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Topic: The Artist's Ego

Claire - When I went to college I planned to keep painting because that was what I had done in High School. But after the first semester of college I didn't feel as interested in pursuing art as a career because I got exposed to a lot of the ego involved in art. And not necessarily the ego of my classmates but the ego's of artists in history. And I felt like I didn't want to be part of that legacy.

Phil - Can you expand on that a little more?

Claire - Yeah, hmm... I don't know if this will sound a bit sacrilege but I was really put off by the work of Christo. When I saw the work of sheets of plastic around islands, it just bothered me. It couldn't have been great for the marine wildlife. And it's all there for this artists ego to create this vision. - But he's also done a lot of work that didn't really hurt an ecosystem.

Phil - Definitely dominating though.

Claire - Yah, but he does have interesting work that I appreciate but that one specifically really bothered me. And I surely saw the ego in art elsewhere as well, it was one artist that put me off.

Phil - I can imagine seeing the ego in a number of places could build into a crescendo.

Claire - Yah, probably. And I was a tutor in an afterschool program at the time and I really like it and thought, I should go into education. So I switched for a year but was also put off by some of the art education classes because they were too watered down, didn't feel challenging or interesting. And so for fun I took a letterpress class and I loooooved it. So I decided to go back to art.

Topic: Applying for Things

Phil - One thing I noticed about you and your work is you apply for things. You apply for grants, artist residencies, and on and on. Can you talk about that a little bit? Because I think it's a world many artists are hesitant to get into.

Claire - For me it's partially to stay engaged in the arts scene and in some ways to give myself an assignment. I find it easier to build a body of work if I have an exhibition coming up. Because when you're out of school, you are your own driving force, there's no one there to give you an assignment. So applying is a motivating force and eventually people will see what was created so that's motivating too.

Also, I apply for grants because I want funding to just focus on my work. That's always great. Then you don't even need to worry about selling the work to make money. So it's really about staying engaged and support.

Phil - And what about the emotional side of applying for all of these things. There must be a bit of rejection for a lot of work.

Claire - With applications I've learned you really need to have a thick skin. Early on when I was applying for stuff I would feel devastated with each rejection. But then I realized you're more likely to get rejected than get the grant because there are so many artists applying for everything making it very competitive. And once I developed that attitude it made the application process easier. I still feel disappointed if I don't get something I really wanted but I don't take it as personally as I used to.



Topic: Fox Conversations

Claire - They were originally going to be Christmas cards. I was going to make a unique conversation on each card for each person I sent them out to. And then I developed this long list of everyone I wanted to send them to and it was like 150 people and as I started to type them out I realized that it was not going to happen. (lol) And now it's turned into a thing I every once in a while give to people.



Topic: Being Human

Claire - I applied for the Friends of Red Butte Creek grant to investigate the question of what the wildlife I would meet was thinking. This extended from a long time crisis of not feeling comfortable being human. I felt like I should have been a different animal. It was something I hadn't fully developed out of as a child. I wasn't comfortable being a human, socially I got fine, I had friends and all that but it was this weird existential question of wanting to understand my connections to other species. So I went into the grant to investigate that and since I couldn't know what the other animals are thinking I would investigate what came up for me when I met an animal.

Phil - Is that a way you often make art? By asking a question and investigating it?

Claire - I haven't necessarily done that but a lot of my work has come from existential angst or enui which sounds super emo and annoying but it just is what it is. (lol)

But I think in the Red Butte series I was very intentionally investigating a question that was very important to me. And ultimately investigating my connections to other animals and understand my thoughts about them has made me accept being human. And then later on actually being happy to be human and grateful that I'm human. And shifting through that kind of released a lot of the angst I was feeling and now I don't really have those same kinds of questions. So now I come at my work not from a place of angst but sort of from a liminal in between state and having to ask 'what is my art about now'. Which is okay but it brings about a sense of discomfort and I don't really know what I'm doing right now but that opens up time to experiment and make a lot of art you don't like but that's okay.



Topic: Creating Time vs The Other Stuff

Phil - How much time do you spend making art vs the other components of a creative life?

Claire - I think it would depend on what point in my life I was thinking about. Like when I was younger most of the time was just making the work. But once I got older I began to spend more time applying for things because I realized that it's kind of a numbers game. The more things you apply for the more likely you are to get it and it's competitive so I should put more work in to have a stronger application. So I feel like maybe 25% of the time is applying to stuff and 75% is making stuff.

Phil - But then if you add in making prints, selling them, shipping them.

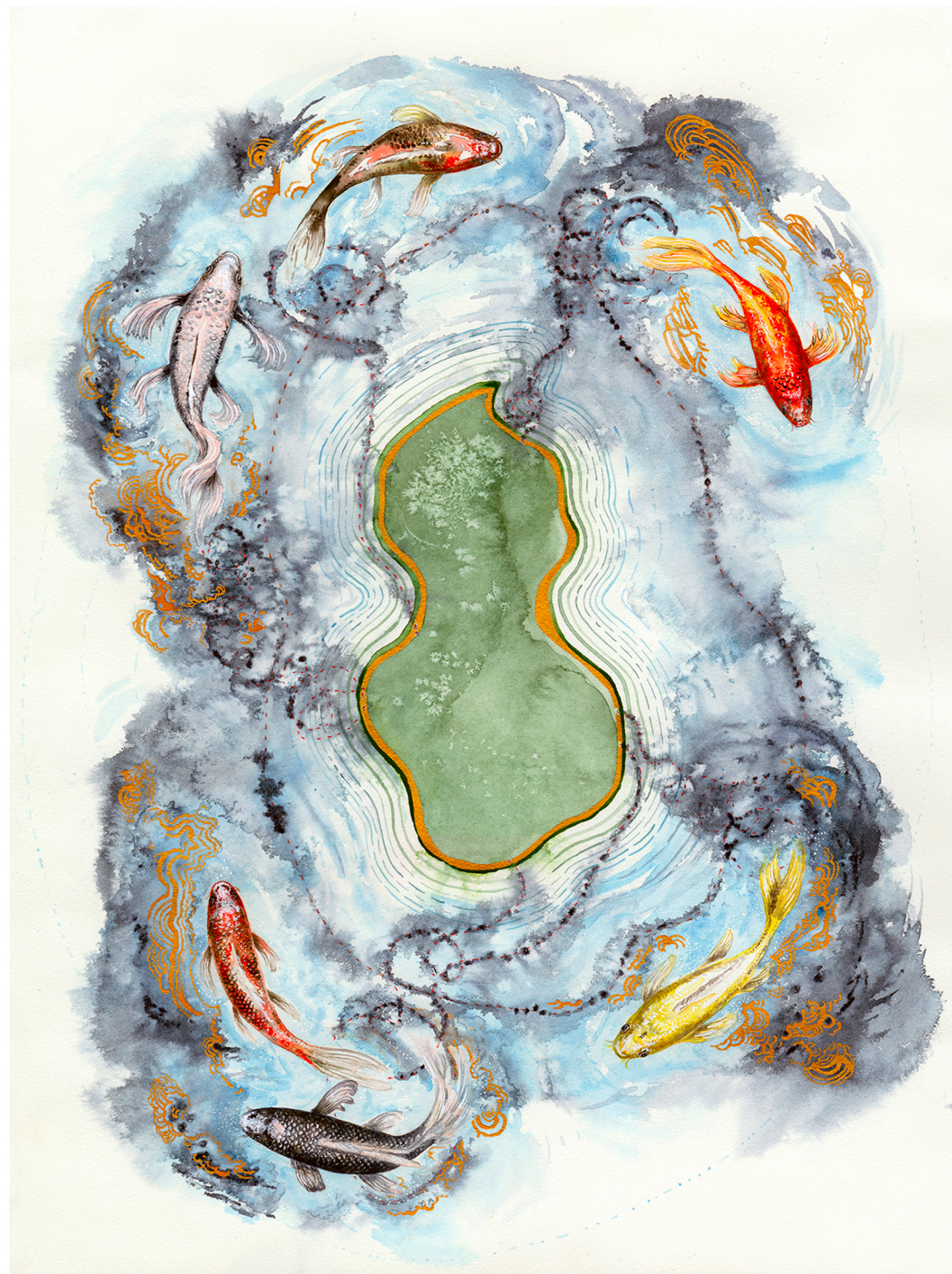
Claire - Well yah, exactly, that takes a lot of time. So maybe I'd say 20% is applying to stuff, 20% is doing the manual labor of producing prints and everything that goes along with it and then 60% is creating the work. But it might even be less creating time as I spent more and more time on the commercial side of things. Like when I got to the point of really selling prints it was kind of annoying and depressing that so much of the time was going to menial tasks. But those menial tasks would support my ability to create art.

Phil - And social media, does that whittle away at the creation time?

Claire - Yah, when I'm engaged with it, it does. So then I'm left with maybe 40% of the time is actually creating the artwork. And that is frustrating! But when you're an artist, you are your own marketer, your own copy editor, your own producer...

Phil - print maker, packager, shipper...

Claire - Yah. It's rough. There's only so many hours.



Topic: Acting on Inspiration



Phil - You spoke about needing to get to a project quickly because the inspiration will fade. My ideas tend to be something I can come back to years after coming up with them. It's quite different, could you talk about inspiration a bit?

Claire - I mean, I will have things that I work on over the course of a couple years because I'm often working on multiple pieces at once. But for me I'm often investigating a feeling or experience and it's funner for me, more intriguing for me to do it soon after I felt it because it still feels real to me. I do occasionally go back and add to a work if I have a new idea for it. But it's rare that I'll create a piece about an experience if it's pretty far in the past.

Phil - But is the inspiration motivating?

Claire - Oh yah, it definitely is. It's usually a concept, idea, a thought, an experience that I'm really excited about and so I want to investigate it. And often it's helpful for me to investigate it by creating visual work about it and often by creating the visual work I will see something about it that I didn't before creating the physical work. So it's almost like a therapeutic process.

Phil - I remember at one point I got confused about how inspiration is different from motivation because they are so tied together. Like 'I put on my favorite album to be inspired' but that's motivation not inspiration.... or maybe it's both?

Claire - Oh yah, sometimes they are intertwined and sometimes they are not. It's a venn diagram!

Phil - And for some of us they are very overlapped and for some of us they barely touch.

Topic: Changing Dreams

Claire - For me the dream was to be able to support myself off of my art. But once it became a reality it wasn't quite how I envisioned it. But maybe my dream would be to live off of grants and create only the art I would want to make. Hahahaha. When I was living off of my art it was a lot of commissions. And so it wasn't only art for me. I did enjoy the commissions and the ones I enjoyed less I still learned a lot from. I guess I was lucky because I was able to work with some cool organizations that align with my values and they'd give me a lot of freedom and those commissions I really enjoyed. But there were also people that wanted me to paint very specific things in a scene that I don't normally do. And I wasn't as excited about those, but in some ways I still enjoyed them because I was getting paid to paint and build my skills. But it felt frustrating because I sorta felt like I needed to focus all my time on making art where I knew that there was a paycheck on the other side so I could pay my rent. Versus making art that I just wanted to make. So I've realized the value in having a job which allows my art to not have money associated with it. It can just be what I want it to make. Ironically though, since having this full time job, and I think it's sort of a storm of COVID, racial reckoning, and climate change, I've been having a little struggle to make art lately.

Phil - And you're not sure which is the key compounding factor?

Claire - Yeah, and so it's been sort of a little bit of a struggle. The world is burning, why does anything else matter. (lol). But I'm still trying to push through and make stuff. Even if I'm not happy with the stuff I make, experimenting is always helpful.



