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“José de Jesús Rodríguez’s Back & Forth” New Art21 Film to Premiere May 27, 2026

Using traditional techniques like fresco and mosaic, artist José de Jesús Rodríguez searches for a visual language as complex as his own personal and collective identities.



Production still from the Art21 *New York Close Up* film “José de Jesús Rodríguez’s Back & Forth.” © Art21, Inc. 2026.

[Watch the trailer.](#)

New York, New York—May 26, 2026—Art21 today announced the release of “José de Jesús Rodríguez’s Back & Forth,” a new documentary film following the New York City-based painter in a moment of creative transition as he brings processes like mosaic and relief sculpture into an emerging body of work. Scenes and symbols from history, popular culture, and his upbringing in Salinas, CA, collide in his paintings, revealing how such elements can inform our self-image yet ultimately fail to capture the full texture of our lived experiences.

Directed by Andrea Yu-Chieh Chung, the film premieres online Wednesday, May 27, at 12 pm ET on [Art21.org](https://www.art21.org) and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com).

As the leading independent producer documenting the art of our time, Art21 was established with a mission to expand access to artists and their ideas, meet audiences where they are, and explore connections between artists and their communities. To date, Art21 has created 80+ hours of films documenting over 300 artists across six continents.

Dense with figures and landscapes, the references in José de Jesús Rodríguez's artworks range from the 2004 Denzel Washington thriller *Man on Fire* to the paintings of classic Mexican muralists like Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco.

"It's not just about the image," says Rodríguez, "but the way things have to meet and touch, and the edges, and seeing what can be generated from that. From things that maybe aren't supposed to be together, having to acknowledge each other, and hang out."

"Throughout the production process and our conversations, the word that came up the most is 'oscillation,'" says director **Andrea Yu-Chieh Chung**. "José has a deep sense of love for and responsibility to his family, but tries to find an alternative way of being in the world for himself...He is influenced by certain periods of art history and ways of making, but aspires to challenge and defy them."

She notes, "It was important for me to find ways to hold all these complex and contradictory feelings and ideas in the film."

About *New York Close Up*

New York Close Up (NYCU) is devoted to capturing early career artists living and working in New York City. NYCU films have been accepted and honored by over 100 film festivals worldwide, including Academy Awards-qualifying festivals like AmDocs Film Festival, Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, BlackStar, DOC NYC, Full Frame Documentary Film Festival and Palm Springs ShortFest. NYCU films have also been honored with 2 Webby Award nominations and 9 Vimeo Staff Picks.

New York Close Up is made possible with support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, the Henry Nias Foundation, and individual contributors.



About Art21

Art21 documents the art of our time through the words and works of the most impactful artists working today. Operating at the nexus of contemporary art and film, Art21 produces intimate portraits of artists at crucial moments of creation, inviting audiences to see the world from an artist's perspective. From its award-winning public television series to in-person public programs, education initiatives, and film screenings, to broadcasting documentary films free, online, and across social media platforms, the independent nonprofit is dedicated to meeting audiences where they are and to making contemporary art accessible to all. For more information, visit Art21.org.

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For an advance screening or to learn more, email Art21 Associate Director of Communications, Hannah DeGarmo, at hannah@art21.org.

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