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‘Art Became a Form of Escapism for Me’: Watch How Video Games Inspire Jacolby Satterwhite’s Artistic Lexicon

As part of a collaboration with Art21, hear news-making artists describe their inspirations in their own words.

Caroline Goldstein, April 9, 2020



Production still from the Art21 "New York Close Up" film, "The Incredibility of Jacolby Satterwhite." © Art21, Inc. 2020.

How can we think about art at a time like this? The artist [Jacolby Satterwhite](#), who has survived cancer and lost his mother three years ago, might ask instead, how can we not?

The multidisciplinary artist’s practice has long been informed by his most personal experiences, including confronting his own mortality. In an exclusive [interview with Art21](#) filmed in February, ahead of his solo show at [Pioneer Works](#) in Brooklyn, [Satterwhite](#) explained that video games like *Final Fantasy* were escapes for him while he underwent cancer treatments as a child.

“I can see that as my natural lexicon as a creator,” he says in the episode of [Art21’s series *New York Close Up*](#). “Maybe I’ve been skeptical of my own mortality my whole life.”



Production still from the Art21 “New York Close Up” film, “The Incredulity of Jacob by Satterwhite.” © Art21, Inc. 2020.

As macabre as it might sound, that understanding has helped make Satterwhite more dedicated to his work, to “make myself witness these objects and say that I’m still here.”

In addition to using his late mother’s artworks as raw material for techno music videos, Satterwhite borrows from religious iconography often, returning to the themes of “regeneration, healing, and resurrection” and leaning into the rituals that are ingrained in belief systems.

In a current virtual exhibition, titled “[How Can We Think of Art at a Time Like This](#),” artists are reacting in real time to our current times by submitting their work to the online archive. On view there is [Satterwhite’s piece Avenue B](#), featuring videos based on the Nigerian Yoruba folklore rituals that combine dance, sculpture, costume, and durational performance to honor the matriarch.

For Satterwhite, world-building is a form of self-care. [Speaking to Art21](#) back in February, his words ring true today, “Art became a form of escapism for me to reroute my personal traumas. And now I think I’m trying to pursue something more present.”