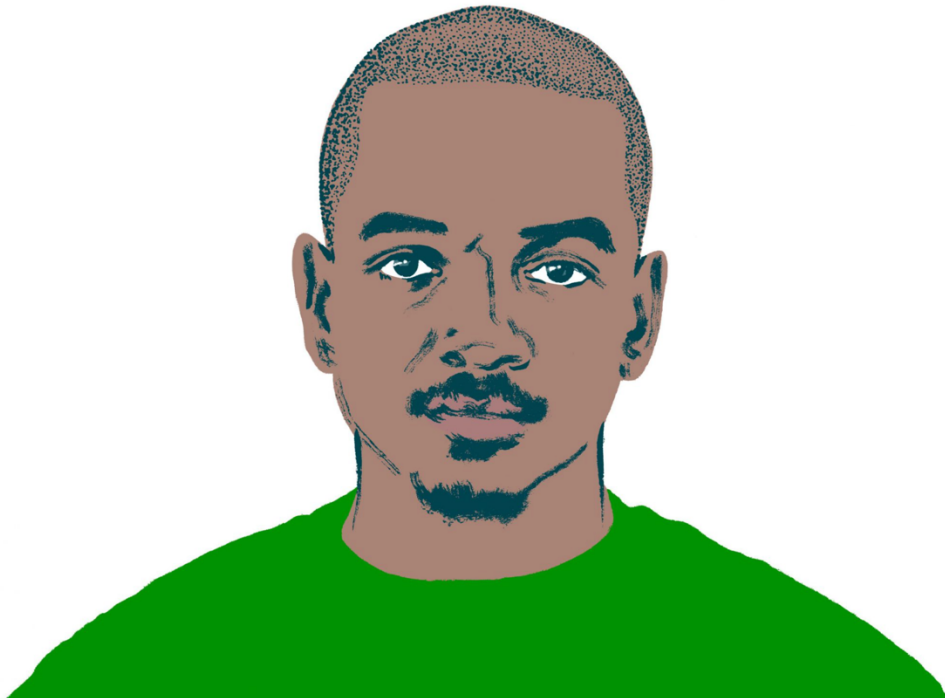


Time. Sensitive

Episode 92: Samuel Ross on the Art of “Awakening” Materials

By Spencer Bailey
June 7, 2023



The term “polymath” is unquestionably overused, and often just plain wrong, but it suits the multi-hyphenate British designer, creative director, and artist Samuel Ross, whose hard-to-pin-down practice spans high fashion, streetwear, painting, sculpture, installation, stage design, sound design, product and furniture design, experimental film, and street art. Ross himself speaks of his work as being situated along a “teetering edge” of sorts. Born in Brixton, London, to second-generation Windrush parents of Caribbean descent, he has always existed between worlds.

Best known for founding the Brutalism-tinged fashion label A-Cold-Wall, which sits at the nexus of streetwear and high fashion, and for his work, earlier in his career, with the late Virgil Abloh, Ross also runs the industrial design studio SR_A and has collaborated

Bailey, Spencer.
“Samuel Ross on the Art of ‘Awakening’ Materials.”
7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

with brands including Nike, Converse, and Timberland. At just 32 years old, he has an honorary doctorate from the University of Westminster in London (he is the youngest person to ever be awarded this distinction), and has work in the permanent collections of Dallas Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and London's Victoria and Albert Museum, the latter of which presented an exhibition of his fashion work last year. Through his Black British Artist Grants program, he provides a platform, resources, and funding to young and unsung creators across fashion, art, illustration, industrial design, architecture, and photography. Several of his design pieces are currently on view in "Coarse," his first solo exhibition at New York's Friedman Benda gallery (through June 17), and he also recently created a series of abstract works for "Land," a solo presentation at London's White Cube gallery.

On the episode, Ross talks about notions of ritual, essence, and alchemy; how his work straddles the line between the organic and the synthetic; and why he always thinks in threes.

Chapters:

I. Ritual, Essence, and Alchemy (19 minutes)

Ross unpacks his Friedman Benda exhibition "Coarse" through the themes of ritual, essence, and alchemy. He also gets into the notion of alchemy in his work in general, which has long explored the edges between realms such as West African furniture and British Brutalist architecture.

II. Material Awakening (12 minutes)

Ross discusses "awakening" materials and refining ideas down to their truest essence. He also talks about the use of numbers and codes in his work—something that was also central to the work of his mentor, the late Virgil Abloh.

III. Rule of Thirds (3 minutes)

Ross talks about how he thinks in threes, and why it's a guiding principle across his entire creative output.

IV. Sacred Space (8 minutes)

Ross comments on his recent White Cube exhibition in London and how, through abstraction and minimalism, he seeks to engage with his British Caribbean identity and to "offer a window into a human experience."

V. Filling the Void (7 minutes)

Ross reflects on how, as a British Caribbean artist and someone of the Black diaspora, it's "almost my job ... to contribute what is missing or what's been misconstrued or what doesn't yet exist."

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

VI. Shaped and Molded (5 minutes)

Ross recalls how, growing up in Northamptonshire, England, he was practically formed into an artist by his parents.

VII. Fashion Forward (11 minutes)

Ross speaks to the time he spent with Abloh early in his career and his work with him on projects such as Pyrex Vision and Kanye West's Donda. He also talks about the rapid rise of his fashion label A-Cold-Wall, which he founded in 2015.

VIII. Upward Momentum (17 minutes)

Ross discusses his vision for the Black British Artist Grants program, what it was like for him to receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Westminster at age 29, and how he's thinking about the near and far future.

Full Transcript:

SPENCER BAILEY: Hi, Samuel. Welcome to Time Sensitive.

SAMUEL ROSS: Spencer, it's a joy to be here.

SB: I thought we'd start today with "[Coarse](#)," your current show at [Friedman Brenda](#) gallery, here in New York. There are just six objects in it. I was struck by how these pieces seem to be out of time—meaning, of no time, or at least not any linear timeline—found somewhere between our primordial past and a distant, far-off future. They're kind of relics, in a way. I was wondering if you could speak to that, this particular body of work from a temporal perspective.

SR: I've got this obsession with kind of deep-diving into so many different forms of literature, whether it be fiction or nonfiction or editorial, or whether it be ingesting historical documents on [Cambridge archives online](#) or via lo-fi independent YouTube documentaries, which are actually forming some of the more specific niche inputs of information that you can't necessarily find in traditional forms of thought, specifically read to design an object in architecture and material. And that type of pendulum swing between different historic movements, whether it's like a inquiry into [Benin in the Edo period](#), or whether it's actually [feudal Japan's Edo period](#), or whether it's looking at the implication of the Venetian palazzo during fifteenth-century Renaissance period. Whether it's the inquiry into the history of folk art across the British Isles all the way through to the work of [\[Henry\] Moore](#) or [\[Anthony\] Caro](#) or [\[Barbara\] Hepworth](#) or [\[Rachel\] Whiteread](#), the joy and organic inquiry of wanting to ingest information ends up dissolving any type of chronological way of seeing object and seeing the world.

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

With “Coarse,” with this particular body of work, I’m noticing this is almost becoming a bit more of a behavior in terms of how I think about material and form. And there’s a freedom there, being able to extract and move and jump and collage between these different inputs that I’m just curious about.

SB: At the opening, I was speaking with the great craft scholar [Glenn Adamson](#), who has also been [a guest on this podcast](#), and he mentioned to me that there are really three central themes, as he sees it, to this body of work: ritual, essence, and alchemy. On the surface, those sound kind of heady.... [*Laughter*]

SR: Indeed.

SB: But I was hoping we could unpack them here.

SR: Sure.

SB: I would love to hear about how you think about those three words—*ritual*, *essence*, and *alchemy*—in the context of this work.

SR: If we think about the world *ritual*, we think about [the] public forum, and you think about the placement of public art. Let’s think about [the Kensington Gardens Henry Moore installation](#) just behind [Serpentine](#) and the questions that it kind of brings forward of who, what, why, when, how, where. It doesn’t maybe answer, but it presents itself and projects these questions to the everyday human. There’s no bias in needing to ask that question because there’s maybe a certain level of understanding of the arts or materiality. There’s this decorum of democracy, and the idea of ritual and gathering and pulling those opinions feels quite humanistic.



“House” (1993) by Rachel Whiteread. (Courtesy the artist and Gagosian, New York)

And there’s something there with public art and congregation and ritual that I’m deeply interested in. I think the same when I think about early Caro work and what it kind of represented to the public forum. If you think about Whiteread’s breakthrough piece of work in East London, which was then taken down after—

SB: The “House.”

SR: The “House,” which was [then taken down](#).

SB: Yeah.

SR: There is this reverence around the monolith, which continues to almost propose a new way of appearing for every generation. And there’s something deeply human and intrinsic about that, which is almost etching into the subconscious. And the more time I spend considering the implication of ritual in modern times, in the time in which we live and how we all engage and experience reality and space, I cannot ignore that pull or gray area, to fill that with ritualistic objects, whether it be through the medium of furniture or temporary architecture or sculpture. There’s a need for that to be filled. And I keep returning to that talking point or that matter....

And it’s not really a talking point, it’s a feeling. It feels like my contribution needs to be for [the] public. And the idea of ritual and public can’t be separated, specifically when you consider some of the influences of “Coarse” and the wider umbrella of my work, the

Bailey, Spencer.

“Samuel Ross on the Art of ‘Awakening’ Materials.”

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

relationship between [the ideas of utopia through architecture](#), through [Postmodern](#) and [Brutalist](#) and [Modernist](#) architecture across Europe and the U.K. And maybe some of the unfortunate calamities which weren't achieved, but actually had a very much altruistic or optimistic underpinning of how people would engage with space as they did in the golden age of the Renaissance. I'm interested [in] that tension point.

SB: What about essence and alchemy?

SR: Essence connects to ritual in such like a.... The two are so connected, right? You think ritual and you think essence. It's almost like they're like magnets. You need both.

SB: Yeah.

SR: Ritual kind of elicits and pulls and speaks to essence. And the interesting matter there is that essence— There are two ways to look at essence: There's the nonphysical, and then there's almost the metaphysical. And by that, I mean the idea of the genome and platelets and cells. If you think about [the medieval system of the humors](#) and how you kind of broke down the red blood cells and the white blood cells and the platelets, and then bile, and those were the four different axioms of how you would read your purpose or place within society.

There are two things there which are interesting. One, it's obviously a pretty conservative and feudal way to look at what fulfillment means for an individual and there being some predetermined way to understand what that is, which is difficult to comprehend now, when you think about meritocracy and democracy. But then on the other side, it goes back into this idea of purpose and being, and essence seems to be connected to the idea of fulfillment and the idea of almost carrying out the will that one was predetermined to do so. And that relationship to ritual, being able to affirm essence—there's a real interesting dynamic there.

I tried to bring that out through the way in which materials, specifically organic—what we deem to be called organic materials or organic composites—how they are convened and proposed, whether it be an alabaster or sandstone, or whether it be plaster or whether it be a marble or a Carrara marble, treating them with a softer hand, a more humanistic take on blown-out edges and exposed material surfaces contrasting against quite a clean and precise language seems to be a way to pair modernity with these eternal truths of how we've always related to material and ritual and essence.



The process behind the sculptures in Ross's exhibition "Coarse" (2023). (Courtesy the artist and Friedman Benda)

SB: Alchemy?

SR: Alchemy is interesting, isn't it? The relationship between alchemy and innovation. I kind of think about historic British scientists who had private alchemic practices, but they couldn't publish their papers because they didn't want to be refuted. But there's always this interest between innovation and moving how we deal with material forward, and alchemy, I believe, is part of that process.

There's a little bit more of a relationship to ritual there, historically, but it's just as innovative. And practically, alchemy, it's always been in my practice. It's always been a talking point of: How do you produce or bring forward an energy from a material? And this goes into another concept linked to essence, which is also linked to [Shintoism](#), of, each surface or material already has a reverb or a living spirit of sorts, right?

SB: [Animism](#), too.

SR: Animism coming into play, right? Actually, it's kind of logical, because at [the] cellular or composition level, everything is just kind of atoms and core materials and different elements arranged and re-proposed in a different order.

With that in mind, it gives you a little bit more autonomy over how you're actually bringing [alchemical] process practically, whether it be through fire, whether it be through erosion—and not just physical erosion, but by integrating materials to work with one another. And that might be through milk and honey, that might be through soaking wenge or oak in turmeric to soften the actual tissue of the material to then allow for a re-contortion of how the material may respond to casting or to embalming or to waxing.

SB: Yeah. So the listeners know, you're actually using these materials in some of these works.

SR: This is not theoretical. [*Laughs*]

SB: Yeah. This is real. The turmeric and milk and honey become, as you put it, “embalmed” in these works.

SR: Absolutely. This relationship—to take two materials and cleave the materials to produce fundamentally a new material story or engagement—feels like a practical way to contribute to the field of design.

So you have these philosophical interests that I just tend to have.... It's kind of the way I was raised and what I just enjoy reading. Those texts and those thoughts all start to filter into practical case studies and practical experiments. And the practicality there isn't just, Hey, I wonder what happens if you pair A and Z together. It's more looking for a way to contribute conductively, earnestly to the field of design.

SB: So let's take turmeric.

SR: You say turmeric; I say *turmeric*. [*Laughter*]

SB: Let's take turmeric. And what is it about that material? What do you think it lends to the work? Because it's not obvious, necessarily, to a viewer that like, Oh, this has been embedded with turmeric.

SR: It's wonderful, isn't it? I'm going to bring in an architectural perspective here. There's an elevation view, there's an overhead view, and then there's an isometric view in how I look at materials and objects.

There's always a triptych. There's always quadrants or a triptych, or great things come in threes calamities come in threes. And I try to integrate that way of viewing a material. When I think about the first layer of viewing turmeric, I'm thinking quite practically about the properties it has, in terms of the richness of the staining, the richness of the color which can be applied, and how difficult it is to remove that organic substance or imprint. The second octave [is where] I'm thinking about turmeric in terms of its properties as a

material or food material, and what that does to the body in terms of the anti-inflammatory properties, its relationship to healing the body....

There are almost these cathartic associations that we have to turmeric—and to the idea of the antidote—which are interesting when you start thinking about ritual, and you start thinking about alchemy and proposing some closer, more intimate relationship between a material and the body.

And the third element that I really look at when I think about turmeric—and again, looking at all objects from three different perspectives or different angles—is the historical trade routes that turmeric, of course, took under the British Empire and the idea of the spice route and the trade routes also being a talking point here. And it's taking those free manners and then applying them on different octaves to another organic material.

In this case, we're talking about ply and OSB [[Oriented Strand Board](#)], which veer on the edge of being organic materials, which also makes them quite interesting because they also have their own material journey. The idea of decimated and shredded wood being recomposed with an acetate or with a PU [polyurethane] or TPU [thermoplastic polyurethane], or with some type of adhesive, represents our relationship to organic matter and synthetic and technology.

So there's this real joy of taking something that we deem to be organic and maybe don't see as a material, like turmeric, which has this historical implication, has a cultural implication, and has a perceptible tangible implication of staining, and pairing that with a material which is half alive and half dead. That being ply and the synthetic.

And that's where the alchemy kind of occurs, right? Because you're reintroducing an organic material with a half-alive or half-dead material, and you're seeing how the two engage.

SB: When it comes to alchemy, there's also this visual language going on in your work, whether that's a reference to West African furniture or British Brutalist architecture.... Could you speak to that? The alchemy of the visual, too, not just the material.

SR: Yeah, completely. I think there are a few words that I think about when I'm writing some of these ideas down as well. So there's the existential view, and then there's the absurdist view, of what is the relationship between Brutalist architecture in the Eleventh or Twelfth Arrondissement [of Paris] or within any type of council estate in [Handsworth](#), in [Birmingham](#), or in [Brixton](#) in London, or just middle England—how does that have a relationship to Benin bronze sculptures or Edo-period birthing chairs? And I think that absurdity or that connection.... Well, one, it is absurd, and it's a connection, which is the interesting paradox to play with—of where you pull information from—is by way of empire. And the existence of the voice that is speaking now is by way of empire. So to

Bailey, Spencer.

“Samuel Ross on the Art of ‘Awakening’ Materials.”

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

kind of pool from these different influences and realities, which again, live on their own time lapse, right?

There is no linear view of time I'm looking for. I'm pretty much pooling these experiences and pulling them together. And I'd say with this body of work, it's gone beyond the politeness or feeling a need to gently reference, and it's more of a view of, No, I am both. From my bloodline, I am African. I am West African—though by way of a British Caribbean identity—that's what the genome says. But I am also the product of Brutalist architecture. All of my core memories and formative memories and childhood memories are within these facades—thus I know it; thus I will the two together. And that's how these worlds start to come together.

It's also almost finding such comfort in being able to will what you know and experience—that's almost the beauty of being a relatively young contributor to the arts and to design, is the confidence to simply do that.

SB: Relatively young at 32. *[Laughs]*

SR: 31 still. Hanging on. Hanging on for dear life.

SB: Oh yeah, you'll be 32 when this episode comes out, probably.

SR: Likely, yeah. *[Laughter]*

SB: This week, coincidentally, I started reading this book [Lapidarium: The Secret Lives of Stones](#), by the British art critic [Hettie Judah](#), and there's some interesting crossover in it with your work. In the introduction she writes, "We humans find it easier to think of abstract notions such as eternity than to enter the geological imagination and follow clues in stone that lead back over four and a half billion years to the fiery origins of our planet." She kind of gets to this technological aspect of stone, too, that I think your work is exploring. She writes, "As well as evidence of a long and mysterious past stone, has provided the tools of human progress, from the earliest projectiles through cutting and grinding implements to rare minerals that power the present-day information age."

To me, I was just struck by these two quotes, but also this idea that your work is experimenting with some of this idea around the primordial and the root material—where these materials come from, how they become sort of mini memorials of where they came from.

SR: Yes. Well, there's also this notion of: What is material at a composite level? You think of mineral, you think of grain. You think of all of the axioms. There's always this mythology provided with the material base.

I guess part of what I'm trying to do is embrace the reverence of mythology, but also start to really pick at the attributes at a composite level to open up newness in how we

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

interpret those, without supplementing or removing the core material. And I think that there's something there, again, which goes back to this lapse in time and this buoyancy of, these are fundamentally kinetic materials.

If you think about the placement of alabaster and Nero [Marquina] and marble and slate, and to a degree now, concrete. And it's tenure and its contribution across the last— maybe not so much of concrete because it's a relatively new material, but with the others—across millennia, these are materials that move fundamentally with us, or that we move through constantly and will continue to do so.

And then it's about contrasting the impermanence of the idea of synthetic against the idea of primordial, the idea of ritual, the idea of what's fundamentally.... What we believe to be there for eternity, which is what this literature also proposes. I'm quite keen to reengage with that channel of thought on that proposition.

SB: I have to mention the theme of memory here, too.

SR: Yeah.

SB: I feel like you can't talk about your work without talking about memory. How do you see memory embedded in your work, whether it's sculpture, a piece of furniture, a painting?

SR: I think that memory is linked to—specifically in the furniture artworks, it's linked to the idea of purpose and essence, essence in particular. And it's this idea of, again, sentience in material. And practically, it's looking at the nature of how materials can continuously be reengaged and re-proposed. People might hear that and they might think, Oh, recycling. No, it's not really about recycling because it's not about the placement or the form of how an object or material is used. It's more about changing the physical composition of how the material presents itself.

And that proposition of almost “awakening”—awakening the materiality of a new composite, which is half synthetic and half organic—is such a good way to look at the majority of the materials that we engage with now.

Even if we look at the CNC steel aluminum units in front of me, I start thinking about, How does this idea of, at this point, a lead-free, powder-coated sheet work with the oxidized proportion which could be brought forward from the aluminum. It's always about awakening materials and trying to, to a degree, *humanize* materials. There's a pliability with material that I'm quite keen to continue to explore and try to pare back to the essence or. In reality, all materials and surfaces are organic, although we treat them as though they're not. And I want to pull us closer to the idea of organic materials— *living*.

Bailey, Spencer.

“Samuel Ross on the Art of ‘Awakening’ Materials.”

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

SB: For the listeners who can't see. It's a [Vitsoe bookshelf](#) that— [Laughs]

SR: Indeed.

SB: —Samuel's referring to.

I wanted to also ask about your approach to just six objects in this exhibition, because there's a certain refinement and alignment happening, a real care in making and deciding what's included, what's excluded. Even though there's also a particular kind of roughness to the body of work, in a way. These works have something to them that says they're—kind of going back to what I was saying earlier—of no place or of... There's this tension between the specificity of them, and yet the decentralization of them.

SR: Yes. To give reference to maybe why there's such a focused body of work, I think it's probably underpinned by just a life principle. I tend to just enjoy aesthetic spaces which are really brought down to the crux of what they are trying to communicate, whether that be through the form of painting, or through the form of CNC sculpture, or through the form of furniture that almost veers on the edge of sculpture.

The idea of focusing the experience gives enough space for the artworks or the furniture to speak. And by that, I mean giving the work space to breathe and to domineer an atmosphere that I want the viewer—really, in this instance, it's the *user*; it's a huge difference. Huge, huge, huge difference—[for] the user to be able to see correctly, to be able to also feel the reverence of the artworks, to feel the familiarity of the artworks, to physically have all distractions removed from when they begin to touch and engage with the materials there.

People have very different opinions. One view isn't better than the other. There is no hierarchy. But from my perspective, I've always wanted to focus the experience for the user. And so six pieces felt correct. There are, of course, many more that were in the works. Even some of the drawings that were shown. Only four drawings were shown out of sixteen hundred drawings for this collection, which isn't an exaggeration. It is a very well-rounded number, but it is around that amount which was produced. But even focusing the artworks down to six pieces being shown and only four drawings being shown, it really is about making sure that the experience remains distilled and emotional.

SB: There's also these numbers and codes embedded in some of these objects. And this is something your mentor and friend, the late [Virgil Abloh](#) also played with in his work. And I was wondering, let's just take "Fire Open Stone," which is one of the works in the show, this bench-shaped granite and concrete work. I guess you could call it a bench. [Laughs]

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

SR: Yes. Yes.

SB: What is it with those numbers in particular, how you treated that? And what are you thinking here in terms of these numbers or codes?

SR: I'm going to go back to the idea of the triptych, and having multiple inputs justify or validate the decisions to have either a material or a use of typography be included within the bench or within the artwork. And this is a really good reference to that system and way of thinking to how some of these decisions are made.

The first notion, immediately, was the tension between the reverence of the material itself and that storied history that one thinks of when considering mineral stone, particularly Nero [Marquina] marble sourced in the Dolomites. It has such a storied history. The other was, of course, the implication of commodifying, what we would all deem, I would assume, to be a sacred material with postmodern culture and the idea of the serial code.

The third element there is the idea of the inscription and insignia historically, and the notion of the modern hieroglyph being the serial code, to a degree. There's a sorting system there which is underpinned. There's a way of thinking there that is indicative of other practicalities of what it means to live in modernity. You think supply chain, you think geography, you think distribution, you think margin, you think technology and process. So to have that counterbalance directly with material from millennia felt appropriate as an inscription of our era and our time. The second point there is the notion of mark-making and the hieroglyph and the modern hieroglyph and what our contribution is to vernacular and literacy in the twenty-first century. Again, this is a twentieth-century matter, but it is still the barcode. We have emoji, we have meme, we have barcode. We didn't come up with any new form of haiku or prose—yet.

SB: *[Laughs]*



Ross (left) with the late fashion designer Virgil Abloh (right). (Courtesy Samuel Ross)

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Bailey, Spencer.

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SB: [Laughs]

SR: So it's also being quite practical in operating as an artist and a designer of the time. How do I document our contribution to literacy? And I guess that interest there, and as Virgil's was—we were both graphic designers, both trained in graphic design. So there's like a want to communicate through that graphic medium.

And the third element to why the serial code or barcode was included was the implication of.... It's kind of connected to the second, but it's a little bit more specific. The tension point between the hand-engraved versus the CNC and automated relationship there is really interesting because that was partly CNCd and partly hand-engraved. And I love this tension point between organic and synthetic, humane and unhuman, humane and automated. And that teetering edge that our generation sits on, that we live in, is indicative of how the font and serial code is applied.

SB: I love how you think in threes. This is fascinating. Is that a rigor that you bring to your thinking, that as you're processing certain decision-making, you're thinking in threes?

SR: Typically, yeah, I think that is one of the additives of my working product primarily, and thinking about volume and scale. Of course, we all need to think about ROI, KPI, marginality, raw materials, sourcing patterns—all these elements. It's applying practical thinking to philosophical thinking. Or free thinking, maybe. That's a lazy term, but you know what I mean: thinking which has no type of boundary.

But there's also the critique, as you were saying, where I am obsessed with the lack of rigorous critique amongst the artistic and design community, and its lack of formality. If we're to add to the books of human history—which we all are—surrounding design and the arts, we just need to make sure that we are all comfortable with what's being quantified and why it's being quantified.

I feel like the idea of, "Hey, I felt this, so I made it," is just not really that appropriate at all times. We've really got to start to push one another a little bit more, and that's where this triptych system of almost like bulletproofing a concept and making sure that it makes sense from a historical or philosophical standpoint, and then from a material

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

technology standpoint, has some type of rooting or grounding. Then it feels like a contribution to the arts. I guess this is where maybe there's a sliver of maturity coming into my practice where.... To be honest, none of my work has ever really been about, "Hey, this is how I feel, so this is what I want to say." It's always been a commentary, whether it's in democratizing fashion between luxury and streetwear and talking about the relationship of public housing in sociology and anthropology, or whether it's been about some of these themes within "Coarse," which really look at the human experience, yes, through a tilted diasporic British Caribbean lens, but fundamentally it's about the human experience.

By taking a step back and putting myself in the passenger seat, you get just the view of the rearview mirror. You get the blind spots that you might not see if you're constantly driving in front, not considering others in the room in your practice.

SB: You also currently have this [exhibition on view at White Cube in London](#). By the time this episode comes out, it won't be up still, but I did want to bring it up because it's your first solo art exhibition, and an important milestone in your practice. Two of the paintings, "9 Hours" and "7 Hours"—maybe this is really on the nose, given this is *Time Sensitive*, but I was like, Oh, they're named about time. And I thought it would be interesting to hear you speak about those two works in particular from that temporal point of view.



View of Ross's solo exhibition "Land" (2023) at White Cube in London. (Courtesy Samuel Ross)

SR: Completely. And again, this notion of the triptych returns. You have "9 Hours," you have "7 Hours," and then the third piece, which sits in that remit in terms of tonality and color, is called "Candles Burn," and it's this idea of, to a certain degree, within the medium of abstract painting, where there can be a little bit more of an internal conversation happening, because I'm not necessarily considering service through the medium of design or through furniture.

I can be a little bit more quiet about the conversations that I may be alluding to. “7 [Hours]” and “9 Hours” really talk about the travel time between core memories I have, which have now kind of shaped my use of color, my perception of what it is to be *of* a place, but not *from* a place. Seven to nine hours—to be right on the nose—it’s the travel time from Heathrow to St. Vincent, which is nine hours, and the travel time from Heathrow to Barbados, which is seven hours.

And it’s this interesting lapse between leaving one place that you supposedly are not of and going to another place, which you are also not of, but *are* of. And it’s this interim, almost like hyperbole between the two. And some of the placements of color elicit journey, but they also elicit the idea of the body and belonging. They also elicit, possibly, the idea of memory and trauma and genealogy, which is passed down by the richness and the coarseness of some of the red hues that are presented, which are closer to an amber or burgundy and quite bodily in their way of presenting.

But then you also have these really lucid geographical references to minimalist use of shape and asymmetry. Which almost overlays with how the placement of aerial photography and surveillance comes into play. So all of these cadences and elements of a lived experience and different ways of seeing and reading systems come into play in those two paintings, but also in “Candles Burn.”

To talk about another triptych within the series, you have “Closer to Dissonance,” which sits in the middle of a series of three different paintings, which are quite gestural. But there’s this idea that I can’t produce any type of confirmation or affirmation or absolute piece of work as a one-and-done process. There needs to be a returning. It’s quite cyclical, this idea of repetition across the practice.

SB: There’s also this sensory element to the exhibition, including smell, the burning of incense—a scent that was, from what I understand, inspired by your grandmother’s home in Brixton—and a soundscape. What was the thinking in terms of this sort of full-body experience?

SR: The thinking with the senses being met also alluded to time and place. I’m challenging myself to ensure that my engagements within the arts and within design aren’t too on the nose at times, but they also offer a window into a human experience and into a living artist and their references and their influences. There’s a little bit of a breakdown of a facade of the expectation of what an artist can share whilst they’re living. You often hear about, Oh, this was the kind of set-up, or this was the childhood home of X, and this is where they frequented seventy years ago, ninety years ago, and this was part of the formation of their identity.

As my first solo in fine art, at White Cube, it felt like an opportune shift for a living artist in their first solo to start to directly share some of these immediate influences, to not explain but *shape* some of the thinking behind the works being proposed. Similar to a good friend of mine—I’ve known this individual for years, she’s brilliant, [Rhea Dillon](#). She is a conceptual artist and a fine artist, also British Caribbean, who veers between object and abstraction and minimalism. And her use of dyed mahogany, her use of cut glass and cement. These are immediate influences of the British Caribbean experience and that pendulum swing between the islands and between what our grandparents would’ve called the “mother state,” which is a difficult term, but one I’m engaging with because it is part of the vernacular of the house and part of the influence. We are starting to really add—Rhea does this really well also—we’re humanizing the influences, and it feels like we’re being quite honest in terms of what we have to offer to the arts by doing that.

To answer your question about scent and memory, I feel like the statement you made was almost the answer, which is also quite beautiful in its simplicity. It’s a process and ritual that is so linked to how I almost soften my aperture. I have to engage with ritual before entering any type of seance with material or practice. Burning incense and using scent to fill space, and using scent as a tool that can

Bailey, Spencer.

“Samuel Ross on the Art of ‘Awakening’ Materials.”

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

affect environment, is really quite key to that. I wanted to bring an element of that studio process into the gallery.

Even the actual proportion of the doorway at White Cube, I changed only for our room. So typically, they have a doorway opening of around three hundred centimeters, three meters. I forced the door down, the doorway down to around a hundred and twenty centimeters, and I also increased the total height of the door opening. So it's the idea of even entering a vessel, entering a new facade, practically, through architecture, through space, through scent, which will go into the idea of ritual and seance and essence again.

SB: Yeah. It almost sounds to me like this notion of sacred space in a way too, like you're intentionally entering something sacred.

SR: Absolutely. And there's a void which, again, keeps presenting itself, which is obviously linked to the idea of self and the gray area between modern spirituality and religion and essence and being, and the [Ghost in the Shell](#) prospect, which is really interesting, which I'm absolutely for.

But there also seems to be this unhinged relationship we all have to the idea of the sacred and the idea of reverence through material that we cannot escape, and I'm keen to simply explore that and re-propose it.

SR: Yeah.

SB: —about the Black diaspora as this decentralized monolith. And I wasn't familiar with it, so I wanted to bring it up here. Learning about it made me think of some other really essential work that connects to it, including [Christina Sharpe's In the Wake](#) and [Saidiya Hartman's Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments](#). Both of those books are also kind of exploring that notion and the afterlife of slavery and what happens in that time, the *after*, the wake.

SR: And it's so interesting, isn't it? It's such a good piece of literature that Sondra put together, and one that I've continued to read and refer to, and it's just etched in my memory as a good talking point, and a good influence. The notion that Sondra proposes is that the displacement of the African diaspora, by way of colonial trade, operates with the same asymmetry that digital space does. And the ability to reconvene and communicate asymmetrically, almost from a scattergram approach, versus a linear approach is almost embedded into the Black experience. And I think this is absolutely true.

There are stats that she put forward. The book came out maybe six years ago now, around 2017, around 2018, I think. And at that point, one of the stats put forward was that roughly sixty-five to seventy-five percent of all Instagram users were actually African American across the board. And there's this interest and almost influx of communication, which is decentralized across a network, which is almost... I don't know. For some reason, it feels like it's just a very much organic or known behavior. I think about the decentralized tactics of any civil rights movement and how that's embraced and engaged, and we're fundamentally talking about the children or the grandchildren of that movement participating in commune.

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

And also the want and yearning that I feel is part of the diaspora, to want to engage with others cross-continent, specifically surrounding shared experience. Although everyone has a particularly different difficulty, whether it be economic or class-based, there's still an open fissure or an open wound or limb that we are all trying to repair. I think part of the absurdist and maybe existential view I have on time is linked to taking notions of what we deem to be the past and pairing them with matters of the now, to almost unpick and replace tissue and lining—to kind of congeal maybe what was left open, or bruised or wounded or infected, and re-propose what should have sat in place.

And that's almost my job as a British Caribbean artist who's part of the Black diaspora, is to contribute what is missing or what's been misconstrued or what doesn't yet exist. Yeah. I know I went very lucid there, but that's some of the thinking.

SB: Well, yeah. You're filling certain voids, and I think [Steve McQueen](#) did that so beautifully with [Small Axe](#)—

SR: Absolutely.

SB: —that series. I think for any outsider getting a view into that culture, it was just this magical, *alchemical*—

SR: Absolutely.

SB: —experience, to watch that.

SR: There's such a beauty with *Small Axe*, and I can really.... And this is where I brought up Rhea Dillon as well, and Steve, because we're all British Caribbean. So there's a specific relationship that Steve has to the West London Caribbean community, and I have to Southwest London, to Brixton, [Brixton Market](#), which are focal points of that era and of that time.



Still from the Amazon Prime series *Small Axe*. (Courtesy Amazon Studios)

Just for reference, it isn't like I was a voyeur of the area. I was born in Brixton. My parents were married on top of Brixton Market. You think about [the riots and the civil rights movement](#). My mum grew up around that. My father was based there for such a long time. That is fundamentally etched into the history of Black Britain, and the responsibility to make sure these—it's not really messages; it's more like *perspectives*—are earnestly told.

That feels as important as to talking to the canon of what it truly was like to engage with Brutalism or Postmodern architecture on an intimate level and what it is to live through those material experiences and how that then shaped the psyche of how the work comes about now that I'm producing.

It's always this wonderful pendulum swing of British Caribbean diasporic experience, meeting Brutalism, meeting Postmodernism, meeting the need for a closeness and reverence to organic matter and material, which is a human need. Again, it's always an octave. It's not one viewpoint or one vanishing point that I'm looking at. There's the [John Berger](#) piece [[Ways of Seeing](#)], when he talks about the vanishing point, which reoccurs in imperialist painting across the seventeenth and eighteenth century on the shoreline of the idea of the protagonist going out into the unknown world. I could easily have a similar vanishing point with the idea of diasporic art. This is all I want to talk about, but I want to talk about octaves of the human experience, and that's one octave I know intimately. The other is architecture, materiality. Then the other is simply what it is to be human, which is truly just grappling with the humanity that we all know and those intimacies that we often don't speak [of], but we know to be truthful thoughts. I'm trying to propose that as revelation in some of the work as well.

SB: Yeah. Too often, the nuance just gets paved over, and then...

SR: It does.

SB: Let's go back to your upbringing in Northamptonshire. You began sculpting at a young age. I learned at age 3 in a nursery. [*Laughs*] You were raised by your second-generation Windrush parents, who you mentioned earlier. Your father had formally run this anarchist church—

SR: Indeed

SB: —in Brixton, and your mother homeschooled you.

SR: Yes.

SB: Growing up, you spent a lot of time alone as a child—

SR: Indeed.

SB: —drawing, painting, crafting things. It seems like, from what I learned anyway, your parents practically shaped you into being an artist. And I was hoping you might speak to that time a little bit.

And connected to that, you also grew up in the church. You even pursued theology before studying art and design. Is that where ritual came in?

SR: Firstly, it was a wonderful upbringing. I'm enamored by the desire they had to kind of input so much information, so early on, continuously. That's the gift of being raised by academics, I guess.

I'm so fortunate that I was the homeschooled, test-tube kid. For four to five years, it was like, "Oh hey, we're pulling you out at school, and yes, you're going to follow the expected academic route, but we're also going to spend time building computers with you. We're going to spend time building pinhole cameras. You're coming with me to my glass technology M.A. course. Hey, I'm restoring this sixteenth-century glass for a church in Oxford. You need to know about this."

And on my mother's side, there was just this love of education that channeled through her because her upbringing didn't really afford it. She left Brixton at the age of 9 or 10, due to extreme trauma, and was raised in Barbados for around eight to nine years. And she had to return to the U.K. because we couldn't afford.... At that point, our family just couldn't afford any form of education. And she returned to the U.K., met my father through the church, and she started in community colleges, all the way up to getting an M.A. Now she's writing her Ph.D. in sociology, and she kind of lectures and teaches full-time as an academic.

Because she had me at the age of 22, I believe around that point, I was almost part of her academic journey. So I remember her being the helper and then getting employed by the school when I was at the school. She was always kind of there for that journey. And I guess that kind of goes back to the point of the household. And the way in which we engaged with one another was through debate. It was through the exchange of ideas.

There wasn't a topic that was off the table. Your contribution in the home was expected to be a creative one and an expressive one, but also an intellectual one, to a degree. It's just what brought us closer. And even the idea of, when did the artistic process begin for me, because I was asked this recently, right on the nose, this is a great question, it's like it's in my essence. It's in my genealogy. As you said, I was kind of shaped into this. There wasn't really a start point. It was just a way of being, and it's simply continued to be. So when the question comes about of, How come you're in so many disciplines and fields, it's kind of like, well, there's always an engagement with every sensory experience, and there's like a perspective and opinion to explore there.

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

It also simply comes from wanting to learn more about the field. It's just an inquiry, and the inquiry ends up shaping us, an idea or a perspective or a conversation, which then takes on a physical form, typically. And that way of being has just continued.

SB: So we haven't talked about fashion yet.

SR: No, we haven't.

SB: You began your fashion journey with the streetwear brand [2wnt4](#). Is that pronounced correctly?

SR: [*Laughs*] Yeah, it's an abbreviation of twenty-four, but not the tightest abbreviation.

SB: Yeah.

SR: It's 2wnt4, but I've heard everything from "Twanta" [to....]

SB: I'm like, two *want* four?

SR: Yeah. You could tell I was still in design school at this point, figuring it out.

SB: But this led to your discovery by Virgil Abloh, in 2013. You've [spoken so beautifully](#) about your time with Virgil and about how he appointed you as his design assistant, the work you guys did with [Pyrex Vision](#), [Kanye West](#), [Donda](#), et cetera. I don't feel the need to go deep into that. Listeners can definitely find you speaking about that elsewhere. But I did want to ask about your process with Virgil, which I think is fascinating from a time perspective, how you guys created this constant iteration and flow. You [once said](#), of your work with him, that "projects were complete only when time had stopped."

SR: Absolutely. And I think with Virgil, it's so rare. It was so rare to fundamentally find a living practitioner who had the rigor of the masters and acolytes that we read about across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to actually see someone practicing publicly, without fear of failure, knowing that the process was a constant iteration, and with that level of, to be honest, rigor and dedication to almost sacrifice any type of normalcy to contribute to the arts as a whole, I felt very early on, in our time working together, that this is a historic inquiry. You could *feel* that.

You've got this generation of people who have the hard skills, and then the soft cultural skills, for the first time being able to communicate freely, to a degree, as outsiders. And that gave autonomy, that gave mobility, it gave speed, it gave space for open thought because there wasn't, at this point.... Firstly, we wanted to work for the [Pentagrams](#) and the [Sagmeister & Walshes](#)—this is the highest form of visual communication, still is—

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

and we wanted to work with these partners, but we also wanted to find a way to contribute a new perspective, and these new different cadences and nuances.

There was this spirit that the work should embody optimism that felt truly like a contribution to the design sector and industry. Because of course, before working with V, I was at product design agencies and advertising agencies, and it was a pretty standardized track. And we all know how it can be. Of course, it's rigor and critique, and sometimes that can actually hamper the newness that practitioners are so capable of, and that can sometimes slow down the path to expressional innovation and a generation's contributions, historically, right? We've been stuck in the 1960s version of minimalism for ages now. *[Laughs]*

And with V, there was this desire to.... Specifically in his case, he wanted to widen the perspective, bring new perspectives in, and also break some of the old thinking and break down old channels of thought, or break down the old no and change it into a yes. And that's where the volume came about, and that's where the idea of touching every surface and every discipline came about. Because when you're an outlier, and at this point, he still was an outlier. Virgil was still known as Virgil, but he wasn't *Virgil Abloh*, [Time 100 Virgil Abloh](#). He was still building in real time. It was such a special time, and I was completely dedicated to his practice and to what he needed to communicate at that point. And he was able to also invite other practitioners into dialogue.

The idea of community and culture and design, it felt like it had returned. Of course, we all read about [the Lower East Side and downtown in particular eras of the seventies and the eighties](#). In the U.K., of course, we talk about, even though it's an art movement, [the] cultural impact of the [YBAs \[young British artists\]](#) and the impact that had on the artistic period there in the mid-nineties and early nineties.

This felt like it was a chapter of design culture and design history opening up. I'm sure you probably felt some of that, too. We could all see this happening, flowering, and it was Virgil, but it was also Virgil as a catalyst to open this new chapter of, I guess, the creativity of the times.



Image from A-Cold-Wall campaign. (Courtesy A-Cold-Wall)

SB: At the age of 24, you launched [A-Cold-Wall](#) in 2015, and in many ways, this was more of an art project, at least at its impetus, than a fashion label. And I was hoping you might speak a little bit to the thesis behind it, because, similar to what you were just saying about Virgil, this project really flowered, too.

SR: Yeah.

SB: It took off in probably an unexpected way, but it was really rooted in this thesis.

SR: Absolutely. My university thesis for my undergrad was rooted in really the semantics and the semiotics of the suit, the history of the suit across the twentieth century and what it enabled in terms of social mobility, and the idea of being able to move across different echelons of society and how fashion can be an interesting form for social change in that regard, right? And when it came to founding A-Cold-Wall, and that thesis and that dissertation, it was rooted in.... It was literally like a two-thousand-word think piece.

This is after I'm two years in working with Virgil at this point and working on Donda-related projects at this point. And I'm kind of seeing this canon of thought, which is purely African American, right? And it's really strong and it's pronounced: "This is the ideology, this is the expectation, and this is the experience." Which is now being channeled through the medium of fashion at that time, through those practitioners, through [Jerry \[Lorenzo\]](#), through V, through Ye.

I would, of course, be the satellite in Europe for V, or in Europe for whatever V needed done on behalf of Donda. And I realized it was wonderful to contribute and aid that experience, but I also need to consider what I have to contribute to the field as a British Caribbean individual.

After one fashion week—it was after [the Kanye APC second season](#)—I kind of went back home and started to just write. I reached for the old dissertation I wrote on menswear, and I started to think

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

about, to a degree, the lack of alignment with my personal experience in terms of where I was raised, what I knew to be true, the Black British experience and the working-class experience, with architecture and with space, as immediate influences to form this paper, to really start writing about, what is the British working class experience with engineering and material and color profiles and texture. Really, it was kind of an early anthropology paper. And all of those inputs and thoughts and experiences, which were written within Northamptonshire, formulated the blueprint for A-Cold-Wall. It was always this abstraction, because the paper itself was very informal, very abstract. And, of course, there was an impetus to have ready-to-wear basics in there, but I was far more concerned with the materiality of the clothes and how the clothes could tell some of these particular stories and influences.

SB: And you build this incredible business out of it.

SR: Yes, we have five global mono stores now, from [Selfridges](#) to [Harrods](#), to Shanghai to Beijing. It's now eight and a half years old, and it's really blossomed and bloomed. And we have these legacy partnerships of Nike and Converse and Timberland, and we have shown [runways in London to Milan](#). And there's this real culture within A-Cold-Wall, which was birthed from the unseen and the unheard.

I believe that story and pathway of unseen and unheard has worked out and the company has bloomed and flourished because it wasn't specific to myself. It was a read of what was being internalized across society and wasn't really being spoken about. The zero-point-zero-one percent, the zero-point-zero-one percent, and then there's the other ninety-nine percent who have a different experience. And it just really wasn't being captured through the medium of fashion. There was something to contribute there, which is why it kind of stands as a pillar now almost a decade onwards.

SB: And it's interesting, it afforded you personally, the opportunity to break out of fashion and get into what we talked about for the first ninety percent of this interview. *[Laughter]*

SR: Absolutely.

SB: And in addition to that, it also afforded you the opportunity to create the [Black British Artist Grants](#)—

SR: Yes.

SB: —which you created in 2020 as this effort to.... What are your hopes with it? Is it your own small way of lifting others up just as Virgil once did with you?

SR: There's two really good points there. A-Cold-Wall did afford the mobility and the means to contribute and build a much more critical and rigorous practice in the arts. There was also this returning to the arts and to design almost, because I studied graphic design and illustration and then went into product design. That was my first formal juncture in as a practitioner,. I then moved over into fashion because I felt like, at that point, there was something to really communicate and contribute in that medium. But I almost feel as though I've kind of returned, I've almost returned back to the core interest.

I feel like in this particular chapter of the history of design and art, I have something to contribute. I guess this is where there are quite methodical decisions that I made on my behalf. It's less, this is what I feel, so I should do it. It's like, No, where is there a piece of paper to add? Where is there a

Bailey, Spencer.

“Samuel Ross on the Art of ‘Awakening’ Materials.”

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

foreword or a thesis or a perspective which maybe should exist but doesn't exist? And it's always quite like a methodical process.

To the second point, the grant program established.... It's really easy to have coffee table conversations and dinner conversations about what should change and what should happen, and I was starting to slip into that rut, where I'd go to dinner with peers and contemporaries and friends and say, "Hey, why isn't X in the room? Why isn't Y in the room? Why isn't there X program for Y?" And I just kind of got a little bit tired of getting caught in that way of thinking. It felt a little bit regressive, and it didn't feel like it was who I am.

So I decided to build an advisory board, which is part of the Black British Grant program. The advisory board was formed to make sure that exceptional talents and contributions to the arts and to design and engineering and architecture—and fashion, of course—are acknowledged and supported. So the support part is we produce ten to twelve grants annually for two thousand five hundred pounds, which is all, for the most part, self-funded for the first three years. And even to now, ninety percent of that is self-funded from [SR A](#), our industrial design practice. And the whole prospect there is to identify the talent, but bring the talent to the forefront of historic institutions and corporations and academies to make sure that talent is well-placed and can build a prolific career hopefully.

So the board is formed of the [Royal College of Art](#), the [British Fashion Council](#), the [V&A Museum](#)—

SB: Where you [had a show last year](#).

SR: Where I had a show last year as well, which is wonderful.

We have corporate partners who are involved, whether it be Nike, or also Apple, on a soft support front. The [\[London\] Design Museum](#), of course, we're also involved and part of that board. We have the [University of Westminster](#), we're a part of that board. And the whole idea is to also have contributing guests on an annual basis. So our guest advisor for 2022 was [Grace Wales Bonner](#), who's a dear, dear friend of mine.

It's this idea of, it's not enough just to have talent; it's also the honesty, and the honesty to look at the placement of the talent and the framing of how talent is seen. And through that program, these are people.... These are already practitioners who were brilliant and this is almost the point of the program. It's not to maybe "break" talent; it's to make sure talent that is exceptional is seen.

So [Mac Collins](#), who went on to win the [Saltzman Prize](#) at the Design Museum, is a recipient. [Nifemi Marcus-Bello](#), who was awarded the grant in 2021, then went on to win [the 2022 Hublot Design Prize at Serpentine](#), which I advise on the board for there, to ensure there's a funnel and pipeline. Rhea Dillon, who— She's had two solos at [Soft Opening](#), and she has [her show, of course, at Tate Britain](#) as a permanent installation through June 2024, I believe, once it launches at the end of May 2023, also went through the program.

It's really a case of just doing and taking the resources that SRA and A-Cold-Wall have afforded me and placing them into the public forum. And that feels just like what should be happening. And as you were saying, A-Cold-Wall, SRA flowered and they're flowering. My view has never been to sit in this tower of isolation, like an ivory tower, and just hedonistically pull copious amounts of time and expenditure into what we maybe don't need. It's always been to affirm that there is a generation of thinkers and designers and to make sure that's documented historically.

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

SB: Before we finish, I have to bring up [your honorary doctorate](#). Pretty incredible that the University of Westminster gave you this honor in November 2021. What was it like for you to receive that? You weren't even 30 yet.

SR: Yeah, I was 29. I was the youngest honorary doctorate Ph.D. for the arts they've given historically since their inception. It is a feeling you.... It's an expectation you just don't have, right? You kind of practice and you contribute to a field, and you do the work and then you get this email.

The email came almost eighteen months after doing a series of talks on lectures at Westminster University for the M.A. course. And to contribute to a field and feel as though maybe some of it's been seen or acknowledged, I'm still kind of speechless over that matter. It also maybe speaks to this desire for academia that I'm kind of obsessed with, whether it be like self-taught or even....

On academia, if we just talk about that for two seconds, we're speaking to the RCA about potentially doing the M.F.A., and they're like, "No, no, you don't need to."

And I'm like, "No, I want to, though. I want to have critique. I want to be in discourse with peers." The relationship I have with academia has always been this hybrid of I guess being young, but also lecturing and teaching on an ad-hoc basis through programs or through building these programs, and I want to keep building on that.

I think any type of artist I look up to or think makes critical work has this constant report with education for a cycle of a career. So when the honorary Ph.D. came about, it felt great, but I also intend to continue studying formally, and teaching and contributing to chairs and different circles academically, as much as just producing my own works, because it's really about sharpening a perspective and a contribution.



Ross receiving his honorary doctorate degree from the University of Westminster. (Courtesy the University of Westminster)

SB: So how are you thinking about this present moment, the right now? And I ask because you've mentioned this particular moment of time we're in, broadly speaking, is really a remarkable pocket of time for people of color.

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

SR: Yes.

SB: And I was hoping you could elaborate on that a little bit.

SR: Yeah, I think my view is always a historical standpoint. I try to see and sometimes not feel the implications and the harshness of what it is to exist as a human across society. I always try to step back and have an anamorphic or wide-lens view.

That means with some parity, too, which sometimes can be difficult. Because I kind of believe in humanity before having a political view. So I'm not totally apolitical, but I believe in humanity first. With that in mind, I look at the last four, five hundred years. I look at that on both sides of the equator, right? I look at traditional feudal systems, where if you owned a horse in Edo Japan, you're getting taxed ninety-five percent on any profits that horse drives [*laughs*], which completely wipes out the idea of the merchant, intentionally, and the idea of the entrepreneur. I look at bans and ledgers that were placed to rebuke the manufacturing of papyrus leaves across the European empires of the twelfth and eleventh centuries to stop people having access to literature, and why parchment was chosen instead of papyrus, because it's very hard to skin down an animal and to sit there and work [it] into leather. You can't use a press to do that.

I guess where I'm going with this is, access to resource and access to information has always been a difficult feat across millennia. And we are in a pocket of time, in an open, democratic society and a free-trade economy, where anyone can register an LLC in forty-five minutes from the tap of a few keys on a computer. Anyone can go into a library and pick up any type of information they wish to digest. And historically, that just hasn't been the case. If you think of the struggle of [potters such as Dave \[David Drake\]](#) who [had to hide their poetry and inscribe it into pottery](#), even though it was illegal for them to be literate at that point.

And then you think about how easy information is accessible now, and I think about the strifes of previous living generations I have within my bloodline. This is the gilded age, and it's not going to last forever. I was speaking to a good friend and a good mentor of mine, Jerry Lorenzo, who runs [Fear of God](#). He's reached his exceptional feats. We were in L.A. last week and we were just kind of talking at his studio base. He just kind of threw out the comment of, "Yeah man, this age isn't going to be here forever." And I couldn't agree more.

So once we have this pocket of autonomy to be able to source materials, start LLCs, have incredibly niche perspectives documented and heard. We need to acknowledge that it's very much a special time for the diaspora, but also just humanity. Taking a step back and having the wide-lens view, let's not discredit that at all.

There's, of course, work to be done. There's always work to be done, but this is an incredibly specific pocket of time one has to express themselves and to add creatively, philosophically in terms of building materials and support for others, let's leverage that. It might sound very optimistic and altruistic, but that's just my stance.

SB: Final question, how are you thinking about the future? And I mean this in whatever sense you want to answer it philosophically, literally.

SR: I am still surprised our view of the future is the same view that we had in the sixties and the seventies, almost like a half a century on. You'll know there's been so much writing on the death of the future and this kind of time lapse we're in. And that's not that the future is to be harrowingly bad, it's more so the philosophy of what a future means.

Bailey, Spencer.

"Samuel Ross on the Art of 'Awakening' Materials."

7 June 2023. *Time Sensitive*.

Actually, it depends on what catchment of the future we talk about, too. I guess I'm thinking more from a social standpoint. Although we're in a brilliant window, it maybe feels like there's a little bit of a regression in terms of how the left and the right engage. And the perspectives of the left and the right building a well-balanced equilibrium, that feels like it needs a little bit of work, maybe, because you need both to have a balanced and free society where people can feel that they can express their needs, their desires, and their concerns.

It's super important that meritocracy stays in place. I'd like to see much more of a centerpoint or a center axis return in the coming future a little bit. It's really important just in terms of ethics, right? I think about the past a lot when considering the future. I was with a friend at [the Magna Carta site](#), which of course was placed after [King John](#) really had a bash with society and mashed it up [*laughs*], to run around with language. And I think about what the Magna Carta represented and still represents as a ledger of autonomy.

So I think maybe the near future is more about a reminder of what a modern society is supposed to inhibit, and reaffirming that through balanced perspectives being heard—super important. And when I think about technology and I think about the arts and design, and I think about writing, there's a real interest there into the new advent of traditional artistic mediums producing new movements. I think about the relationship between the advent of the camera at the top of the nineteenth century through to the 1930s and twenties when it entered [the] public forum, and the elasticity that offered to the medium of traditional painting and what followed onwards of that.

I also feel that will be the same for Western literature and our contributions to the medium. And I believe that we'll enter a far more abstract and psychedelic phase of forming poetry and forming sentence structure. Because once we can kind of automate off a sneaker-drop post, which we don't need human spirits spending too much time on—because that's a service, right?—once we can get that out of the way, the affirmation of what makes an individual a writer, or the individual a painter, or the individual specifically an architect or an engineer will be further defined to offset the banal tasks which need to happen at a service level, which we will then place into A.I. It's just really the next chapter of A.I. A film camera is a piece of A.I., a CNC machine is a piece of A.I.. And I'm keen to see these new artistic movements and principles of how we engage with one another come about.

SB: Samuel, thank you so much for coming today. This was really a treat to sit down with you.

SR: A joy and honor. Thank you so much.

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