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Topic: Getting back to Art

Phil - You mentioned earlier that you weren't always a painter. You went to school for Botany, then community college classes, and then a Graphic Design degree. So what brought you back to painting?

Paul - Well, I had been doing a few paintings on and off for 20 years. But when I met my wife, she looked at my paintings and was like 'why aren't you doing this?' and really encouraged me to take a year and really build a body of work.

Phil - Sometimes we need that push and that support.

Paul - Yeah, and it was really at the right time. I was ready for the shift.

Topic: Collaboration

We are standing in Paul's living room admiring one of his latest works. It's one of his larger works, a woman floating above a building wave.

Paul - I collaborated with a woman in town who is a photographer and she photographs models underwater in beautiful costumes on a black background. She does really cool work. I approached her and asked if I could use some of her images and create a scene around them. I did a few pieces with some of her model shots.

Phil - Is that the first time you had worked with someone?

Paul - Yeah. And when I approached her with this idea she said she often thought about what scene might be around her work but she didn't have the skills to create it. But she ended up getting the skills and now uses photoshop to create her own scenes. So now I'm kind of competing with her and it's not a collaboration anymore. But it was such a cool experience.

We laugh together at the flipping of the circumstances.

Phil - I think that's an interesting part of creativity. We can have an idea and not act on it but when someone shows us what possible it might act as the catalyst for action.

Paul - Yeah. Quite possibly. And she's really perfected it now. She does quite amazing work.



Topic: Bringing it all Together

We wandered from the house to the studio and stopped in the hallway to look at one of his paintings.

Paul - My wife Donna and I were in Scotland 4 years ago and hiking down below the ruins of an old chapel and there was this grove of old burned out trees, they were still alive but the insides were burnt. Something about it grabbed me.

This often happens in my work, I'll see something that plants a seed in my head. It's like a piece of an idea but the other part hasn't shown up yet. So I took some pictures of the trees. Then when I'm getting ready to work on a new piece I'll go back through my reference photos. I saw this photo and thought this tree might be some critters' home, someone lives here. Then I thought, what does the concept of home mean. How relative it is to our species.

Phil - I love that you have a moon in there. It really opens the space up. So how do you go from reference to the final product?

Paul - So I use digital medium to create the blueprint of my work. I use photoshop to layer images together to create a composition which I work from. The painting process is still very traditional, I sketch with charcoal first, then a monochrome underlayer of painting, and several layers of color on top. That's the way I learned and it's comfortable for me.

Phil - I like the idea of how home can be so different for different species. We have a couple cats and I



often try to throw a sheet over a piece of furniture to give them a different space to explore and hide in.

Paul - Oh, maybe I oughta do that. Our cats have made their own tents. They're hollowing out the bottom of our furniture. They dug apart this love seat we have and essentially made a hammock in the bottom of it. Their own little world.

Topic: The text Accompanying the Work

We move through the hallway and enter the studio. It's neat and organized. If there are piles of stuff it is out of sight. Around the space are multiple tables, a desk, and numerous easels with works in progress. Behind the desk is a large painting of a rock wall with an open door.

Paul - We went to Georgia O'keeffe's ranch a while back and I took this photo of a cellar she had out back. I changed some elements and it became a scene for my own midlife crisis, my own emergence.

Phil - This is cool. Yaknow, sometimes an artist causes the viewer to be unsure of what they are seeing and look harder for more. I feel like your work does that to me. I try to look deeper and deeper.

Paul - That's great. I like hearing what people think and see in my work because everything has a reason for being there. Everything has a symbolic element. I'll usually write a narrative for each work, it might be a poem or a short story.

Phil - Did writing the narrative feel like an obvious thing to you? It came naturally?

Paul - It did. It was actually an expansion of my own notes. People often ask me the reasoning behind different elements in my paintings. Everything I do is so allegorical. But sometimes I would struggle to remember so I began to put it in a concise little paragraph that added to the painting that would pull someone a little deeper. It would explain a little bit of

what's going on but it was also another little piece of art.

And now I have people tell me at showings that 'this story really helped us to connect with this piece of art'. And maybe they purchase it, or buy a print, or enjoy it more, it's great.

Phil - It's really interesting. We all absorb information in different ways. And when we learn about art we appreciate it more. So I can imagine that it really helps people connect with the work. It's a really cool idea.



The Star Hanger

It was here, at the edge of our garden
where wild irises prosper
and laugh out loud,
where jasmine vines carouse
late into the night
while plotting their next moves

that I was told your crown
had been sent out for polishing
and may have been lost.

But oh, sweet pleasure patron,
bringer of the moon
and of happiness,

do not be concerned,
or doubt your worthiness

Do you not know
how wildly in love with you this world is?
How it longs for your feast to resume,
for your royal celebration to continue?

So much so, that
each night in my dreaming
the Beloved inspires me to swin into the night sky
and hang another star for you

so that you'll have light enough
to carry on the regal procession
through the streets of your own heart.

From the artist's book



Topic: Playfulness

Paul shows me his sketchbook which has drawings from different places he's visited and he expresses his desire to have a sketchbook full of his travels. And as he's talking, he pauses as if something just leapt to mind.

Paul - Yaknow, one of the things I really enjoyed about your story is the playfulness of the creativity. Because my artistic output is destined to be sold. The idea of creating a painting and destroying it, or not selling it, is something I have to wrap my head around. And that would probably be a really good thing for me to do. You're actually inspiring me to be a little more playful.

Phil - Yeah, it's the opposite of our culture in many ways. Once an artist makes something the instant reaction by most people is 'okay, how can you sell it' and I'm guilty of it too, it's tough.



Topic: Selling and Connecting

There's an art exhibit in Laguna Beach every year that runs for two full months rather than many cities' weekend art fairs. Paul was able to get a spot in the space and sells all of his work during those 2 months. He paints for 10 months and sells for two. It struck me as a rather unusual setup for an artist. There are galleries that sell his prints but his originals are only sold at the fair. (Festival of Arts, Pageant of the Masters, of Laguna Beach)

Paul - It's kind of funny, I actually hold back from sending out a message to my mailing list about a new piece because someone might want to come to the studio and buy it. Which is great, but because of the show, I need a body of work to present. The last couple years I've realized how unusual this show is for an artist. Most artists probably send their work to a gallery to be sold and don't have a lot of direct contact with the public. But for me, this is a big part of being an artist, it's the chance for a connection, a personal connection with people. I love to talk with people, share, and hear what they think.

Phil - And you wouldn't have that if you sold the work online. Or at least not in the same way.

Paul - Yeah! The only other show I do each year is down in San Diego. It was last week. And while I was there I was approached by this kid. He was probably 17 or 18 and he came up with his Mother. She said that he wanted to interview me. I could tell something was a little bit different and eventually found out he was

autistic and didn't speak. But his Mother had a communication chart that he could point at and she would interpret his questions to me. He asked me the most profound questions about my art, questions no one had ever asked me. So we chatted for a bit and before they left his Mother said 'Otto wants me to tell you that when he looks at your art he hears music. In this painting he hears chimes, and this one symphonic music, in this one he hears the ocean and can taste salt.' And it's like, I have the joy of creating the art but if I was selling at a gallery I might not have the joy of that conversation. There's really a deep personal satisfaction of connecting with the people who enjoy my work.



