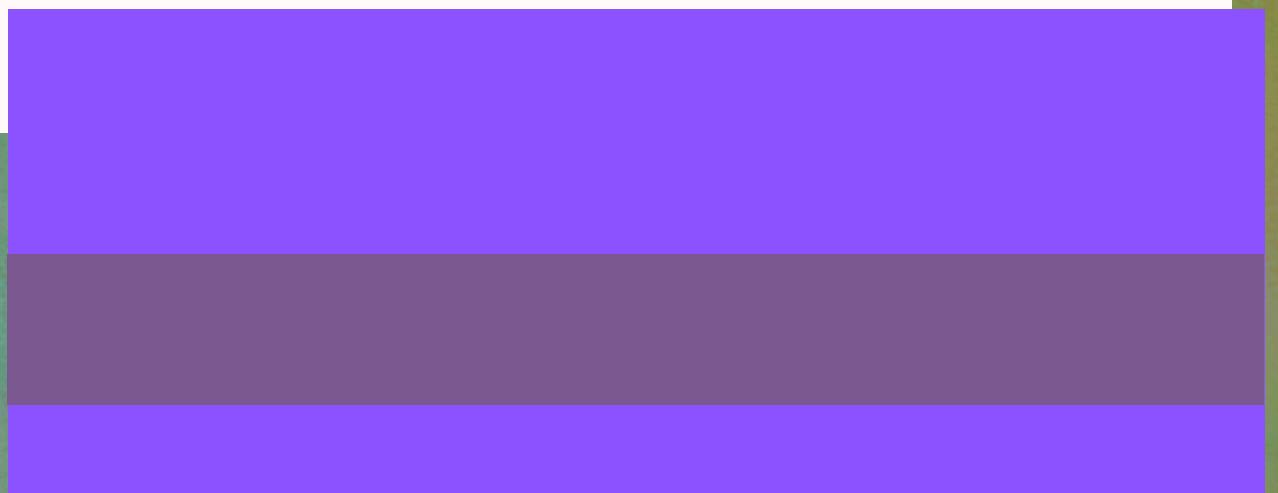


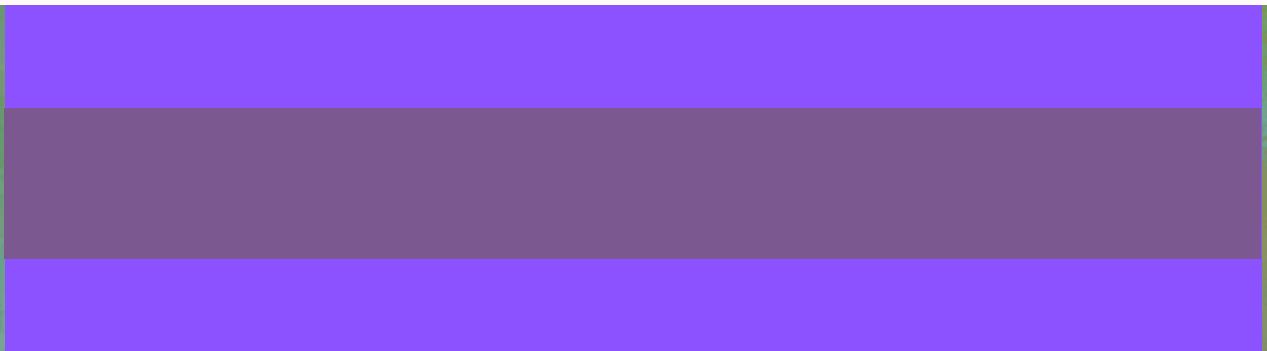
**(Sub)surface
art made accessible**



Have you ever thought about or imagined your life without one of our five senses? What things you wouldn't be able to experience or parts of life where you've essentially been forgotten? I actually think about this often, oddly, it's always hearing or sight I'm worried about. What would I miss because I can't hear beautiful songs or my son's voice or not being able to see my family evolve or sunset everyday. Those always are the things I think about most. But then you experience something for the first time that really shapes the way you view the world, and those unable to utilize their senses—and realize, we could all just be a bit more accommodating.

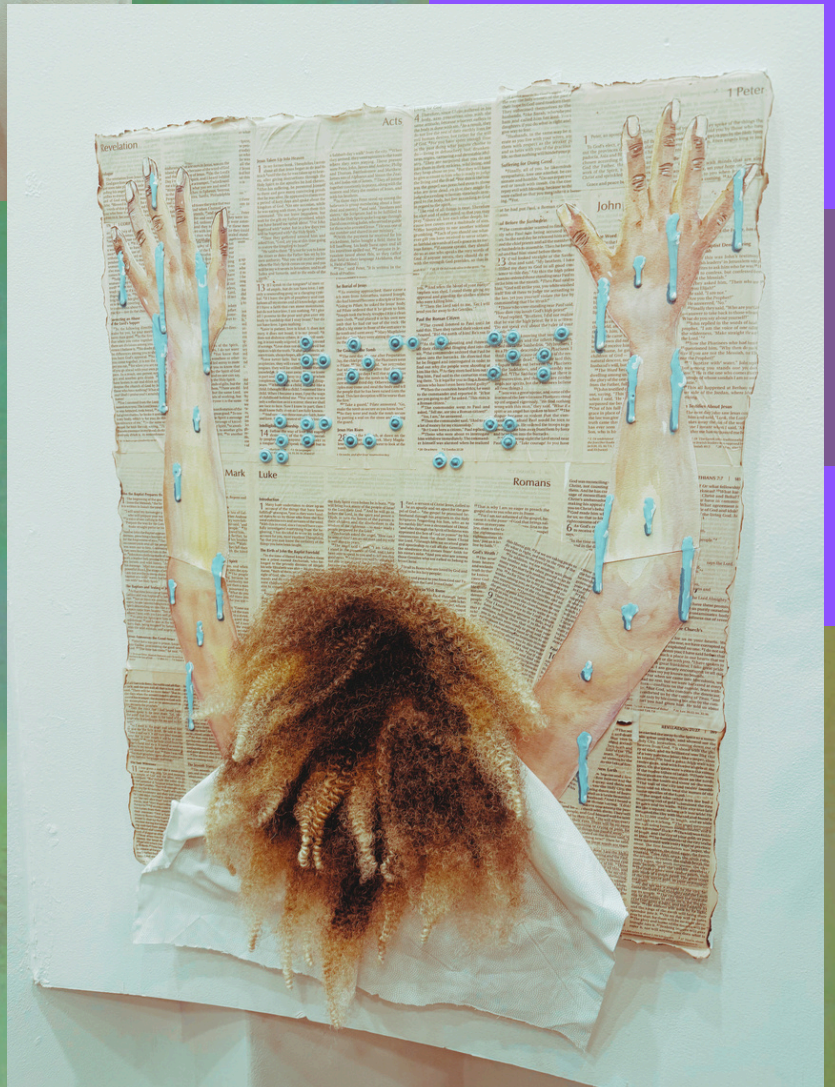
So it's September, so if you don't know, that means it's Design Core's Month of Design. This year, I celebrated the fact that one of my closest friends curated an art exhibition rooted in accessibility for the blind at Swords into Plowshares as part of Design Core's featured event series. This show then became the moment my view changed on how to "see" the world.

(Sub)surface, as described by the curator, is, "a space for exploring the arts beyond visuals, offering sighted people an opportunity to encounter different forms of engagement within the arts." The show featured 11 artists, using different mediums to create pieces that challenged them to add an element for the visually impaired to be able to experience an art gallery.



RENEWAL

Erin Palmore



“Within the show, I mentored 12 other artists so that they can understand how to create works of art that are accessible to people that cannot see using their eyes,”

curator of (Sub)surface, artist and educator Asia Dobbins shared with me. “I had a series of workshops.

In the first workshop, we talked about what a visual impairment actually entails and how other museums are implementing different aspects so that people with visual impairments can see and experience their works.”

She shared the second workshop included ways of which they could opt to be more accessible, such as alternative text, visual descriptions and the importance of including them in their work, which many were inspired by and understood how they could then change elements of their artistry.

I heard from several artists how challenging this was.

Many fully stepped out of their elements to create things they’d never done before. The show itself was extremely intentional and the artist and audience perfectly aligned.

Asia has worked in schools for years, been in school for quite some time and as long as I've known her been an artist. For a while I wasn't always sure of her medium, but it's always been tactile. A few years ago, she held her first art show, everything tangible and interactive, but what stood out then was my introduction into her world that believes deeply in art inclusion. That show, similar to this one, included multiple elements for sighted people.

**(Sub)surface
art made accessible**

How Do You Feel Miriam Uhura



Let's Build Something Together: The Strands Deja Jones



Centers Mass Mary Ciermerych

“It became my focal point when I was working in Ann Arbor public schools. At one point, I was a teacher's assistant, and I worked one on one with a student that had a visual impairment,” she shared. “I was a painter, and I was trying to figure out I was like, well, how can my student experience my work? And then I started experimenting with embroidering in my paintings, and then I took a class at Wayne State, where it was sculpture. I had no idea what that entailed. I first thought it was going to be like a ceramics class. And then we started doing castings and all this cool stuff,” including welding.

It was then when it clicked for her and to see the outcome honestly shifted things for me too. She goes back into her storytelling, “then I was like, wow, I can really make artwork that my student can see now. So then I started casting large scale braille. I started making things that had concepts directly tied to people with visual impairments, and then that's when I had a body of work.”

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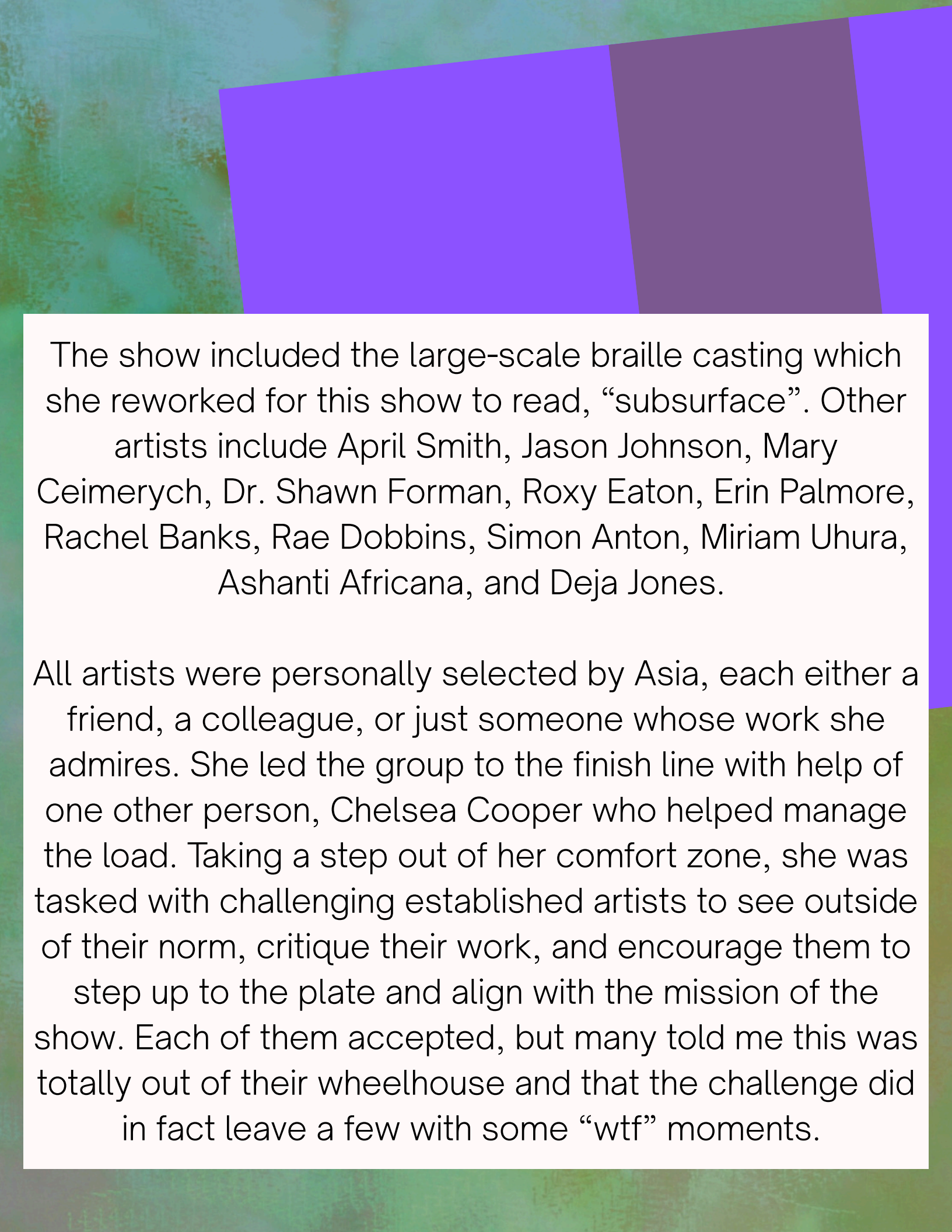
Rhythms You Can Feel

Shawnrenee

“These particular photographs come from South Africa in Cape Town, they are street performers and you can see their children. They are performing to make money for whatever reason, if it's for buying uniforms for school, buying books, taking care of their families, or buying food. And they were just, they were captivating.”

Shawnrenee





The show included the large-scale braille casting which she reworked for this show to read, “subsurface”. Other artists include April Smith, Jason Johnson, Mary Ceimerych, Dr. Shawn Forman, Roxy Eaton, Erin Palmore, Rachel Banks, Rae Dobbins, Simon Anton, Miriam Uhura, Ashanti Africana, and Deja Jones.

All artists were personally selected by Asia, each either a friend, a colleague, or just someone whose work she admires. She led the group to the finish line with help of one other person, Chelsea Cooper who helped manage the load. Taking a step out of her comfort zone, she was tasked with challenging established artists to see outside of their norm, critique their work, and encourage them to step up to the plate and align with the mission of the show. Each of them accepted, but many told me this was totally out of their wheelhouse and that the challenge did in fact leave a few with some “wtf” moments.



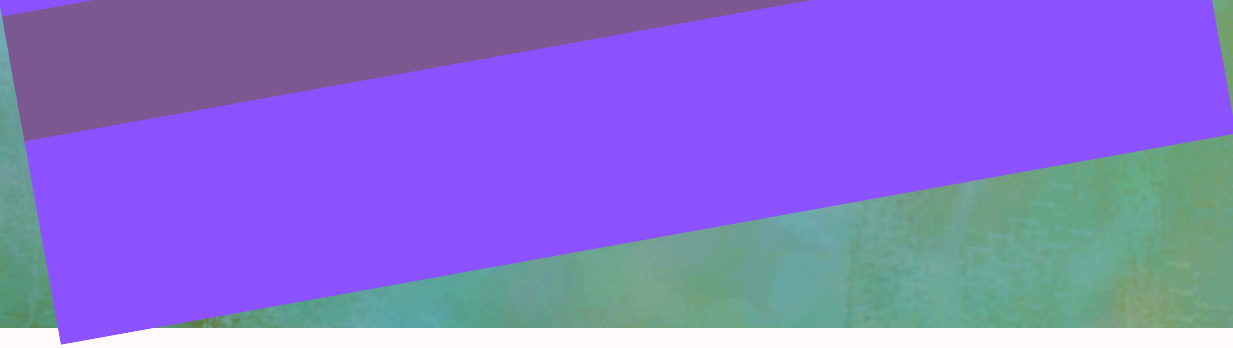
**What Needs To Be Done
Ashanti Africana**



**(Sub)Surface
Asia Dobbins**



**Stunted Development
Roxy Eaton**



But overall, once it was all said and done, opening day was something special. Each artist succeeded in making their work accessible. The audience, full of visually impaired people who had the opportunity to interact with art via braille, audio elements, smells and touch. Though many stepped out of their bounds, their work seemed to have been made with such intent you'd never think they'd touched some of the materials for the first time.

Each piece was accompanied by braille cards, matching the typical museum cards displaying artist name, title of the works, and the mediums used. I'd catch Asia giving tours, holding hands, walking with and helping throughout the evening. And that student that sparked her curiosity, made his way with his family to feel the show.

Additionally, on September 24 from 6-9PM there will also be an artist talk featuring those included in the show. The exhibition will be on display until October 24, with the closing reception held that evening at 6PM. For more information visit: www.sub-surface.co/

“It's plastic from a toy factory in Michigan, and the pieces that they didn't want to use, they shred up and then they can't make it into toys again. So I get all kinds of recycled plastic and I try to melt it into new things, like turn it into art, transform it into art or design objects.

This is a sculpture that can be moved around, and there are all these different little pieces that can be reconnected with these smooth brass, so you can literally transform this. I wanted people to be able to interact with it and kind of be part of the art making. I wanted it to be, you know, tactile, but also to be able to be interactive with.

[Asia] really pushed me, she's great. She did such a good job as the curator. I've been making a lot of work like this for the wall. So it'll just be mounted to the wall. And this is the first time making a sculpture and the first time it can be moved around. So the whole sculpture can change forms and grow into it like a new shape.”

Simon Anton



Plasti-Play
Simon Anton

“This is my piece called Bonfire. When she first approached me with the idea of doing this event I was kind of back and forth about what I would do. Typically, I'm a photographer and I do oil paintings. So like, how do you do some artwork that will engage the sensors, with sight, sound, taste, smell, and all that? And I kept having different ideas and I kept changing my mind. Nothing felt really strong enough for me. But then she had posed this question it was like, “how do you want to feel? But how do you want people to feel when they engage in your artwork?” And with that, the idea of ‘I want people to feel a sense of warmth, some community. I want some solitary moments.’ Reflection is a big point when driving, for instance, my artwork.

So when thinking about all these things, it's kind of hitting me for a bonfire, because one, I just love bonfires. So I want to create an insulation-curated space that symbolizes what a bonfire would be. So [it]] smells like a bonfire. If you listen close, you can kind of hear the wood crackling and some outside noises. There's some embers down there but it's not real fire. It's not really burning but it's lit up. But I did burn the wood, and that's what gives you the scent.

And to keep it more artsy and surreal, I chose to color the walls orange because it gives you that warm bonfire kind of mood. And then there's this play of juxtaposition with the wood in the bonfire. So you see there's like a tree inside of the bonfire burning old dead wood. And the idea for that was when you're in a reflective mode, you kind of think a lot, you have a bunch of different ideas, so the tree kind of represents all the ideas that you have when you're reflecting your wing, or just like the new life that happens when you're with community, you guys like sharing drinks and stories just around a bonfire.

Jason Johnson

Bonfire

Jason Johnson

