



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Moses Ros, 2020
August 28

This interview received Federal support from the Latino Initiatives Pool,
administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center.

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Moses Ros on August 28, 2020. The interview took place at Ros's home in the Bronx, New York, and was conducted by Fernanda Espinosa for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Pandemic Oral History Project.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Okay. Uh, hello, Moses. Uh, welcome. Um, thanks for joining us for this interview. This is interview for the Pandemic Project at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. And today is August 28th of, uh, 2020. Um, if you can start by introducing yourself, uh, and just let us know how you've been doing.

MOSES ROS: Okay. Well, my name is, you know, Moses Ros. I am a Latino artist living in New York, of Dominican descent. And, um, you know, it's been a challenge being cooped up at home and having limited contact with, uh, the outside world, and friends, and family. Um, but I've tried to adapt as best as I can to the situation and respond to the situation as well. So those are—that's what I've been, you know, working on, just adapting.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Okay. In, uh, in what ways have you adapted, both, uh, personally and in your—in your art, in your practice?

MOSES ROS: Uh, in my art and practice. I wanted—I responded to—well, I first started to respond by doing drawings, um, in a notebook which I have some examples here. So I'll show that because I think this is, uh, something that'll be, um, helpful. So you can see this one is, uh, is called *Sodis*, which is about social distancing and these figures in their bubbles so that everybody has to, you know, separate themselves from other people so that they don't get ill.

And then this one, um, called—uh, what is it called, *Shinpa*? Yeah, exactly, and that's, uh, sheltering at home, little houses there. Um, and then, of course, when the pause hit, I did *Pause On*. So you have a figure sort of between two portals sort of frozen in time there, you know, until we can get back into the groove of regular living.

And then, uh, this other—I have more, but this is a limited selection of *Vital*, or *Vital, Esse*, which, uh, means, like, essential worker. So that's an essential worker. They've been, uh, doing extraordinary work in this, uh, difficult time. So that's how I started, you know, black paper, red pencil, to the—uh, bring up the emotion of the moment.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah. Um, you mentioned earlier, before we were recording, that you've been fortunate to have your studio at home. Um, and right now you're in the Bronx, in your home. Um, how has that helped you, or how has that been, uh, for you during this time, being able to access your studio?

MOSES ROS: Well, that has been very, very good. You know, I'm so blessed to have that. Um, I just have my studio at home because it's just easier for me to get my work done. But, um, now, when I can't go out, it's perfect. And so I have everything here that I need. And I can, uh, produce work. I've done some other things as well, um, where, um, I've been part of, uh, an exhibition at, uh, Samford University in Alabama, that's up now, where they about—this was in relation to social justice. And I did a print which I can—I can show you if you want—oh, you do? Okay.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yes. That would be great. Thank you.

MOSES ROS: [Laughs] All right. No, no, because I'm just trying to, um, you know, make it more interesting. So here is the—is the print. And it's a, uh, kneeling figure, taking a knee. And then above it says class, and in the middle it's rays broken into two, and then the bottom is power. It's about starting the conversation how to address this, uh, situation that we're in. And when there was, uh, storefronts in downtown that were broken, they put up plywood, uh, to protect it, the artists went out and started doing, uh, work on these—on the plywoods. And this is *Taking a*

Knee, but he's like an Atlas. He has the weight of the world on his shoulders there. So that was that one.

And then there was a show over at the, uh, Sugar Hill Museum about social justice called *Black Is Beautiful*. And, uh, I did this painting on a plywood of that print. So I translated that print into this, uh, 8 by 4 foot, uh, painting.

[00:05:14]

Okay. So, um, those have been some of the things that have kept me going. Uh, those paintings are going—are in the window of the museum because the museum's closed right now. But you can access it from the street. And it's up, you know, 24/7, so people can still see art and at least reflect and have some culture in this—in this difficult time.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you so much for sharing that with us. Um, I'm wondering, um, what your observations are, um, about these issues that you're mentioning right now, uh, as well as the intersections between, you know, the crisis, uh, the pandemic crisis, um, and the levels of crisis around, uh, race, um, that we've been seeing in the last few months.

MOSES ROS: Well, it's—yeah. Well, I mean it's very difficult because I have lost, uh, some people to COVID. I mean just a couple of days ago, somebody passed away from COVID that had been in the hospital for a while. And, um, you know, learned of other people, family members, who have passed. Uh, and then when you see what's going on on the—uh, when you watch, uh, people being, uh, killed, uh, at the hands of police, uh, it's, you know, it's just a very, uh, dark time. So, uh, this helps me to sort of, uh, you know, cope with it, where I can express myself. And it helps me, you know, personally. And then I'm hoping that I can also, with that expression, help other people too that'll see that and maybe uplift them out of this darkness.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Um, and have you found any particular ways, um, in addition to the art, as ways of caring for yourself and, uh, the people around you?

MOSES ROS: Other ways? Um, well, I mean we're more doing things together, you know, uh, meals, and just, you know, my family members, you know, hanging out together, um, and doing things together as opposed to, you know—I'm a person that likes to go out places [laughs]. So now I'm very limited in doing that. So, uh, we're just very close to home, maybe take a walk to the park, uh, things like that, uh, very, very extremely local, uh, activities.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Um, and how has—you mentioned you're in the Bronx, um, and I know you work also a lot in that area. Um, what have you been seeing, uh, in your—in your area? And what conversations have come up, uh, with people around you?

MOSES ROS: Uh, in this area? Well, it's—uh, I've been talking to people, but, you know, everybody's wearing a mask, you know, like my neighbors. And everybody's sort of keeping their distance. So communication is not so easy between people too because you're, like, you have this mask on, and their voices are muffled, and you can't really understand all the time everything that's said. Um, but we're, you know, just, um, just waiting to get through this. We're hoping that, uh, you know, we'll, you know, see the light at the end of the tunnel, um, where—I mean people have been hopeful. And they've been—at least the people I've been with have been following the guidelines, you know, masks, social distancing, et cetera, washing your hands. So, um, they're following that science and hoping that we'll be able to get out of this thing, uh, you know, sooner than later.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah. Um, I want to, uh, go back a little bit to some of the works that you showed on the camera, um.

MOSES ROS: Okay.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And you mentioned there's a piece that you sent, uh, to an exhibition, um, the one that says race, I think it was.

MOSES ROS: Right. That's the print.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yes, the print.

MOSES ROS: It was, um—actually the name of that print is *Rebirth of Our Nation*. And it's a linoleum print. Here, let me see if I can—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah.

[00:10:03]

MOSES ROS: Okay. Yeah. And, um, you know, the figure's, you know, you know, taking a knee, but he has a heart in—uh, right on the chest showing that everything is coming from love, uh, and, you know, the opposite of hate, to try to bridge the gap that's going on right now and bring people together and not divide them. So these themes, you know, class, race, and power, need to be talked about and discussed, uh, between everyone so that we can understand and take action to better our society. Um, the letters, themselves, I purposely used like sort of graffiti-style letters as a more type of, uh, universal language, as graffiti is now global, and it comes from—it's like a grassroots, uh, movement that has gone global. And so, uh, I want it to be the language, uh, the expression to be universal. That's why I did it that way.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah. Thank you.

MOSES ROS: And then, I'm going to show you the other one again.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah.

MOSES ROS: So this one, just so you know, this painting is based on that print. So from that black and white print then I translated into a color painting and gave it a lot of energy and vitality, uh, and energy to that message.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MOSES ROS: Okay.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thanks. Um, I guess I'm thinking about, you know, there's so much content in those pieces, um, and also, um, I think imagination about what the future holds. I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit more about how you imagine things going forward, not just for the political moment, I guess, but also for your art?

MOSES ROS: Uh, well, right—I mean in terms of, um, the type of art I'm doing right now is because of what's going on in society. Uh, so it's very, uh, specific to that. Um, what I'm hoping is that it'll—eventually, things will, um, become more universal and not so specific to this situation. But the situation that's going on is—I don't know how to, uh, to say it, but it needs to be addressed. And, um, it's been—like, in terms of social justice, this has been going on for a long time. And, um, now people they were at home; they saw what was going on. And there was a reaction. And there's been global support, where people are, you know, uh, putting up signs of Black Lives Matter, you know, around the world. So it's not just in this country but around the world who are, um, doing this. And I'm hoping that there'll be more understanding and more, um, of trying to find solutions to that.

And in my work, I would like to express those solutions, you know, where people are united, uh, in harmony. I know it sounds a little idealistic, but ultimately, um, as human beings, as we see now, we're missing that social contact, and we really need one another. So that's the way humans are. And I'm hoping that they will—uh, they will, you know, people will be able to understand that and understand that we need to do better than what we have done in the past. And I hope my work will be able to respond to that, uh, that feeling.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah. Thank you so much, Moses. Um, is there anything that I didn't ask you today that you would like to, uh, record during this interview?

MOSES ROS: Um, Well, um, I don't know. I just have to, you know, experience the moment, you know. It's like we're living in this moment. And I'm responding to this moment. Um, and it's something that—that's the way, you know, I am. As an artist, uh, I want to reflect my times and hopefully make the world a better place through my work. Um, and that's what I'm trying to do. Like, you know, like with that colorful piece, I want to, you know, bring joy, even though it's a very, um, you know, serious subject matter. But I think we can still be, uh, you know, positive and, uh, look to a better future.

[00:15:17]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you so much.

MOSES ROS: Thank you. This is great.

[END OF ros20_1of1_digvid_m.mp4.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]