

Clap. Snap. Rap.

A Reflection on the performance *Freedom in Failure: “That’s how the light gets in.”*

By Ayla Tanurhan

Collaborators Roberto Ascalon and Amos Miller brought momentum and music to Raúl de Nieves’ [A window to the see, a spirit star chiming in the wind of wonder...](#) at the Henry Art Gallery on Saturday, April 6, 2024 with their performance entitled [Freedom in Failure: “That’s how the light gets in.”](#) Responding to the thematic narrative of regeneration from creative failure which appears throughout de Nieves’ exhibit, Ascalon took viewers and participants on a journey through his corpus of work, reading from a wide array of his poetry. Ascalon began by inviting the audience to see this performance as a reflection of de Nieves’ *Celebration (Mother)*, a horizontal figure which underwent metamorphosis, as he intentionally and ceremonially destroyed the sculpture, transforming it into a new artwork, one which he adds to with each showing. Throughout the exhibition space, Ascalon laid out a breadth of paperwork, comprising poems from his lifelong creative journey, some he regards as success and others as failures. Amongst these documents, sat everything from university projects all the way to discarded works, and Ascalon invited the audience to view this ever growing body as analogous to de Nieves’ ever growing *Celebration (Mother)*.



Throughout this reflective process, Ascalon was in conversation with Miller, on keyboard, alongside vocalist Danae Howe and drummer Christ Patin, moving from speech into song, picking up phrases and words of inspiration. As Ascalon shared both highlights and lowlights from his own creative process, the music swelled in response, shifting into song or chant. Picking up on Ascalon's feelings surrounding the creative journey, Miller responded through highlighting components that resonated, creating a space in which creative failure could be understood as a universal experience and a necessary component of achieving success. Howe took this experience to another level, picking up Ascalon's works and responding to Miller's tunes, marrying them in ad-libbed songs. By constructing a creative response to failure, Ascalon and Miller performed the process of creative regeneration.



“We can clap, we can snap, we can rap” was repeated throughout, as Miller invited the audience to participate in the sound making experience. Through this practice of encouraging audience engagement, Ascalon and Miller transformed this creative reflection into a collective process, in which participants had the opportunity to share and process their feelings and experiences regarding failure and success. Underlying the performance were expressions of gratitude for the community gathered as well as the creative process. Ascalon proclaimed “I am okay, we are okay.” The performance ended on this sentiment of gratitude and an affirmation that despite the failure which is an inevitable consequence of human existence, we are okay.



Viewing this performance as a soon-to-be graduate who is grappling with how I might begin carving out my own version of success, entering this space wherein failure was being celebrated provided me with a moment of refuge from anxieties about the future. As a Henry Art Liaison, I've had the privilege to immerse myself in the arts community, and *Freedom in Failure*, was the perfect reminder for how art brings people together to hold discussion and traverse shared experience.



Ayla Tanurhan is a 2023-24 Henry Art Liaison and a graduating senior, majoring in Art History and Political Science and minoring in Textual Studies and Digital Humanities at the University of Washington, Seattle. She is passionate about how art making and viewing function to bring community together. In her work, she hopes to continue to make art spaces accessible to wider audiences.

Freedom in Failure: "That's how the light gets in." multimedia performance program, April 6, 2024, taking place inside *Raúl de Nieves: a window to the see, a spirit star chiming in the wind of wonder...*, (2023). Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle. Photography: Lucien Pellegrin.