



ART

INCONVERSATION

TAMARA GONZALES
with Raymond Foye and
Peter Lamborn Wilson

Tamara Gonzales is a painter who came of age in the 1990s Williamsburg milieu. Her colorful paintings are created using lace as a stencil or mask for overlapping layers of patterns. Her solo show of paintings and textiles, *Ometeotl*, is currently on view at Klaus von Nichtssagend (through February 12). She met with Raymond Foye and Peter Lamborn Wilson to discuss these new pieces, her bohemian childhood, and the role of magic in her art.

Raymond Foye: When did you first see art as offering an alternative lifestyle?

Tamara Gonzales: I think I was just doing it already, and somebody pointed out that I was “artistic.”

Foye: Jean Genet said, when asked when he decided to become a writer, “the day I was born.”

Gonzales: Being the “creative one” in the family, when a job came up that needed to be done—whether it was making a garden sign or decorating a cake, they’d tell me to do it. But, I clearly remember the moment when I stood in front of a painting and started crying and I knew I was an artist. I just didn’t know what that meant or how to get there.

Peter Lamborn Wilson: What painting was it?

Gonzales: I was on my first trip to Paris. I had one week and 200 dollars. It was 1983. It sounds so obvious—it was van Gogh’s *Starry Night*! [Laughter.] The 1888 version now at the Musée d’Orsay. My friend Karen had gone to the Alliance Française in New York and was a real Francophile. She gave me a guided tour, explaining Impressionism, Post-Impressionism—neither of which I knew anything about. When we got to the van Gogh’s, I just burst into tears.

I’ve visited the van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam several times now and I’m still fanning out. Doesn’t matter how many umbrellas, coffee cups, or other reproductions I’ve digested, the originals still thrill me. Now I can only imagine and smile at being twenty-three and seeing a room full of Van Gogh’s for the first time. I might as well have found El Dorado.

Foye: What did it represent for you?

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Gonzales: It was like, *this is my tribe*. This is what I want to be, how I feel—realizing there were so many painters, so much art. I felt that I could look at the entire history of the world through art instead of war, which was up until that trip how I had been taught to view history.

Wilson: Growing up, did you have any creative influences?

Gonzales: I did, but not from art. We were way in the country, in Madera, California—the central valley. As kids if we wanted to play, we'd have to make it up—just having to go out into the yard to play with our friends. We had to make a fort if we wanted it. Boredom was really the impetus.

Wilson: There are so many kinds of boredom; some are very fecund.

Gonzales: In hindsight it was a good thing. It was great until puberty—having a snail farm is fun until you're about nine. [*Laughter.*] Also my grandmother Anne was very creative, in the crafting sense. Lots of DIY in the house.

Foye: Once you told me some things about your mother that really stuck in my head—she was an amazing person. Can you talk a little about your mother and how she influenced your childhood?

Gonzales: My mother married young, at sixteen or seventeen. She met my father, fell in love, and wanted to leave home. Her marriage lasted a couple of years, and when they split up we moved back to her parents' house in Madera. Madera was just too small for her mind so we went to San Francisco, which is three hours north. According to her, she had gone to San Francisco a little too late for the bohemians and a little too early for the hippies. This is 1962 – 65. I went with her, and I don't remember many details, except that she lived with Shig Murao, the manager of City Lights Books. As she tells it they met in the bookstore when she was “borrowing” books.

Foye: He was a hugely important person in that scene—were you in his apartment on Grant Avenue and Union?

Gonzales: We lived upstairs, but I don't remember the street. I do remember when I was four or five they tried to get me to eat sushi, and I wasn't having it. [*Laughter.*] Anyway, it was a very playful time. We had a small monkey named Ruka—probably illegal now, with good reason. We fed it moths and fruit. My mother's lifestyle was absolutely horrifying to her mother, so when it came time for first grade, my grandmother stepped in and took over my welfare. It worked out well, because my mom had met someone new and ended up riding a motorcycle to New York City. She later told me they went to Max's Kansas City a lot. This was 1966. Myself, I'm happy that my early years were spent in a rural farming area. I got to grow up outside.



Tamara Gonzales, *untitled*, 2015. Colored pencil on paper. 15 x 11 inches. Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York.

My grandmother quickly enrolled me in Catholic school, and I was there until eighth grade. After that I moved to New York City. By then my mother was very into Reichian therapy—this is 1973 or '74. We all went to Reichian therapy and slept under orgone blankets, which were so uncomfortable. There was a half-built orgone box in an extra room. That's one reason I loved first encountering Mike Kelley's work, which, among other things, made good use of Reich as source material. She was also very involved with the scene around the occult bookstore, Magickal Childe. She became a pagan and was part of the Wiccan community. Our bible was Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* and *Isis Unveiled*.

Wilson: Did she work at Magickal Childe?

Gonzales: She did some work in the back room and in our house. It's kind of funny because as a teenager I found it so embarrassing—there is my mom and her friends sitting in the living room doing occult rituals *skyclad* [nude]—like, *oh my god!* And now that's basically what I'm doing. Her own creativity really came out in her lifestyle. She started a bakery to support us.

Foye: The bakery was a storefront?

Gonzales: Yeah it was on the Upper West Side. We basically made pastries for restaurants, in a little shop on Amsterdam between 79th and 80th Streets. It was called “Desserts by Michelle.” By day I would be decorating and delivering cakes, and at night I would use the delivery van to move Tish and Snooky's or Cheetah Chrome and the Casualties' equipment to different music venues.

Foye: Were you going out in the punk scene then?

Gonzales: This is my relationship to the punk thing: after the tenth grade I got really into Kriya yoga and disappeared for two years. It was really a good cult with a real cult setting—no TV, no movies, no extra stimulus from mainstream culture.

Wilson: Where was that?

Gonzales: That was in the Imperial Valley, California. By day I dressed in a sari, and by night worked as a nurse's aide.

Foye: That was young to be into yoga in such an intense way.

Gonzales: At the time that was the only way to learn yoga. You found a teacher and followed him or her. There weren't any drop-in hatha yoga classes at the Y. If you didn't find a teacher you couldn't really learn much. There were a couple of books available that described the postures, and many of my friends and I started with those, but as far as the meditation or *pranayama*—not so much. At one point, we were trying to recreate this utopian place I imagined existed in India. The guru, Yogi Ramaiah, would come and it would work, and then the guru would leave and, like, the cows would break free. We learned great yoga but there were a lot of comedic episodes around actually running this ashram—as one could imagine. We were trying hard to do it right. We were extreme too: fasting, keeping silence, and conducting mantra *yagnas*—three-day rituals around the fire. After about two years, I decided I didn't want to keep doing it.

Foye: That is a long time when you're that young.

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Gonzales: I'm forever grateful for those two years. I poke fun, but I'm grateful for the character building and the yoga. When I came back I had a nose ring, and met Tish and Snooky; I looked around and saw some other pierced people and thought I should really move in that direction. That meant below 14th Street to CBGB, the Mudd Club, and of course, Max's Kansas City. I called it the Bermuda Triangle. I was fortunate to be friends with Tish and Snooky, owners of Manic Panic, and amazing performative artists themselves. They were downtown royalty so I was able to immediately go to all the cool places. I mean, in Imperial [Valley], I had really dropped off the planet. Tish and Snooky were instrumental in creating the New York Punk look. I tried for purple hair then, but all the bleaching was too time-consuming.

While my downtown friends were all rooted in Wicca, my mother had met a *babalawo*, a priest, from Cuba—so her magic was really moving towards the Cuban Santerian tradition. That was my first introduction to the *orishas*. My mom was like, *I need to get my kids their warriors*—the protective *orisha* beads. Seems like we were all into candles, tarot, and magick though.

Wilson: Did you do the whole thing? Dressed in white for a year?

Gonzales: That is only if you're going to make the Saint. Just getting your warriors and *Elegua* is one thing, but if you take a specific *orisha*, then you have to do the year. I thought about it, but I didn't want to shave my hair off. Someone told me, "maybe you're Oyá [Yansá]," which is the only *orisha* you don't have to shave your head for.

Foye: It sounds like you were naturally comfortable with all of these things—you were clearly seeking, but you weren't lost. You're in these extreme places and experiencing them in a very full way.

Gonzales: I think they all contributed to that sense of self now, but in my twenties I was much more lost, and I think that was because I wasn't making art yet. I wasn't calling myself an artist, so I was still in that uncomfortable area where I knew I had creative purpose but I didn't know how to express myself.

Foye: Were you aware of the galleries in New York yet?

Gonzales: I was not. I was with musicians. We'd go to the Mudd Club at about midnight, and some art thing would have happened earlier. We were getting there for the music stuff and it was really late—seems like the art stuff happened earlier in the evening. That said, now I look at some of my work and I think "Keith Haring," so of course one is always absorbing.

Foye: When I would go to CBGB or the Mudd Club I'd be out until 4:00 in the morning, go home to sleep and then be up for work at 9:30 a.m.

Gonzales: Yeah, the triangle. When I'd go out, I'd start getting dressed at 9:00 p.m. and then leave the house at 11:00 p.m. and then at 4:00 a.m. go to an afterhours, and get home at 6:00 a.m., and struggle awake at 2:00 p.m. so I could get to the bakery and decorate the cakes for the next day. I digress. The first time I started going to galleries was 1986 or 1987. I was twenty-seven and I had started taking art classes at Parsons, and one of the teachers said, "go see galleries!" That meant going to SoHo.

Wilson: Did becoming more involved with art relate to the spiritual side of your life?

Gonzales: It did. I had to kick a bad cocaine habit, like a lot of New York in 1983—turns out cocaine is really addictive and we didn't think it is. [Laughter.] Having gone through that process meant changing my habits, which meant not being in a music scene that started at midnight. I was living a relatively quiet life on the Upper West Side decorating cakes, probably depressed as hell and not realizing it. I wasn't doing anything "spiritual"—I wasn't doing any yoga, but I did start taking art classes. I started taking a figurative drawing class at the Art Students League. You could drop in there for ten dollars. Eventually, I enrolled in an adult degree

program at Parsons. My first art teacher was Joe Fyfe—he was teaching "Design Objectives." Since he himself is a painter, that meant we were being exposed to problem solving mostly on a picture plane. The next class I took with him was "collage." We are still friends today. At the end of the semester you bring your work in for your one-on-one review. I laid my stuff out and Joe just said, "what happened to you?" [Laughter.] I guess at that point I was still waiting for someone to tell me I was an artist—or to get over confirmation of talent or something. In a sort of backhanded way I got that, because he assumed I'd been making art for a lot longer than I had. He thought I had been to art school as an undergrad and came back after five or six years. He thought I knew more than I did about art, which to me was a kind of recognition.

Foye: Did you feel that you were waiting for something to be conferred upon you to become an artist?

Gonzales: Yes I think I did. I wanted somebody to say, it's O.K., you can keep doing this." This gets into the discussion of "talent": I had the view of art that you had to have talent to get in. And that brings up the question of: just who is the judge of talent? I was just learning to broaden my understanding of everything that makes up art. Ann Ledy was also instrumental in my education. She let me sit in on her foundation figure drawing classes and taught painting in her studio. She brought a group of us to Greece. This was a couple of years before she became head of the painting department at Parsons. Meeting Chris Martin had a huge impact on me. He just made me feel like, "you are what you are, and nobody can give you that, or take it away from you."

Foye: He's had that effect on so many people I know, especially through his teaching. Francesco Clemente says that painting is the "last oral tradition we have in the West." Did you have a feeling that these forces and energies you were searching for all came together at that point in art?

Gonzales: I feel like those energies have come together now. At that time they were acting on me but, frustratingly, just beyond my conscious grasp. I've had exactly two formal painting courses in my life: "Painting I" and "Painting II" at Parsons. Those teachers taught me things like: you can lay out your palette out this way. You can mix in this kind of medium if you want it to be runny; you can add turpentine. They taught me mechanical stuff. I realized that I had all these ideas conceptually that I could bring into a painting—I didn't need to figure out "what" to paint.

Foye: Does that mean there wasn't a strong art-consciousness in your work at the time, but that it was more coming from personal impulses and things you had experienced? Like from yoga and magic?

Gonzales: Completely, like the arrangement of the altars in the house. *Botanicas* were a huge influence—in the '70s on the Upper West Side there were so many of them. The windows always had these eclectic, elaborate displays, so even if you never went inside the shop, you were still treated to the imagery. Likewise Hindu altars and the *pujas* we did in the ashram were also huge influences—my mother's books on Kabbalah, tarot, and magic...



Tamara Gonzales, *I Am the Hummingbird*, 2016. Acrylic and spraypaint on canvas. 77.25 x 60 inches. Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York.

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Foye: Once you started going to galleries, was Philip Taaffe someone whose work you responded to?

Gonzales: Yes, very much. His work was some of the first I saw when I started to go to galleries in the '80s. I've been a fan ever since. He was also the first artist I saw using patterns. When I first began using lace for pattern in my own work, I instantly thought of Philip. Also Judy Pfaff. I also remember seeing an important show at the Whitney, in the building that is now the Met Breuer. One floor was Agnes Martin and one floor was Jean-Michel Basquiat. I left there like a tuning fork that couldn't be tuned because I loved them both equally. When you're a young artist you're constantly thinking about who you are and where you're going to land—I was asking myself, "am I a minimalist or a maximalist?" I had the heart of a minimalist but I've always loved *stuff* too much.

Foye: When does Chris Martin enter this timeline?

Gonzales: 1994 – 95. New York was starting to get expensive in the late 1980s and I wanted to move someplace where I could have a studio. I had never been to Brooklyn at that point. I'd never heard of the L train. [Laughter.] A friend, Angela Wyman, convinced me to move to Williamsburg. Pierogi Gallery was down the street, on North 9th. I met Chris there, over the flat files. It had just opened and was more like an artist collective—not yet part of the commercial gallery system. I was looking for a recommendation to Yaddo, and Chris assured me he knew *lots* of people who had been to Yaddo. We exchanged contact information. We ended up going on a date—going to see Ken Butler play music at the Kitchen. He was an artist living in Williamsburg playing crazy instruments that he made. They were musical sculptures. Chris came to my house, looked at my work, and was very enthusiastic, and so we really started an art conversation. I was painting *shiva lingams*, like big egg shapes, and Chris was like, "Oh, you're painting abstract!" That LACMA catalogue by Maurice Tuchman, *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 – 1985* was my first birthday gift from Chris. When I first saw his work, he was painting in black and white exclusively. They were huge—no one was making anything like that at that point—big, heroic abstractions. I instantly felt at home, thrilled—I *loved* his work. Then it became *romantic*—I took him to the Day of the Dead in Mexico and he started painting in color. [Laughter.]

Foye: So we're at a point where the art and magic were merging into one thing. When did that happen? Did you have to make a conscious decision?

Gonzales: When I moved to Williamsburg I decided that everything I was going to do for the rest of my life was to support my vision of making art. From that point on, art was going to come first. Planning your vacation now meant scheduling studio time. Or if I went to Mexico for the Day of the Dead, it was to see things that were coming up in my work—trying to discover where the work is and why. It was the same thing with going to Haiti. In 1998 I saw *The Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* show at the Museum of Natural History, and they had these big Vodou altars and Chris was like, "you've got to go look at this stuff in Haiti; these look like your apartment right now!"

Wilson: When you went to Haiti did you go through an initiation?

Gonzales: I went to Haiti and did Kanzo, a Vodou initiation where you spend five days in a *djevo*, a small ceremonial room. I had, after all, made the promise to follow my art.

Foye: How did you find out about that?

Gonzales: It was one of the synchronistic things. I had met someone at that *Sacred Art* show at the Museum of Natural History and we started talking. She said, "I go to Jacmel, I take a group there to study Vodoun. She said "studying," which really meant you go through an initiation.

Foye: You're searching out imagery, learning about a code of imagery, and symbolism from various traditions, but you also have your own personal imagery and symbolism developing, and they become merged in your work. Is that about a universality of images? Or some psychic, subconscious state?

Gonzales: Both. I definitely think there's recognition of a universal aspect. Part of that is being in America where a lot of these things, these traditions, are blended through various diaspora.

Wilson: Right, it's impossible to try to have an American culture if you're going to narrow it down to mutually exclusive identities. The good part of American culture is *syncretism*; it's not based exclusively on European culture, but is mixed and mingled with Native American, African, and other immigrant cultures. Why did we start having Zen Buddhism in the '60s? Largely because of Japanese and Chinese people coming here. That to me is a brilliant aspect of American culture that seems to be under attack now, from the left as well as the right. It upsets me a great deal.

Gonzales: Me too. As a culture we are certainly not going to be remembered for the treatment of our indigenous peoples. I was also just following my interests. I have more fun participating in a ritual than reading about it. For some people, studying it is enough. Or just being attracted to the visual aspects is enough. For me, if I was attracted to using the imagery, I wanted to have a first-hand experience of how and what it was originally used for. But I don't think that necessarily makes the art better or mean more than if I weren't participating in the ritual aspects of it. I mean I'm not interested in being crucified yet, I just like to use crosses.

Wilson: I'm not sure about that. There is a very negative aspect to certain kinds of cultural appropriation. Syncretism does not mean appropriation. There is also a phony way of doing it. I think Native Americans in particular have a right to be offended by people who *steal* their religion—as opposed to honestly experiencing it. It's often been pointed out that many Native American traditions are family traditions, clan traditions, and unless you are adopted into the family or clan, you don't have a right to it. From that point of view alone there is clearly such a thing as misappropriation. But, without cross-cultural influences, American culture would be nothing. That's what I like about Hoodoo—it's got *everything* in it. It's so *American*, because it's made of European, African, Indian, and Chinese symbols and beliefs, that intertwine and build on each other. It's the best version of what America can be.

Gonzales: I agree, it's a balancing act. You want to keep the classical, as one root, and have respect for the beauty of that particular cultural contribution. But then, I support not freezing a culture, especially if it's not mine, in some attempt to keep it pure. There can be a beauty in how something is re-interpreted, maybe even degraded, assimilated, and re-presented. It must be similar to language. Now I cringe at words like "purity." I'm a huge fan of anime and I've always wondered if the big eyes so ubiquitous to the style may have sprung from all of the Keane paint by number kits that I had as a child. I'd like to check the "Made in Japan" production timeline.



Tamara Gonzales, *untitled*, 2016. Alpaca and wool. 36.5 x 23.5 inches. Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York.

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Wilson: I just got in the mail today the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*—a European book of magical *grimoires* that has been totally adopted into Hoodoo. Purists reacted to this with horror, saying you have to worship African *orishas* under their African forms, that you can't have Catholic saints mixed in. Those arguments don't impress me; it reminds me too much of fundamentalism. In any religion fundamentalism goes against the spirit.

I'm sure your familiar with "ayahuasca art"—do you feel your work moves in any sense in that direction?

Gonzales: Maybe. Generally I feel what's generally associated with "ayahuasca art" is really an illustrative look at the "DMT world" or, the visual aspects of ayahuasca. There's a lot that goes on with ayahuasca—there's a type of "life review." Having done nine-day Vipassana retreats, it's similar to that, but you do it all in one night, in a few hours. There is a similar, intense experience of not-escaping oneself—of really experiencing the habits of your mind. You can go way out into the cosmos but you're always coming back in through your self. If you are a skilled draftsman you can illustrate those visions—if not then you can find some other way to express it. In my own work I try to let the images function on more than one level of seeing and not be so descriptive as to rule out another interpretation. I think I'm saying that I'm from the school of "look at a stain on the wall long enough and your mind will make up an image."

Wilson: I didn't mean simply illustrating a vision, although a lot of ayahuasca imagery does seem to be like that; I meant like getting something out of it, through art.

Gonzales: Yes—for instance in the indigenous communities that have worked with ayahuasca, especially the Shipibo, the textiles are completely and beautifully reflective of that. In the West a lot of people draw beautiful, surreal, landscapes which can also be part of the experience. For myself, in the last four years, it's shown up in the work. I was already working with pattern and the more abstract to blocky-figurative shapes that have become more animated came directly out of my ayahuasca experiences. They don't look exactly like what I saw, but they are reflective of the energy and feeling I remember seeing. Those shapes also come from a box stencil I was working with. Using the box made me feel a connection to

Foye: The first art of yours that I saw were the dense patterned textile-related works and I related it to William Burroughs's paintings. For Burroughs the spirits emerged from the paint, and he would look at a painting from very far back and then he'd go up to it about six inches away and he'd point out things that were happening on a microscopic level. It's funny because I think his aesthetic really comes out of *yagé*. Henri Michaux said, "what's interesting about the drug experience is not what happens, but what you do with it"—how you integrate it into your life. Do you find that to be the case?

Gonzales: Completely. I'm very grounded. For me to be able to channel the immense energy that becomes available with these medicines I stay sober. One might use these experiences to try and escape one's self, but that is futile—actually impossible.

Wilson: A Sufi once said to me, "if a tiger is chasing you, escapism makes good

Gonzales: Good advice. I have to agree! But can the tiger escape itself?

Foye: What does the sketchbook represent for you, in terms of the work?

Gonzales: They're often way ahead of where the work is going. But I don't realize it when I'm doing it. When I'm working in my sketchbook generally I'm not in the studio—lately it's been when I've been in Peru with limited materials. If I ever feel stuck in the studio, going through old sketchbooks is a great way to get started again.

Foye: Can you describe the new textile works that you're doing with weavers in Peru?

Gonzales: I was doing sketches for these semi-figurative works in between ayahuasca ceremonies. When I returned to New York these sketchbooks would be my starting point for making paintings. The famous Pisac archeological site, an Incan sun temple, Intihuatana, sits high above the town. On several of these trips a group of us would visit the site. It's a hike, so we would take a taxi to the top and save our energy for exploring the site. The ritual stone, the *Inti Watana*, in the Quechua language, is an astronomical clock located at the top. There are many other structures peppered over the mountain and stunning views of the valley. It takes a little over an hour to walk down the steep trail from the top of the mountain and the road empties out into the Pisac market. As I came down the mountain I walked by a weaving school and it just clicked: "What if I could get someone to weave some of my images?" So I went in and talked to Raul Quispe Rodriguez. He is the weaver and an artist in his own right. He was willing to facilitate. The next time I went to Peru I brought some reproductions of my work. We started the process and I have about twenty now. The tapestries I'm showing at Klaus von Nichtssagend gallery actually look like my paintings—there's a link they were able to successfully translate. They're hand-loomed by Raul and then embroidered in a traditional manner in his birthplace city Ayacucho—it's a traditional process just not traditional imagery.

Wilson: A friend of mine who is an anthropologist has done a great deal of work with ayahuasca, he's very upset about Westerners who don't really know what they are doing trying to set up their own ayahuasca workshops and rituals. He feels the whole tradition is in danger.

Gonzales: The whole ayahuasca ceremony has suddenly gone out into the world and it's changed. I have seen that happen with yoga—there's the good, the bad, the ugly, and hopefully the good again. Much like "yoga teacher training," I know we're a minute away from "ayahuasca shaman training." Maybe one is happening right now! Honestly your friend has a right to be horrified, as an anthropologist. I'm worried about the conservation of the plants. So many Westerners are smudging themselves with Palo Santo, it's becoming hard to get. Everything is so affected by voracious consumption within our culture. It seems like some trial by fire a teaching has to go through. The fashion part of this will no doubt move on soon and I don't think we'll ever be having any *aya* ceremonies at the Y. But there is a *need*, and a real demand here for these kinds of experiences, which I believe is positive.

Wilson: A traditional society buoys up, like an ocean, the spiritual tradition. When you take away the social, economic, and ecological background, you're left with these spiritual traditions that are like balloons floating across a landscape with no connection. And if anybody pops the balloon that's it, there's nothing to fall back on. That's what happened to all these gurus in the '70s that came here



Tamara Gonzales, *untitled*, 2016. Alpaca and wool. 35 x 27 inches. Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York.



Tamara Gonzales, *untitled*, 2015. Colored pencil on paper. 15 x 11 inches. Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York.

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thinking that they were the tradition and it turned out not to be the case—the tradition was the tradition. The gurus are just representative of it and if they take themselves out of that milieu they are in a very perilous situation.

Foye: What do you see young artists doing and what would you recommend to them that might be useful?

Gonzales: Have life experiences—it all goes into the work.

Foye: You've gotta have something to write about, to paint about.

Gonzales: Right. Art school was so much fun, it seemed like a vacation from my life—a pleasure. I'm a huge fan of modernism and I was able to rub shoulders with other artists and learn about materials and art history. But the idea that then you come out and you're making art about the previous art—I don't think that is all of it. The real zeitgeist is out in the world. It's only through lived experience that one can get to it. Travel has been hugely important to me. If you don't see how other people in the world are living, you don't know if what you're being taught is valid. How other people are surviving and why maybe a country is angry at their resources being stolen. People need fresh water, food. By traveling you see that humanity is connected and it's not such an obscure thought. Of course traveling far from where one is may not be possible, but it's always possible to move out from the habitual. I think of Joseph Cornell traveling from Queens to Manhattan.