stuff. I think that's helped. I mean, there's just a lot of layers of things that you can do that you can help. And you just have to remind people that you're still making work.

**[00:50:40.900] - Joe**

So you haven't walked into a gallery in a long time, I guess.

**[00:50:47.290] - Alex**

I also follow galleries that I like. Then there was this gallery in LA that people keep telling me that I should talk to. But also then curators tell me, "Oh, no, you don't want to talk to them directly." Basically, I had to ask some of the curators that I work with, "Hey, do you know these people? Can you tell them about my work?" You just have to talk. I don't know. It's weird the way that... I wish it was a lot simpler, but I don't know. Well, right now, I'm going to be in a couple of shows at the Museum of Craft and Design in the city.

**[00:51:31.370] - Joe**

Oh, nice.

**[00:51:31.900] - Alex**

I'm hoping that that will lead to things. Then I have another show. I made another few pieces of the Museum of Quilt and Textiles in San Jose.

**[00:51:41.150] - Joe**

Is that Craft and... What's it? Craft and Design? Is that the one that's a couple of blocks from the MoMA?

**[00:51:51.430] - Alex**

It might have been at one point, but it's actually in the dog patch now. I think they moved it. I think they were moving it when I moved to the city first, but it might have been.

**[00:52:00.780] - Joe**

Yeah. I think it was a new building.

**[00:52:03.350] - Alex**

Yeah. I also recently started working part-time at Creativity Explored. I work with people with disabilities or neurodiverse. That has helped me a little bit in being playful in my work. The way that they play with colors and materials has been very... I love it how they're not afraid sometimes, so I'm doing that. I started sewing stuff with T-shirts lately because T-shirts is a very hard thing to sell unless you're surging it. Or hand sewing it. I've been trying to be experimental and playful and do things that other people aren't doing. But at the end of the day, I'm more... This is something I realized, too, is that you just have to please yourself because I think there's a lot of artists that try to please other artists or other galleries. I just realized you have to please yourself and what you're making. Which I guess is what you've been doing for a long time.

**[00:53:17.010] - Joe**

I can't do artwork when somebody else is around because when people start offering opinions and stuff that makes you rethink what it was you started out doing. Then for me, I lose the inspiration. It's easier for me to just create by myself.

**[00:53:48.380] - Alex**

Now that makes sense, too. I have to make things on my own. I'm also a Libra, so I always have to ask, does this look good? But at the end of the day, I realize that I'm the person that has to decide if I like it or not.

**[00:54:10.370] - Joe**

It has to really mean something to you. In terms of DJing, I've had offers to take jobs where they wanted me to play specific things. That's very hard for me because it's like when I DJ, I spent a lot of time discovering music, and that's what I want to play because I think it's really good, and I want to introduce people to it. That's what's inspiring to me. People aren't always open to something they're not familiar with, whether it's music or art. I guess the challenge is either waiting it out, not doing it, or convincing them that this is what they need.

**[00:55:17.590] - Alex**

Well, people are sometimes just afraid of things they don't know about or understand.

**[00:55:26.050] - Joe**

Well, they're afraid, and also they might not think it. Maybe it's not commercially viable.

**[00:55:32.130] - Alex**

Also, this is for the bars or for...

**[00:55:37.810] - Joe**

Well, in terms of artwork or music.

**[00:55:42.380] - Alex**

Oh, yeah. I think I remember, not for me, but I think I remember hearing when people were buying art, I don't know if this is going to work with my living room or with my... Can I have one in red? Stuff like that. It's ridiculous.

**[00:56:00.340] - Joe**

Yeah.

**[00:56:01.750] - Alex**

Yeah. But who knows how things will be... But it's also like, who knows what things are going to be like in the next 5, even 10 years? It just feels so uncertain right now. Yeah. How was it growing up, Latino, in Texas?

**[00:56:25.130] - Joe**

Well, Texas. It wasn't as hard-core Republican back in those days, in the '60s and '70s as it is now. But my experience there was if you were brown-skinned, you were automatically Mexican, and the term was used derogatorily. It was like you could have been Indian or you could have a Brazilian or whatever, but they would say, you're Mexican, as a second-class kind of thing. There's a lot of ignorance. Also, Spanish was my first language when I went to kindergarten, and it was the only language I knew. I was forced to speak English because I don't know when bilingual education started being implemented, maybe not until the '80s, but there was no such thing as that when I was a kid. It was actually, I want to say illegal, although I'm not sure if there were laws, but they wouldn't allow it. You could not speak Spanish in the school.

**[00:58:02.200] - Alex**

Well, and I think that's also why I noticed there's a difference in generational... I feel like Latinos that have been here for a long time for generations, they're forced to stop speaking Spanish. And in a way, they began policing themselves in a way. It was like they wanted to assimilate it so bad. And then I think in the '80s, when it started changing, where my family moved. Well, we started in San Diego first in the '90s, in the early '90s, and then we moved to Colorado in the mid '90s. Then I think by then, people were okay with being bilingual and people were proud. But I also felt like I would meet other Latinos that there was this hesitation or wanting to blend in. I think my family... I think part of me wanted to be that, too. Sometimes I was ashamed or embarrassed with my mom because my mom only speaks Spanish. I was embarrassed being in the grocery store and I just wanted to be like, I wanted to be an American, and I wanted to have a room in the attic and stuff that you would see in Nickelodeon. I want to have my own room.

**[00:59:29.270] - Alex**

But then It wasn't until college that I realized that actually that's what made me unique and interesting. It wasn't for a long time that I got into my Latinidad or Mexican heritage until later on, which I also think also informed my queerness, too, because, I mean, growing up, the only porn that we saw was twink and white guys. If there I was a Black guy or a Latino, it was like a flavor, whatever. I had to unlearn all that in college and be more proud of that. That's my work, too. Talking about being brown and Mexican. That's why... Well, maybe you can insert the piece here. I did a series of... I called it Fabuloso because it was talking about Mexican and Latino bears. Just because whenever you see Latinos in the culture, it's always like a twinkie or muscly Latino. I wanted to show different bodies. I've always been attracted to more regular or robust, hairy or bigger bodies. I wanted to show that in these pieces. I did a series of pictures that I took after a one-eight stamp and stuff, and I started to pixelate them to not only reference how we like to portray ourselves on the internet or in apps, but there was also a quiltery quality to it as well.

**[01:01:29.180] - Joe**

Yeah, the square.

**[01:01:30.110] - Alex**

Yeah so I started printing them on the side that's actually used for... You post your own art, and it's mostly like fan art. You can have it printed on mugs and stuff like that. I started printing on what they call tapestries, but I put three or four pieces on them, and I ended up cutting them. Because they're 100 by 80 inches, so it's pretty big. I like... The quality is not great, but I like that because it reminds me of like banners for Pride or like how they're like there's something a little off about them. Or the person who uploaded the picture doesn't know much about art, but they like blew up and it's all pixelated. I love that

like DIY stuff that's in good culture, flyers. But it's also the same stuff that I would see in CD covers at the Swammy for Latino bootleg CDs.

**[01:02:44.100] - Joe**

Oh, yeah.

**[01:02:45.060] - Alex**

Or mega mixes. That's something that I was able to put together. Has your Latin identity influenced your work at all?

**[01:03:00.530] - Joe**

Not much. Occasionally, something will come up that I think I would like to explore that more, but that really hasn't been the thing that has motivated me to do work. When I first started, a lot of my work was very explicitly gay, and it was because growing up, my parents used to I had to go to the drive-ins a lot. My stepfather loved those films like *Women in Cages* or whatever, where there was always like, titties everywhere. I just remember being aware as a kid that a woman could show her body, and it was not controversial, but yet a man could not. That was really taboo. I did a whole series of work where I cut out penises from porn magazines, and I would do line drawings using the penises. Then just in other ways, too. But I used penises all the time, and it just was not to be controversial, but to try to desensitize people to seeing penises because because I felt like I was desensitized to seeing breasts. It's in commercials and everything. The woman's sexuality is just out there. Then it turned from that into being more political about my HIV status and also just dealing with it.

**[01:04:58.850] - Joe**

That's why a lot of my The work was, if it wasn't outwardly political, it was a positive affirmation just for myself, such as There's a collage hanging in here that is called the Breeder Series, and it's nine panels, and each panel is hand-cut flowers. The whole thing, each panel is a different color, and it's covered from edge to edge in these little flowers. It was just my way of rationalizing that whether it's a virus or a flower or whatever living organism, that everything has a lifespan and everything has a temporariness to it and that it's natural and that there's a beauty in it. It just was just a way to take the fear out of it for myself because it was always for the first 10 years, it was just like a death sentence hanging over me. It was a way to deal with that. As much as I've tried to work in an angle being a Latino in America, and there's a lot of racism here, and I really haven't dealt with that a whole lot in my work, but it hasn't ever really been that big of a focus.

**[01:06:50.440] - Alex**

Well, actually, when I was an undergrad, we had this really big curator, be the guest critiquer. At this time, I was really experimenting with materials, and I started experimenting with textiles and mixing. I think I was doing plastic and fabric and stuff. I was really into Eva Hess and Rauschenberg and these artists that would mix these things together. After I talked about what I was making, this curator, the first thing she says was, "Why don't you make stuff about your culture" without even really knowing what that is or who I was? I think she actually asked me if I was Latino or if I was something like that. Then she said, "Oh, you should make stuff about your culture." Eventually, I did, but it had to be on my own terms and on my own... I think she was seeing it as how she could sell it and that I was like... You know what It wasn't important for this body of work because it was just about material. It was years later that I started adding my identity. You just have to add your identity or whatever when it feels right, when you force it.

**[01:08:20.980] - Alex**

You don't even have to do anything with that. But if it does ever come, it'll feel natural.

**[01:08:29.150] - Joe**

What was your... What did you use as inspiration to create the first pieces? What were you thinking? How did you get into doing that once you suggested it?

**[01:08:40.910] - Alex**

I think I still started... I think I was actually really annoyed. I didn't say anything or I didn't... I think the bitchy gay side inside me said stuff. This is what I should have said. But I didn't say anything because it was in front of a class and whatever. But I think I actually started making even weirder stuff at this point, just as like a, Fuck you, or I do what I want to do when I do it how I want to do it. A lot of that work was terrible, but you have to find that on your own, and it has to be natural.

**[01:09:23.140] - Joe**

Yeah, that's the whole thing. That's how I feel about art by committee. It's like if it's being done by a committee of somebody saying it's not really your creativity because somebody is steering you, that doesn't work for me.

**[01:09:39.830] - Alex**



My work sometimes can be very Latin or very I actually should say Oaxaca, because it's a very specific region of Mexico informed. Sometimes it's very that, and then sometimes it's just barely there. So That's why the way that I work in Patrick is because everything's fragmented. Everything's in pieces and in scraps. I think that a lot of I think that my generation has this... These Latinos from my generation have this... We don't feel like we belong here or there, so we're always in this in-between space. Because, for example, my mom left Mexico in the '80s, and her mentality is still in that. That's something that I joke with my friends is whenever parents left, that's when they're... Even them, when they go back to Mexico, it's not the same for them anymore. They're stuck in a time. I haven't even know where I was going with it. But yeah, Going back, I feel like an outsider when I go back to Mexico to visit my mom's family, and I don't even feel like I'm part of that. I think that's why doing patchwork is because I take what I like from that and sew it on top.

**[01:11:17.270] - Alex**

Then I take what I like from growing up in Colorado and during my pseudo goth stage. Then I take from cartoons, and then I take from anime, and all these things that influence to shape what I am now, which I think that a lot of gay people do, too. They take what they like, and then we make a fabulous gown out of it. I don't know.

**[01:11:54.190] - Joe**

I'm really glad that we got to talk together and talk about our work and get to know each other a little bit.

**[01:12:12.210] - Alex**

Well, thank you for having me and for inviting me to your lovely Palm Springs home. It's really cute.

**[01:12:20.080] - Joe**

It's my little match box.