-So my name is Ken Taya,

also known as Enfu.

My street name is Enfu.

[ Chuckles ]

Or maybe I should say,

my name is Enfu,

also known as Ken Taya.

-He does some of the best work.

I have a piece at my house,

and I just am always excited

about the work

he has coming out.

-I love the color,

his illustration work.

He's probably, like, one of

the better well-known artists

that came out of Seattle

right now.

-How I feel

when I see his work --

I feel very happy.

-There's no one

in the Pan-American community

or anyone who's familiar with

the Asian-American community

who doesn't know about Enfu.

-I was born in Chicago,

and my parents

are both Japanese.

They met in college.

I moved to Delaware for most

of my childhood -- 7 years --

and then we moved to Seattle.

I think the first encounter

that I had

with knowing

that I was different

was probably when I got called

a "Jap" for the first time,

and that was, like,

in third grade.

It was kind of awkward for me.

I didn't understand

where that hate was coming from.

We moved to Japan for one year

in Sendai.

I moved there

When I was in sixth grade.

I thought, "Well, finally,

I'm going back to a place where no one will call me a Jap."

And already middle school

was kind of hard

trying to fit in

and everything,

and my Japanese

was not very good.

They kind of treated me like

a disabled child, a little bit.

Like, "Oh, he looks Japanese,

but he can't speak.

He must be slow."

You know, being called out

for being racially different

kind of sucked.

Then being called out

just being different,

but racially the same --

That kind of shook my world.

But there were things

that I did well at.

There's a painting class

where they started

painting in watercolor.

And it was the first time

I touched the medium at all.

I never experienced

any painting before.

And then the teacher was really

shocked at my ability to paint.

That teacher was really empowering to me,

as I remember it.

He indulged me, and like,

"Hey, this is pretty good.

You know, you should

you keep doing this."

I loved video games growing up.

And, you know, watching

Saturday morning cartoons

and playing video games

and reading manga --

those are all things

that every kid does, I think.

So, you know, I just wanted

to make games.

Right now, I'm currently

a professional game developer --

Doing that

for about 11 years now.

The games that I was working on,

they were all gritty and horror

real world,

first-person shooter-type games.

And I wanted to try

something else more artistic.

So I started screen printing.

Pull it from this side.

I started selling them

at Emerald City Comicon,

and that's kind of

my first exposure

to being out there.

The convention scene

was easier for me

to get into than,

like, an art gallery scene.

Hello.

-Wait. Is this the one at, uh...

Boosie?

-Boosie? Yeah, I did that.

-Oh, that was you!

-That's me.

I'm on page 44.

Hundreds of people

walking by your work.

You want one, too?

That'll be $60.

-Here you go.

-Thank you.

And we'll get them out to you

as soon as possible.

And I started realizing --

I need something --

I need content to draw.

I can't just draw a tree,

and people like it.

I needed to make it, you know,

my tree or not.

So, I was like,

"Well, something I care about

and understand

are just cultural differences."

I found myself

defending American views

when I was in Japan

and defending Japanese views

when I was in America.

And you're basically this person

who is always taking

the other side...

Kind of a bridge --

a person who tries to bridge

to two different worlds.

And, you know,

you're really presented

with a lot

of conflicting values.

So I had this period

where I was just combining

East and West themes

I coined it "Hybrid Hip Hop."

The very first piece

was "Tako Truck,"

which is a combination

of taco trucks in the U.S.

and then a takoyaki stand

or yatai in Japan.

And, you know, then I combined Superman and Ultraman.

The superheroes in the U.S.

are all very buff.

The superheroes in Japan

aren't buff at all.

They're really skinny.

What does that say

about masculinity?

Whenever I see content

that points back to my identity,

it's empowering --

not just Japanese-American specific stuff,

but just empowering

other Asian Americans.

My daughter came in my life,

and it made me soft.

I think being a father

makes everybody soft. [ Laughs ]

A lot more of my stuff's now become cute, flowery things.

And I think that generally

just appeals to more people.

The next step of my commentary

was in comic form.

I did "I Fart Rainbow"

in a local magazine called Ibuki

for about 3 years.

Social situations are hard,

even in one language.

I wanted to be able to comment

on that in the comic.

Just processing out

what I was thinking.

I built an audience of people

that were dealing with their own

cross-cultural battles.

-I know a lot

of my friends have --

they have a lot

of his most recent stuff

up in their apartments,

their houses,

and that sort of thing.

And, so, I've kind of known

of his art around.

And then finding out

on social media

about especially, like,

today's drop is pretty cool.

-Hey, the Wing Luke crowd.

All right.

[ Laughter ]

-I know. I was hoping --

-Here you go.

-Thank you.

-I started selling my work

at Kobo,

and my work

was well-received here.

-We loved his --

just his sensibility

and this kind of cross-cultural,

you know, Western and Eastern,

Japan and America together,

because that's basically

what Ken is,

you know, a blending

of those two cultures.

A lot of us are blending

of those two cultures as well.

-I like the colors he uses.

It's quite -- It's fun.

I have this really tall poster

of one he did.

It looked

like a vending machine,

and it just -- I was like,

"I have to have this artist."

And since then

we've been stalking him

at every con that we go to.

-Thank you. What's your name?

-Mei. Yeah.

-Mei? Nice to meet you.

-I think we harassed you

last year at the San Diego Con.

-Oh, really?

-Yeah.

-Oh, okay. That's cool.

-Yeah, awesome.

-I'll be there again,

full force.

-Okay. We'll see you.

-Yeah.

-Thank you.

-Tell your friends.

-I will, definitely.

Thank you very much.

-Yeah.

I've always learned

from my dad --

He'd always wake up early

in the morning and study,

and I picked up that habit.

But he also encouraged me.

He actually said,

before I went to college,

he goes, "You need to learn

the value of a dollar."

So he sent me up to Alaska

to work in the cannery.

I think the record for how long

I worked in one week

was 117 hours,

and that was pretty grueling.

That still, by far,

is my benchmark

for what hard work is.

"Enfu: Cute Grit"

is a compilation of 10 years

of my work.

Touches into some

of the exploration I did,

some of the struggles

I dealt with,

my process, tells kind of --

it lays out how I draw things,

and it explores that transition we're talking about --

from my content changing

from being about

my Asian American identity

to just being a father,

and just how that's --

you can see my work change.

[ Applause ]

Well, I appreciate you guys

coming out tonight.

I know it's all rainy

and everything is all dark,

and it's not really

kid-friendly time,

but I appreciate you guys

making it.

-[ Laughs ]

-No, that's awesome!

-As an artist myself,

I like looking at his stuff --

his icons,

his little, cute chibis.

It shows a lot of emotions

in each one of those.

-The big body of work

in the book

turned out to be

what we began with,

which was just pages

and pages and pages

of these amazing

chibi characters.

And every time

I would look at these pages,

it would make me so tired,

realizing all the time

that I went into drawing them.

And as someone who -- I work

with visual art all the time,

but don't consider myself

that much of a drawer,

and just makes me insanely

jealous to see all this stuff.

-These are created

with other things in mind.

So not just texting, but games.

Module games, matching games,

memory games.

I have a whole list of games

that I want to make with these.

-We run into each other

in a couple of shows,

and one year, we just, you know,

struck up a conversation,

and he's like, "Hey,

do you want to collaborate?"

And it'll come off.

We started off with hats.

And that's basically

how we got started.

-Yeah, I think there's

a lot of value in...exploring.

[ Machine beeps ]

-So this particular

black and white hat --

we'll put our Enfu

and, like, neck pattern

on the inside of the base.

-Would you sign it?

-Yeah, of course.

-Just anywhere on the orange.

-On the orange right here?

-Yeah.

-All right.

-Right on.

-And we're making billfolds,

plushies, stuff like that.

We're R&Ding a bunch of things,

resin blocks on the art --

my posters.

Also we're making,

like, leggings.

-That you can definitely

spot them from a mile away.

And we're looking

towards the future,

and we're just thinking of other

just fun products

that we can just kind of take it

and put our own spin on it

and run with.

-Well, my favorite piece of his

is actually --

wasn't like the stuff from Tokyo, you know, like the --

My actually was

the bags he did for Uwajimaya.

-The guys at Blue C Sushi approached me and said,

"Would you like to do a mural?"

And, "We want to incorporate

the coolness of Tokyo

with kind of a modern

American lifestyle."

And in the background,

I drew Uwajimaya.

So I made that poster,

and we sold it here,

and then...

-We got one of the prints,

and my wife noticed

that he has a little sign

that says Uwajimaya in kanji.

And I hadn't noticed it.

So I sent him an e-mail saying,

"Thanks for the shout out,

and thanks for including us

in your print, and I got one."

And he e-mailed me back

the next day and, you know,

said that, you know, he enjoyed

shopping at Uwajimaya,

and that if we ever had

a project for him

that he'd interested.

-Because it was -- For me,

that was a big part

of my childhood.

Uwajimaya was the one place

where you see homeless people

that look like you there.

This is a place for me --

is kind of what

Uwajimaya became.

I mean, who thinks that

about a grocery store?

But, to me, that's what it was.

And it was a big deal.

-So I ran it by my boss,

and he was in.

So we just started communicating

about a bag.

-First bag I did with all the stuff coming out of the back --

that's paying homage

to their roots.

-We had a lot of sponsors

for that.

Next bag was our freshness bag,

which has one side filled

with all of our fresh produce,

then flip side

has all of our fresh seafood.

-They're super detailed.

He was telling me about

how many hours he spent

meticulously researching

the look and the type of each

and the color of each,

like fruit and vegetable

and all the seafood

and everything in it.

That really shows the depth

and breadth of, like, Asian --

like, basically

Asian-American food.

-Every bag really, you know,

does well.

-I think through Uwajimaya, people -- all have to do is say,

"You know, the guy

that does the Uwajimaya bags?"

Since I have a store

in Japantown,

I have kids coming in

all the time

with the parents

and by themselves,

and it's really fascinating

who is being captured by J-pop and anime and all that.

And it's a tremendous

cross-section of America.

I mean, we have kids

from the Midwest,

and they were on vacation,

and they want to come down

to Japantown,

and they want to go

to Kinokuniya,

and they want to, you know,

see what Japantown's about.

And Ken fits

right into that

of keeping it contemporary

and refreshed,

which everything needs to be.

It practically evolved

out of the idea

that we were gonna do

a wayfinding sign

for each of the three sub-neighborhoods of our greater

Chinatown International District

neighborhood,

and those would be Japantown,

Chinatown, and Little Saigon.

Paul Murakami,

whose family owns this building,

was saying, you know,

"We need something that's fun

if we're gonna do something

kind of untraditional

for wayfinding,

like wrapping switch boxes."

-I'll let you do your thing.

-And then, right there, I mean,

it came up in a discussion.

And it was -- everyone

in the group knew who Ken was

and recognized him.

It was a pretty easy sell

if you would, you know.

-I'm so happy to see this,

You've been talking

about it for a while.

-I know it's been

a long time, right?

-Yeah.

-Yeah.

Looks good.

-Good job, man.

-Oh, thank you. Thank you.

-That's awesome.

-We're gonna have one up

on 5th and Main,

and then one down here

on Maynard and Jackson.

The one directly

outside of Momo

will say "Japantown" on it.

These are the ones that

are actually gonna have

wayfinding signs on them.

-There's a dichotomy

of preservation.

Again, when you preserve something,

you preserve something

that's old.

So you got to re-interpret it

to make it appealing

to younger people.

Young people have a hard time

putting value on those things,

and the older you get,

you value those.

Just by the way I'm drawing it,

giving it a kind of a modern spin or modern interpretation.

It reminds people

of anime in games.

It's -- every artist does this.

They make the old new again.

[ Camera shutter clicks ]

-Okay.

Oh, I just absolutely love it.

I feel like it really

brightens up our corner,

and it brings attention to what

we're trying to accomplish

in this neighborhood.

I think it's really wonderful.

It's very attractive to,

I think,

people of all ages

and all cultures.

It's really happy-making.

-My vision for art is I believe

that it should be enjoyed

and consumed.

I consume all these things

all of my life,

so I feel like I can give back.

-He does so much charity work.

He donates so much

of his stuff and his time.

He gets his name out there.

It's great.

-He does a lot of festivals,

does a lot of community events.

-He's grown so much in the years

that I've seen.

Like, going from, like,

doing the smaller events,

now going off --

Now he's in New York City

Comic Con.

He's doing more things

in San Diego Comic-Con.

It is significant.

-He's a great, great role model

for young people

who want to pursue

doing something creatively.

-We're always talking about

the new work that's coming out

and really excited about

just seeing any new creations

he has to bring to the public.

-Yeah, the list is long.

It's never ending.

I have no shortage of work

to create for myself. [ Laughs ]

But, again, when I say work, it's fun for me.

I just love to draw. I've always

loved to draw since I was a kid.

You know, my best mode is --

I have coffee, and I have music,

and I'm just drawing.

And I could do that for forever.