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MICHAEL JOESPH: Well it's about time to get started and as usual, some people will wander in. Ideally one or two of them will bring corkscrews. This is *Sacred Sisters: The Making of an Artist's Book*. Originally, we planned to have this panel discussion last November in the middle of the 24th Annual New Jersey Book Arts Symposium, but circumstances beyond our control made that impossible.

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. So, I'm very happy that we're able to convene tonight and perhaps engage in a longer discussion. I'm going to introduce the speakers in no particular order, or perhaps it is in some particular order, but you're going to have to figure that out. I'm going to start with the person I've known the longest without actually knowing her.

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Marilyn Nelson. Marilyn Nelson is a poet, of course, author and translator of more than 20 books and chapbooks of poetry for adults and young readers. She became a writer for young adults by serendipity when the editor, Stephen Roxburgh, asked her if he could publish *Carver: A Life in Poems* in 2001 for young adults. It hadn't occurred to her before [that] she was a young adult poet, but lo and behold. Her bibliography

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reads like an index of poetry awards. *Carver* captured virtually a part of every major award; taking Newberry honors, Corretta Scott King honors, the Boston Globe Horn Book Award and the Flora Stieglitz Straus Award. It was also a finalist for the National Book Award and it was published, in its entirety, in the *Norton Anthology of Children's Literature 2005*, placing her work alongside the works of poets like Randall Jarreau, Robert Graves

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and Grace Nichols.

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That is when I first encountered Marilyn. This is the well thumb-worn copy of the Norton Anthology of Children's Literature for which I was the author responsible for the Teachers' Guide.

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So, this was published in 2005. In 2004 I was delivered stacks and stacks of pages like this to go through. Not digital copies, but printed copies. That year, I went through them and among the many wonderful discoveries was *Carver* and I wrote about that in the notation guide, but although I have this in my office, I don't have a copy of my teaching guide. But I'll leave this up and you can thumb through it. You see one or two of the wonderful

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illustrations that appeared there.

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Oh fabulous. Okay. Over the next 15 years, *Fortune's Bones* in 2004, *A Wreath for Emmett Till* 2005, which is my favorite. An extraordinary virtuoso technical accomplishment. It's just amazing. It's a heroic wreath of sonnets. *How I Discovered Poetry* 2014 and *My Seneca Village* 2015 won her similar acclaim. In a recent article in *The Lion and the Unicorn*,

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Richard Flynn, perhaps one of the foremost writers on children's poetry in America today, noted that *How I Discovered Poetry* is the first autobiographical collection for young people by a poet who works as a "lyric historian" and Marilyn was dubbed a "lyric historian" by a seventh-grade girl when she was visiting a middle school in Providence, Rhode Island, and it's perfectly apt. It's not comprehensive but it's apt

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Maryland's old adult books reflect the same technical virtuosity and lyrical power and have found similar recognition. *The Home Place* in 1990 was a finalist for the National Book Award. *The Fields of Praise: New and Selected Poems* 1997 won the 1998 Poet's Prize and was a finalist for the 1997 National Book Award. The PEN/Winship Award and the Lenore Marshall Prize. *The Cachoeira Tales and Other Poems* 2005 won the L.E. Phillabaum [Poetry] Award

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and was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award and *Faster Than Light* 2012 won the 2013 Milton Kessler Poetry Award. There is nothing that Marilyn has written that hasn't won a major award. I might have just said that and saved myself five minutes. I could say that her honors also are too numerous to list, but I will mention they include two NEA Creative Writing Fellowships, the Connecticut Arts Award an ACLS

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Contemporary Fellowship from the J.S. Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award and the Frost Medal, the Poetry Society of America's most prestigious award for Distinguished Lifetime Achievement in Poetry. Since 2013, she has been a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and she is also a former poet laureate of Connecticut, which puts her in excellent company along with John Hollander who taught at Yale for many years, and the great James Merrill. She is also

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an Emerita of the University of Connecticut at Storrs, where she taught alongside my good friend, Kate Capshaw Smith.

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MARILYN NELSON: Oh, yes. MICHAEL JOSEPH: So welcome to Rutgers Marilyn and by the way, happy birthday. MARILYN NELSON: Tomorrow. Thank you. MICHAEL JOSEPH: Yeah, I let the cat in of the bag a bit soon. OK. Holly. Growing just in the shade of Marilyn is Holly Trostle Brigham.

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HOLLY TROSTLE BRIGHAM: We actually say "troh-stul". MICHAEL JOSEPH: OK.

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So, for the for the recording, Holly Trostle Brigham is a painter who creates life-size figures in rich, saturated watercolor that depict historical and mythological women. Brigham or let me say Holly was born in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. She attended Smith College where she studied Art History and studied abroad in Florence, Italy. She went on to study Art History at the graduate level at the University of Pittsburgh. Fine Art at the Pennsylvania Academy

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of Fine Arts and then earned her MFA in Painting at George Washington University. [sneeze] Bless you. She has taught at Pasadena City College, Worcester State College, the Worcester Art Museum and the Baum School of Art. She was part of the Experimental Printmaking Institute, *Gift: An Exhibition* at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in the Fall of 2017,

and let me just mention here that the pioneering photo realist, Audrey Flack, has written that, "Brigham is one

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of the most interesting young painters working today. She is pushing the depiction of the female figure into new and interesting territory." MaryAnne L. Miller is a print-maker, poet and publisher. As a poet, she is the author of two books: *Cures for Hysteria* 2018 and *Locus Mentis* 2012. She has been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

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Her work has been published in *Mom Egg Review*, *Ovunque Siamo*. Thank you. Oh, the corkscrew has arrived! Not a moment too soon. *Stillwater Review* and *Wordgathering Kaleidoscope International Review American African-American...sorry*. I'm going to say this again because I'm jumbling it. I want to be clear for a change. I want to be clear.

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Her work has been published and *Mom Egg Review*, *Ovunque Siamo*, *Stillwater Review*, *Wordgathering*, *Kaleidoscope*, *International Review of African-American Art* and in other places, it appears in the anthology, *Dark as a Hazel Eye*. Her poem, *Canaletto Validates my Grandmother*, has won an award in the Passenger Poetry Contest for 2018. I personally am particularly delighted to say

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that she is the Poetry Coordinator for the New Jersey Book Arts Symposium, which occurs every November -- for the first Friday in November -- in this very room. So, if you're interested in artist's books and poetry and printmaking and art, then keep that in mind because we will be celebrating the 25th Annual New Jersey Book Arts Symposium, an anniversary, next November. As a publisher, she issues hard-bound artist's books, pairing artists and poets through her press,

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Lucia Press and this is one of her gorgeous publications.

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I'm going to leave this somewhere away from the wine for you to look at. So, that is my piece. Now I'm going to ask Marilyn to I'm sorry. I'm not going to ask Marilyn anything. MaryAnne is going to ask Marilyn questions.

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I'm going to sit and listen to her answers. So, MaryAnne. MARYANNE L. MILLER: You got the corkscrew.

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Thank you, Michael. As always, I appreciate so much your welcoming spirit. It's great to be back in this room and I do appreciate that we have been invited back here to take up the slack from our time that we couldn't do it and during the Book Arts Symposium. So, I've been looking forward to this for quite a long time, as have Marilyn and Holly. So

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we're going to start with what I've got up here on the screen; *Sacred Sisters and Other Miracles*. *Sacred Sisters* is the artist's book that you see displayed on the table. You can take a closer look at it a little bit later. It's displayed in one of its permutations. It's a collaboration between Holly Trostle Brigham and Maryland Nelson published by me, Lucia Press. I am

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the designer, binder and printer.

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The book is kept inside of a box with a very opulent fabric chosen by Holly.

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Do you remember Holly, what we went through? Holly? Remember what we went through choosing that fabric?

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HOLLY TROSTLE BRIGHAM: Yes. I wanted something that looked sort of ecclesiastical, but also kind of Renaissance Medieval.

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So, I went down to the -- I live in Philadelphia -- I went down to the fabric district and went into a number of different shops and then found this and was really hoping that Maryann could actually put it on top of the box and glue it and spread it. Because it's kind of a thick fabric. I'm talking specifically about the crimson fabric because the green is a book cloth. MARYANN L. MILLER: Right.

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And it worked. It worked just fine and also Holly's friend, Pookie Weatherburn, designed the embellishment which is made out of brass wire. Pookie is a jewelry maker in Philadelphia and so we felt it needed some kind of a point of interest

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that said "this is where you open the box." HOLLY TROSTLE BRIGHAM: Right. It's supposed to kind of echo like a hinge. There's like a magnet underneath it so that you're not actually putting pressure on the embellishment, but you're able to lift it.

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If you look closely, when you come up afterwards, on the top there are sort of three little forms that almost look like crosses. That was kind of Pookie's way of following through with this idea of a book based on nuns.

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MARYANN L. MILLER: Right and then in this photograph the embellishment hasn't been sewn on yet so you can see it's kind of at an angle. Here is the book displayed in its radial format. I decided to use a radial spine format because these women, who are depicted in the book, are nuns. They are engaged in prayer. They are engaged in repetitious

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elements in their lives. They pray, they sew, they do deeds for other people and so the radial spine kind of reflects on that idea of almost like a prayer wheel that goes around and around and it continues into infinity. The idea of eternity is in there. You can see that Holly's paintings

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have been reproduced. I printed them on transparency so that they would have a translucent glow to them. So, the women in the paintings were researched by Holly and Marilyn at various times. They realized when they met that they had a mutual interest in the history of these women, decided to collaborate on an artist's book. Holly's paintings, Maryland's poems, their research and my format

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integrated in *Sacred Sisters*. Would you, Marilyn and Holly, could you explain how you met and how you decided to do the collaboration? I know sometimes [with] collaborations, you can't even tell where one person started and the other one began, but can you talk about that?

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HOLLY TROSTLE BRIGHAM: Sure. I would love to. So, I actually was checking my notes earlier because I was shocked to find out that we actually met the Fall of 2012. So, we met because my daughter goes to a private school outside of Philadelphia and there was a series of, a program, where we invited women writers to come on campus and work with the students.

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It was the year of -- we decided to make it a poetry year -- and my friend Kim Bridgeford, who is a professor and also a poet, recommended that I invite Marilyn Nelson because she said she would be fabulous. I wasn't sure we would be able to get her to come, but we managed that and I was her parent liaison for the day. We started to talk when we had a little bit of downtime and she was

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very generous and asked me what I did. I told her I was an artist and that I was working on a series of paintings of nuns who were artists. It was artists at that point and so, she was so excited to hear about that.

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She said tell me more and so I started to tell her that I had actually done two paintings already in the series and was working on a piece based on Hildegard of Bingen. That was sort of an electric shock for Marilyn and me because she always wanted to do something based on Hildegard. So, she, by the end of the conversation, was thinking maybe we should collaborate and I was excited and thrilled that that might be a possibility.

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We thought about it for a while. She came back to Philadelphia for a children's book conference where she was a keynote speaker. We met for dinner and we decided to proceed with the collaboration. That was kind of the initial meeting and from that point it became not only nuns who were artists, but also nuns who were some of them were writers as well and had actually thought about doing Sor Juana as a subject.

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So, when we decided to collaborate Sor Juana definitely was in the mix of nuns

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we wanted to deal with. MARYANN L. MILLER: Thanks. Marilyn, you want to add anything?

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MARILYN NELSON: I would only add that, as Holly said, there was a shock when we discovered we had Hildegard of Bingen in common. A few years earlier I had a research fellowship to do research about Hildegard. I had gone to Bingen. I had visited every place she had ever lived. I had actually done some serious work

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about her, but I had never gotten around to writing about her. I was prepared and ready to write about her and that was just the springboard for me. It was the springboard for this larger project. HOLLY TROSTLE BRIGHAM: Right.

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I think it's interesting -- you'll find out more as we as we go on this evening -- but this poet friend Kim Bridgeford, I was telling you about, she said after Marilyn and I decided to do this collaboration she said, "Well it was inevitable because you two are kind of doing similar things, but in different art forms." So, where Marilyn does, you know, she does historical research and oftentimes

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will put herself in the place of a figure or she adds to the understanding of a particular person or historical period; I was kind of doing the same, but with painting. So, it's kind of wonderful that we were able to collaborate.

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MARYANN L. MILLER Thanks. And in the background, I was buzzing around in the print studio at Lafayette College and Holly had come there to do a print. We had talked off and on about doing an artist's book together and so this is how it came together then and this was the artist's book that that came into being from that that desire to work together. Here's Holly in her studio. Can you talk to us?

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about what you're working on?

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HOLLY TROSTLE BRIGHAM: This was actually the first nun that I painted. This was Sorella Plautilla Nelli and she lived in the Italian Renaissance in Florence, Italy and I decided to paint her because I had discovered that she was the only woman artist that Giorgio Vasari had mentioned in his famous book from the Renaissance, *Lives of the Artists* (The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects), and he gave her one line. So, you know, all

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the all biographies are about Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Rafael,

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and he gives this one line to her and then says, you know, she's a very talented artist. I thought, well OK,

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she was a very talented artist, she deserves to have a portrait. That was kind of my, that was the catalyst for painting her. She was a Dominican nun and she was part of the St. Catherine Convent. So, the little miniature that she's wearing is St. Catherine. I kind of like start to find ways, iconography, and ways to kind of tell her story within the painting. I have her in the process of

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painting one of her known paintings and I say known because they are still being discovered in Florence, Italy. There's actually a group of women who are associated with the National Museum of Women in the Arts here in Washington, D.C. and they are raising money in Florence, Italy to clean her paintings and to try to find other ones because there's records that she did quite a few. At this point there are maybe like five

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that have been known. She's in the process of painting and I kind of have this like what I call sort of a holy light around her and illuminating her painting. The paintings are all in watercolor. The figures are life-size. They're painted on a very heavy French watercolor paper. It's by Arches and it's a five-hundred-pound paper. The work is done with tiny brushes,

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but also, there's a lot of hatching work and then there's wash work as well. I kind of combine the two. So, this is Andrea and Claudia. This was actually the last painting. We just saw the first one and this was the last one in the series. Andrea Maria was the

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daughter of Pedro de Mena, who was a well-known sculptor in the Baroque period in Spain. He had two daughters and the daughters, Andrea and Claudia, entered a convent, on the same day actually, and that was something that really, I think, attracted Marilyn to them. So, she wanted to talk about the two sisters, so her poem is really, really cool.

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Art historians are not sure which work is possibly of the daughters because they helped their father. They polychromed, they made sculptures and they polychromed them. This particular work that she's working on is one that is considered to be possibly by her. It's Madonna Dolorosa and so

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she's crying; there's like a tear on her face. If you've ever seen these types of sculptures [they] are really amazing. They're sculpted out of wood and then they're gessoed and then they're painted on top. If you look at the sculpture she's working on at the bottom, do you see how it's gray and white and then the rest is in color? I'm trying to show you that she's in the process of adding color. What they would do is -- it's almost like hyper-realistic sculpture --

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they would add like real eyelashes to the sculptures. They would add glass tears and the eyeballs would actually be made out of glass. So, the nun paintings each have a relic sort of a faux relic that I've sort of put along with the painting and it's in a little frame. The relic that goes with this particular painting is a glass eyeball. It's kind of cool. It's like a little, tiny frame

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next to the painting.

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MARYANN L. MILLER: The kinds of detail that Holly applies to her work is astonishing too. This is only a part of the piece and I've done that because of the limitations of the screen size and the dimensions.

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But there are so many detailed, researched pieces in in her work that aren't always apparent in the way they're depicted here. HOLLY TROSTLE BRIGHAM: This one is Henriette DeLille, and this was a nun that Marilyn actually suggested that we might deal with when we had that dinner -- our second meeting in

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Philadelphia - and she was the founder of the first order of African-American nuns in the middle of the nineteenth century in New Orleans. It's called the Order of the Holy Family. Sorry that it's kind of cropped the way it is because you can't quite see some of the important parts in the painting, but when you come up and look at the artist's book, you'll be able to see more. Basically, I've arranged Henriette

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as if she were the Madonna and she's holding a doll, a baby Christ doll. Actually, I thought it would be important because she was a Creole woman and I wanted to bring about the idea of the Holy Family, but also, [in] all of my nun research I would come across a number of different orders that would have a doll

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that represented the baby Jesus. What the nuns would do is they would sort of ritually bathe the doll and dress it almost in a, for me it was kind of poignant and maybe a little sad because they wouldn't have children necessarily of their own because they were nuns. Yet they were going through those mothering rituals with this doll. So, I needed to find

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a doll that was, I thought it was important to have a black doll, and one that was from that time period. So, I did a lot of research and came up with this one that was actually an import doll. It was imported to the U.S. from Germany. I have Henriette and she's actually sewing the vestments for the for the baby Jesus doll and the birdcage in the back is also from

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that period and it represents a church. So, you know, the chair and the furniture are also period pieces that to me looked like pieces that might be in a convent. They look very ecclesiastical. They're sort of Gothic Revival and the carpet was created to kind of help you with that historical period. On the top, you cannot see, there is a Goldfinch

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outside of the birdcage and you may know that in in our history that is a symbol for freedom from slavery. So, there's a lot of symbolism in this particular painting.

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Hilaria Batista was also, I think we brought up, I think we brought up this order.

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You brought up this order when we were having dinner. Yes. One other idea that Marilyn said, because she said,

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"Have you figured out who all the nuns are?" and I said, "No. I've kind of left it open ended. So, I've got the first three." So, there was Plautilla Nelli that you saw. There was Saint Catherine of Bologna because I had just painted her, and then I was working on the Hildegard of Bingen piece. Marilyn, said look at Henrietta DeLille, that would be really great, and look at the Sisterhood of the Good Death, which was

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also, an order from the nineteenth century in Brazil. I don't want to sort of steal all of your... I kind of want you to talk about this too, but it was an order that was founded to free slaves. So, what the sisters did was they took the tobacco which was part of what... The slaves were picking tobacco. So, they took the tobacco

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and they made cigars out of it and whenever they raised enough money they would buy another slave's freedom.

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Really, really powerful order and story, so we decided to make this one of the nuns.

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I haven't really talked about this, but [in] all my work generally I use myself as the model. So, with Henriette DeLille, I used myself as a model because there's one photograph of her and I thought well you know she was Creole. There was part of her story is that her family passed for white. She chose not to. So, I thought that

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I could get away with that, but for this particular painting I could not use myself as the model to paint a figure of African origin. I used, actually, my next-door neighbor who is a friend. So, this is Lorraine Anderson Bell. She teaches marketing at Temple University. She's really great. So, she posed for Hilaria Batista and I'm actually the dead nun statue in the

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background.

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MARYANN L. MILLER: Marilyn what would you like to say about that? Did you go down there?

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MARILYN NELSON: Yes, I had visited the Mother House of the Sisterhood of the Good Death. I had a Guggenheim Fellowship, then

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wrote a book about a pilgrimage to this place. It's a kind of an imitation of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* which is about a pilgrimage. This sisterhood started in the early nineteenth century, I guess. Let me see, slavery was abolished in Brazil about

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40 years after it was abolished here and this sisterhood still exists. To join it -- it's not a Catholic convent, it's a candomblé, which is a combination of African religion and Catholicism. So, the sisters

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worship Mary, but Mary is also a stand-in for one of the Orishas. In order to join the sisterhood, the women have to be older than 50.

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So, it's a fellow[ship] -- it's a sorority I guess you would call it -- of older women who have dedicated themselves to, they were free and they dedicated themselves to freeing other slaves as Holly said. But they were also dedicated to serving the poor. They started schools. So, it's an organization that does good works.

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Every few, I think it's every seventh year, the oldest sister in the community -- candomblé is a religion of possession, being possessed by the spirits -

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and I think it's every seventh year that the oldest sister in the community in a ceremony is possessed by the Virgin Mary and speaks in the voice of Mary which I find incredibly beautiful. They wear white, always dressed in white with white head wraps and you see them on streets and they wear a lot of necklaces.

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The image here is an accurate image of the way these sisters dress. I guess that's all I want to say.

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MARYANN L. MILLER: What's behind the "good death?"

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Why are they called that? MARILYN NELSON: Mary was assumed into heaven without dying and so Mary's death was the perfect death and they are dedicated to helping people die good deaths. I mean you can't help people be assumed into heaven, but you can help people not die poor and hungry.

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You know. HOLLY TROSTLE BRIGHAM: You know that the Assumption of the Virgin Mary is

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like around August 18th. It varies from year to year, but it's like a three-day festival that they have. On the first day they have this the statue of the Virgin Mary and they parade it through the town and she's erect and you know everyone's happy and everything. On the second day they sort of mourn her death. So, what I'm depicting here is this statue of the Madonna laid out to rest. The

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The nun has a black sash over her white islet dress and so for the first day of the festival the sash is turned to its red side.

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On the second day it's turned to the black side because they're mourning her death. On the third day she rises into heaven [and] the sash is turned to the red side again and it's a big street festival.

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Did you get to see all of that?

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MARILYN NELSON: No unfortunately. They were they were in retreat and we were there. MARYANN L. MILLER: Thanks. So, at the beginning of each poem there is an initial. Initial capitals that are in Uncial font and Holly designed those initial capitals and each one depicts the Convent of each sister behind the letter. So, when you take a closer look you can actually see them.

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There are buildings behind each letter. Here we come to Hildegard of Bingen. She really is pivotal in this whole story

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and Marilyn is going to read some poems. She will read four poems from the book and talk a little bit about the women

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she is reading about. This is Marilyn at Hildegard's childhood home with St. Jemma at the monastery where they were. Where was that actually? Was that in Germany? MARILYN NELSON: This is on a mountain in Germany. She,

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let me see, it is in the poem. I think she was the, I'm trying to see what number she was in her family. She was something like the eighth child of her parents and they gave her to the church as a child. So, from about the age of twelve, I'm sorry I

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haven't done research for this, at about the age of 12 she was given to the church and she lived with a woman who was an anchorite. Anchorites were women given to the church who never left the church. They lived in cells that were attached to the outside of a church or a monastery with a window looking

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into the church so they could see the services and participate in them, but they never left this place.

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They were anchors and this anchorite

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was Saint Jutta and Hildegard lived with her for about 12 or 15 years and was educated by Jutta and then left and was ordained or received into monastery herself. Then [she] went on to live the most extraordinary adult life.

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She was a genius. She had visions. She recorded her visions. She was the first woman in the Western tradition to compose music. She was a scientist. She did a lot of research about nutrition and published suggestions of how to eat healthfully; what you should eat. You shouldn't eat flour, you should eat another grain called

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spelt. She advised the Pope, okay.

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She really was an incredible woman and I'll read. Shall I read the poem about her? Yeah okay. She's again [in the] twelfth century. "Our northern window brought us the office, voices of men sweetened by sacrifice, but even they believed women are less. Our southern window brought us the sky's

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light, and in moments between work and prayer, calls and laughter from the world we had left, pledged as my parents' tithe to live Thy praise, I praise Thee for freeing me as a girl from a wife's mother's ordinary chores.

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I thank Thee for the gift of Living Light that touched flame to a young novice's mind, and made me understand what stands in books.

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I think Thee for the ways my visions show in kindling fire, Creator, Sustainer, for the Abbey given me and my sisters Alpha, Omega soaring, harmony, for the music I composed by matins' light, hearing the birds, the roosters and my quill.

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I have praised Thee every hour in spite of men, thou art the source of my strength and courage, I put no trust in earthly potentates, those men who are walking Westward as I am.

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As soon as they stop breathing they are clay, all their important plans quickly forgotten. I praise Thee even now despite the bishops denying us music and sacraments to break my will, assholes, my soul sing praise."

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She was a very strong-willed woman. I don't think it would have been out of character for her to call these bishops assholes.

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She was tough. The bishops denied. She started this convent so they had this land

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and this was the twelfth century when the Crusades were going on and a man who had been in the Crusades and come back to Europe, but who wasn't a believer, he wanted to be buried in holy ground and Hildegard allowed him to be buried in the land of her convent.

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The bishops wanted him dug up and taken out. She refused to do this. So, to punish her they wouldn't allow these nuns to receive the sacraments. They wouldn't allow them to sing. They sort of tried to shut them down,

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but Hildegard was Hildegard.

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I think Hildegard would have been an editor of Ms. Magazine or something. She was tough so that's what this poem alludes to.

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MARYANN L. MILLER: This is Otagaki? HOLLY TROSTLE BRIGHAM: Yeah. It's really unfortunate that you're seeing like tiny sections of the paintings.

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MARYANN L. MILLER: I'm sorry I had to choose what I could fit on there.

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I think Marilyn is going to be. I just wanted to [say] before Marilyn reads the poem, because I was thinking about another thing that you all should know, when we had that first meeting at my daughter's school, Marilyn asked me why I wanted to paint these nuns, why I wanted to tell these stories. I had said that I wanted to give these women voice that they hadn't had.

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To let people know about them.

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To sort of celebrate them and Marilyn said that she could give them more voice. She could, you know, write the words that they would say and it was her brilliant idea to write the

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poems as prayers and to put them in the first person.

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So, I just wanted to say that. MARILYN NELSON: So Otagaki Rengetsu was a Buddhist nun, monk nun in the nineteenth century. My poem tells her story, but I suppose I could add a little bit of information. She's quite famous in

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Japan for her artistry. She was as a ceramicist and one of the reasons her ceramics are well-known -- they're all small -- [is] she made these beautiful little containers, little cups and then she composed poems which she etched into the clay under the glaze. So, each one of her objects

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also contains a poem and my poem has little poems in it which are imitations of Otagaki's poems. You'll recognize them.

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They were intended to sound like hers and I think that's all I have to say about her.

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She was a child born out of wedlock in the 1860s. Must have been 1840s I guess. "Shamed daughter of Samurai and Geisha, but adopted by an honorable family,

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I was given happiness snatched away - husbands, children.

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They vanished like noon dew. The only certainty is impermanence. So, I cut my hair, put on the nuns' black robe and became this humble servant, Lotus Moon, who gathers mud to form into vessels reverently aware of each moment.

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Between my palms

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I knead a lump of clay, warming it into flexibility and shaping a welcoming receptacle for water, tea,

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Sake or emptiness. Each carries, like a scent born on a breeze, the memory of one single moment my poem catches, inscribed under the glaze. In whose dream are you dancing butterfly? White

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Cherry petals flutter down like snow, small asymmetrical cups carry my fingerprints through the kiln's inferno into usefulness. They fit each holder's hand, fill it with grace and gift each holder's heart. The moon loves me, last night it followed

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me to my bedroom. On teapots, sake sets. Pounding my robe in the Spring deep stream, I pause, breathe birdsong. As I walk home through twilight mist, wild geese fly where I cannot see, voices trailing."

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MARYANN L. MILLER: Lovely. Here we have Sor Juana. MARILYN NELSON: I guess the one thing we haven't said is that anyone who does a study of the history of convents, the history of nuns in any culture and any religion, will find that convents were

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places where women could be liberated. So, when you're when you look at nuns you're looking at liberated women. Women who freed themselves from the limitations of marriage and child-bearing and I think it's not unusual that the nuns that Holly and I are engaged with here were geniuses.

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But of the ones we studied, the two greatest geniuses I think were Hildegard and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz. Sor Juana was Mexican, born in seventeenth century. A great heroine of Mexican culture

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who would, like Hildegard, learn to read by a miracle and Sor Juana Ines had a similar experience and was driven to educate herself. To learn.

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I think she would have been an astrophysicist if she were living now.

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She was really fascinated by everything including science and including indigenous, Mexican culture. She herself was descended from Spaniards. She wasn't indigenous, but she grew up surrounded by indigenous people and respected their culture. So, there are some elements in this poem that come from her interest in indigenous culture.

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HOLLY TROSTLE BRIGHAM: She's actually called the first feminist.

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MARYANN L. MILLER: Really?

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MARILYN NELSON: "At three, I learned to read another's thoughts. At five, I learned the beauty of numbers. At eight, the Muse chose me and wrote my fate, a fate impossible for a woman according to men who control the world. Thus, I am called and ordered to refuse

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to accept the limitations of my sex for women are not minds, we are bodies. Where, in the body, does the eye reside? An eagle cramped in a canary cage, I soar to the summits only in books and on lines I scratch with angel feathers.

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For what, but to fly, was I given wings. I looked down on the landscape of myself.

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My eyes are lakes, obsidian mirrors out of which love stares, her eyes full of tears. My hunger for knowledge, my poetry,

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all of my gifts, men pronounce "heresy." Each day is my private Inquisition, the Church examining each truth I find sieving my silence for what can't be said while I, burn at the stake of my desire. Am I another of your ironies, endlessly

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new, self-made, Creator, Lord? Give me humility. Help me

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accept that I was made a sunlight seeking soul and confined to this windowless cell of flesh." Shall we? It's six o'clock, shall we?

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MARYANN L. MILLER: It's six o'clock, and we have one more poem, Saint Catherine? MARILYN

NELSON: I will not talk so much, I'll just read the poem.

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Saint Catherine is fifteenth century. I don't know what else to say. The Poor Clares are the order she joined.

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I will just read the poem. "At age 14 I was sent to serve at court. I begged to be freed from that privilege into the privilege of poverty, to embrace penance and constant fasting, invited with my sisters to the dance of chaste devotion. Thus, I prayed at court, listening over my embroidery.

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My maiden heart beat with a constant plea, show me thy face Lord, Lord show me thy face. A dove released, I flew to the Poor Clares. Then came years when my doubt tempted my faith with remembered footmen, years when virtue promised no reward other than itself. Years

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when the logic of the passing world which jibes at chastity and devotion rubbed my nose in absurd virginity. I kept my lamp lighted for the bridegroom, show me Thy face my Lord, my Love, I prayed. But I spent my work hours with caught breath, focused on the two hair's

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breadth of my brush, bringing light and color to the margins of a book of the hours, or I painted large iconic portraits of Mother and Child with golden halos, or on the Violette with closed eyes, bowed harmonies of the chant. At last, forgetting to pray show Thy face,

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I glimpsed Thy face in the worship of art."

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MARYANN L. MILLER: Thank you so much Maryland. Are there any last comments you or Holly would like to make? HOLLY TROSTLE BRIGHAM: Well I think I would love to tell you also that so before the series of *Sacred Sisters* it was supposed to be *Seven Sisters II* because I had already done a series called *Seven Sisters* that were myself in the guise of women artists

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throughout time. When I finished that series, I thought what do I do next and I thought it would be interesting to paint nuns who were artists. So, *Seven Sisters II*, a pun on the word

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Sister.

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So, there were to be seven with Hildegard's box, it became eight and when Marilyn and I decided to collaborate together, we not only were doing the collaboration, but the intent was -- the original intent was -- to do exhibitions to show the paintings and to have blowups of the poems beside that. So, we did that at the Benton Museum at the University of Connecticut Storrs and also

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at Penn State in the Lehigh Valley. Those two shows it was great and Marilyn and I did some talks there. All the while I kept thinking, this is such an amazing experience, such an amazing collaboration. I would love to document it somehow and how do I do that? The idea, the form of the artist's book popped into my head and, of course, I knew MaryAnn

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and so, I talked to her about that.

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Marilyn and I, originally, we thought well maybe we try to publish it in some sort of periodical or something, but then the artist's book became such a great idea. I had never made one before a MaryAnn was able to kind of help me. I had some ideas and we were able to get that together. That was a really wonderful way to sort of mark this collaboration. It's an edition

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of 12, and there is one here at Rutgers, so it's been placed at the Smithsonian and Penn State and Smith College, Lafayette College. It was just a really wonderful experience and then we went on and we did a second artist's book called *Mother Monument*, which we just launched at the University of Pennsylvania this past Fall at the Arthur Ross

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Gallery. Lucky enough, Marilyn was one...I collaborated with eight poets and Marianne once again, and Marilyn is one of the eight poets for *Mother Monument*. So, thank you so much for coming to hear us talk.

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MARYANN L. MILLER: Thank you Holly and Marilyn. It's just been a great pleasure to hear your full story altogether. Michael, would you like to summarize and end us for today?

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MICHAEL JOSEPH: Well not really, but I would like to thank you all.

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I mean, maybe you could talk about structure of this book because nobody has mentioned the intricate, complex structure that you've assembled and you conceived of for them. So, I think we would be interested to hear about that. MARYANN L. MILLER: Well, I just happen to have an instructional video.

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Which we actually made because the book was acquired by a gallery. Where was it Holly? Was it Penn State, and they wanted to know how to work this book. It can be displayed a number of different ways. Oops. There we go. I'm not sure.

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How do I get it to work as a video? OFFSIDE VOICE: You wouldn't be able to use that. You would have to actually click. Is it embedded? MARYANN L. MILLER: Yeah. OFFSIDE VOICE: You would have to use the mouse to click on the actual video. Go back. Move back to this slide and then use the mouse. If it's embedded it will play.

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MICHAEL JOSEPH: I also wanted to mention that we have food and wine and drinks outside. MARYANN L. MILLER: Oh yeah. We need to get to that.

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This is just not meant to be a published thing, it's just something I did in my studio with my iPhone, so that whoever needs to set up this could do it.

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It's kind of self-explanatory as you watch it, but you can actually see better the structure of the book as it is arranged in two different alternate ways of display. The book is sewn together, but it is also glued because the paper is very heavy. It's Rives BFK, which is a go-to printmaking paper,

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and as I said, I printed the paintings on transparencies and put them into the structure by using an archival adhesive called gutial (sp). It gets a little technical but, here the book is set up and then I it can be displayed this way. It's meant to be circumnavigated

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and displayed on a table so that you can walk around and read it the way I have it on this table. But the table needs to be wider so that it can be pulled out a little bit farther; that the wings can be spread more and you'll get a shot down into the radial spine so you can see how it is sewn. I left the strings long. The red strings which are about life and blood and sacrifice and

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they kind of point out the work that these nuns have done and the vestiges of that work. There is a piece of Velcro that gets pressed together there to hold the spine together. Here's another way to display this book. It is laid out flat. I developed this format with the book artist, [unintelligible] Korf (sp), who was one of my book guards teachers. She

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was an architectural designer and so she was very interested in creating different book forms. Constructed books.

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So, you pull it out and all the pages are displayed at once and you read it by turning each page and this allows a more careful reading. If this were to just be displayed in a museum or a gallery, it would be handled with cotton gloves. Otherwise it's usually displayed under a vitrine and nobody can touch it.

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I like people to touch the books, but you can't just let that happen all the time. So then this is another way of reading it. You can actually reread the poems. You go back through it and most people in an exhibit wouldn't get to do that.

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So, it goes back together. I think it was winter because I look like I'm all bundled up there. It goes back in his beautiful box that Holly got that wonderful fabric with Pookie's embellishment and so that is it. Does that answer questions or are there more questions about construction? No.

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MICHAEL JOSEPH: Thank you. Would everybody join me in thanking Marilyn, MaryAnn and Holly.