



# NICK CAVE

## SOUNDS OFF

Frank Juarez

**M**y first encounter with Nick Cave's work was at the Seattle Art Museum during the 2011 NAEA National Convention. The exhibition was titled *Meet Me at the Center of the Earth*. I was mesmerized by the abundance of color, objects, and fabrics used to create his Soundsuits, wearable sculptural forms based on the scale of the human body. Cave's repertoire exceeds far beyond sculptural forms, though. It includes installation, video, sound, performance, and community outreach.

In early December 2017, I had the honor of interviewing Cave for *SchoolArts*.

**Frank Juarez: What is your first memory of making art?**

**Nick Cave:** One of my first connections to exploring art was when I was very young, in my first coloring book, and my mother sitting me down and telling me how I must color within the lines. There was a certain way in which she would color. Instead of filling in the lines by going back and forth, she would have me color in a round motion, which then sort of softened the surface. It was my first moment where I technically had to think about "this way versus that way" and the difference between these two approaches.



There were other moments. I always made my mother these elaborate cards for the holidays, and just how she would respond was sort of like larger than life. I would look at her and I would think, wow, this is the kind of reaction that you're getting from this card. That has followed me today in terms of my practice, that it's what I'm delivering. I am only interested in putting out work that generates that kind of response and impact.

**FJ: At what point in your life did you realize that you wanted to become an artist?**

**NC:** I chose to go to art school. I went

to the Kansas City Art Institute, and then I graduated and maintained a studio practice. I was working on visual displays for department stores, but I was still very much interested in getting a job that somehow allowed me to be creative. I worked at Hallmark, and then I decided that I wanted to go to grad school. My mother was like, "You're giving up a full-time job; you're giving up insurance, security...are you sure you need grad school?" I told her, "I don't know, I'm just not happy doing what I'm doing." And she said, "Okay, that's all that matters, your happiness." And so I chose to go to Cran-

brook Academy of Art.

You choose to do these kinds of things only with hopes and dreams. There is no rulebook or manual that you can receive in terms of how to do it—it's all by chance. You just don't know if you're going to get a break.

One morning, in 1989, I had to make a choice. I had to dive in 110 percent and go for it, or it was not going to happen. I knew that I wanted to see if it was possible, but I knew that if I wanted to explore that possibility, I had to give myself over to it. And I chose to do that: I opened my computer, and the Jack Shainman Gallery had sent



Opening Page: Nick Cave, Bunny Boy. Photo by James Prinz Photography. Left: Nick Cave, Kinetic Spinner Forest and Crystal Cloudscape installations at Nick Cave: Until, MASS MoCA, 2016. Photo by James Prinz Photography. Above: Nick Cave, Soundsuit installation at Nick Cave: Feat., Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, Tennessee. Photo by John Schweikert. Images courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

me an email. They were interested in my work. My life changed and took a ninety-degree turn. And thank God that I listened to my intuition and took a leap of faith.

I think that fear was the hardest thing for me to overcome, because it's the thing that gets in the way. We are so used to practicing and performing within rules and regulations and not really understanding how to function in things that are very uncertain.

**FJ: What is your favorite medium to work with?**

**NC:** I would say people-at-large, working within the community and

doing outreach. In terms of connecting and understanding my purpose and using art as a vehicle for change, this is where I connect the most.

**FJ: You are one of the keynote speakers at the 2018 NAEA National Convention in Seattle. This convention brings in more than 6,000 art educators across the globe. What message would you like for us to leave with?**

**NC:** How do we collectively find ways to look to the arts to talk about compassion, empathy, and togetherness, and recognize that each individual we encounter is different? There is a creative spirit in all of us, and how do we nurture that? If we existed in a world where creativity was at the core of our existence, we could live extraordinary lives.

**FJ: You do performance, video, sculpture, and installation. You are an educator, a designer, and an artist. You wear multiple hats. How do you balance all of these things?**

**NC:** There are certain rituals that I do daily. I think the most important one is that every day I spend one hour, sometimes two or three, in silence. I have to be with myself,

and doing that allows me to get clear. Can you imagine if we lived in a world where every day as part of our ritual, each of us had to sit in silence? I think then we would sort of come to our own "truth" in a space of solitude, as opposed to having the TV on and being involved in a thousand things. We don't take the time out to just "be." And it takes everything to just be.

**FJ: What are you currently working on in your studio?**

**NC:** I am currently working on four projects, all happening in 2018 in New York. I am opening a project at the Park Avenue Armory titled *The Let Go*, which opens in June. I'm also working on a solo show that opens in May titled *If the Tree Falls*. I'm also working on another solo show that opens in October. I am also working on a project with Times Square in November, where they invite artists to do an installation amongst the monitors. The studio is on fire right now! 🙄

*Frank Juarez is head of the art department at Sheboygan High School in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and a contributing editor for SchoolArts. frankjuarezgallery@gmail.com*