

# ART2LIFE

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## ACADEMY

Susan: The broadcast is now starting. All attendees are in listen-only mode.

Nick: Hey everybody. Happy New Year. I'm in my winter clothes because it's freezing in our studio. There's no heating, so yeah. I'm just overdressed, but that's why. It's kind of freezing in here. Anyway, I'm really, really excited about today's topic, The mystery and metaphor, with Susan. This is really near and dear to me, because actually about four or five years ago or six years ago, I started this mentorship program, and it was something that was pretty outside my will house, but I thought that maybe I could help people be on workshops, that people would come to apply to a workshop, and they would learn stuff but then they would leave and go away, and I wasn't able to help them anymore.

I thought, "Well, maybe if I was involved with their art for longer, I could get better results." I like the idea of going deep with people, and seeing if I can take their work further. I did. I launched this thing quite to a tiny little email list, and I just wrote an invitation. I really created this program, but what happened in it was quite remarkable because I thought I would just be teaching art. I was, but when you're engaged with someone who is trying to do something, and you're engaged with 10 people or 12 people, some things, there were commonalities that happened. First off all, none of these people knew each other, but then I realized that they really should get together because they're all doing similar things. I said, "Oh my God, Susan should meet Eric and blah, blah, blah." I wasn't even aware of that, how we need to hook people up.

What I discovered was that yes, you're working on your art, but when you start working on your art, it starts to have profound changes in your life when you're setting intentions, and that's what we were all doing. That's what actually I was helping people do, really. I realized that. Then I was saying, "Listen, you're paying this money. You're committing to me for seven months, or eight months." Nine months, actually, the first one, and we're going to do this, and you're going to show up in this way, and sign here, and pay this money. When people set intentions, it was remarkable what happened, and part of what happened, we got really good results, but what really blew me away was all kinds of ... I don't know how to describe it, really, if they're mystery and metaphor type things started to occur. People had, they set their desires. They spoke what they wanted to occur, and little things started happening.

I've experienced this in my own life. You've had this experience, where you're thinking, "God, I really want to go to the Bahamas," and then you talk to a friend, and they just went to the Bahamas, and they're like, "Oh, yeah. There's a great deal on this flight." It's like, how did that happen? That's happened to me some, and I'm not really super woo-y or anything, but I do see that, that synchronicity. Those things happen, but when you're involved with 10 or 12 people, and you're hearing this over, and over, and over again in all these different lives, all different, and I know their stories because I've spent all this time with them. It's what kept me going in the mentorship. That became so interesting to me, and that's where I realized that the art making, and the setting intentions, and the life piece, they're one and the same, and Art to Life was created. That's what this name means, and that's what's so cool about what we're all doing, and I think a lot of you know what I'm talking about now.

Look at what happened in CVP. Look what happens when we share, when we set intentions, and those vision boards, and that crazy stuff when we did the guided meditations in the course. It's like, I got a lot of response, and that was kind of a stretch to do that, but that was really helpful. Basically the idea is that we know, I believe that right under the surface, there is evidence, there's clarity about what we desire, what we want, and it doesn't take much for us to scratch the surface and let these things bear fruit and to kind of come out. Sometimes it helps to have friends to talk to. Sometimes it helps to see people be inspired by other people that are doing this, but in that first mentorship program, Susan was in that, and just like so many people who were in there, but Susan's story and what happened in her life, and how we were talking about art, but it ended up influencing, and her life changed a lot.

As her art became stronger, you can't have your art get really good and ignore the other parts of your life that maybe aren't as good. Everything gets raised. Art to life, there's a connection between both of these. That's sort of maybe a little bit long of a preamble, but I think Susan's so perfect to speak to this, and as soon as I threw out this idea, hey, listen. Let's get some other people to experience on the team besides my narrow view of things. Cheryl did the great thing on fear, and right away Susan was like, "Yeah, this is what I'm interested in," and so I'm delighted to start this conversation and have this conversation with you, Susan, so I hope-

Susan: Thank you.

Nick: Yeah, yeah, so she's got an awesome presentation, and we're just going to kind of have a conversation but let you be this thing, and give us the ... Catch us up to where I left off after that.

Susan: Yeah. Okay. Yeah, and I love this topic, too, and I could tell on the forum I have some kindred spirits. It's one of those conversations that's so great to

have with artists, because a lot of these people, it's just really not on their radar. What are you talking about even? You sound like you're nuts, but we have the soul principle, and for me, that's kind of what ... I have to scroll a PDF while I talk, don't I? Okay. Here we go.

Nick: Yeah. Yeah. You're in control.

Susan: That's kind of what this all relates to for me. If you remember, in CVP we did the inspiration boards. We talked about desire, and we did visualizations, and so it's all sort of around becoming who you're meant to be. That's important because that's in service to your soul, and that's your gifts, right? If you're not living your life authentically, you're probably living someone else's. This idea of cultivating authenticity and meaning is super important, but it's also ... Of all the principles, I don't know. Texture is kind of straight up. Value. I even get a little [crosstalk 00:07:49].

Nick: It's easier to teach style.

Susan: Yeah, and value. I get a little value scale, I'm all good. I still struggle with it, but you know what I'm saying. This is so personal and unique to each of us, and requires a lot of vulnerability. I'm kind of glad we did talk about fear and resistance prior to this, because it's going to bring a lot of that up. Yeah, so E.E. Cummings wrote, "To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best night and day to make you everybody but yourself is to fight the hardest battle which any human can fight." Because of the criticism, or even our own inner critics, judgments about everything we do. We do really make it hard on ourselves.

Nick: Yeah, and this is exactly ... I'm not even sure right now. I think you're talking about just, about things we want to do in our life, but this parallel exactly to making paintings, right?

Susan: Absolutely.

Nick: I can't do this. I'm not qualified. I don't want to look like somebody else. I'm copying people. I'm not copying, and so-

Susan: Oh, yeah, so yeah, we're not-

Nick: It's almost like anything you're talking about here is either life or art. It's one in the same.

Susan: We can be just horrible company in the studio, absolutely. The reason this topic came up for me is because this has been my struggle. I started out as an illustrator, like some other members of the academy, and you. Four years of commercial art school, and I was off creating illustrations for clients, and I thought that I achieved success when I was able to make a living as an artist. That was my goal. That's what I set out to do, and then at

some point ... Actually, I can tell you when. I illustrated Anne of Green Gables. It was three books, three bound books and 150 watercolor illustrations of that sweet little girl with the red hair, and the eyelashes, and freckles. 150, and at the end ... It took three years. At the end, I just thought, "There must be more." I remember back to when I was really little and I wanted to be an artist, and I was thinking, "Well, what happened to that?"

I do think that we come into the world as children, sort of like a blank slate. I think we're more ourselves when we're little than when there's layers of culture, and family, and whatever put on top of us. These questions I have on this PDF, these were sort of the things I had to ask myself, or that I was asking myself, what was expected of me, but I'm talking again both in my art and in my life really. That's kind of how I was living. I remember at one point thinking, "I don't even dress the way I want to dress." Isn't that strange? You can get so far off track. I-

Nick: These questions right here, these were questions that yeah, I get it. What do other things? These were the things rattling around in your head that were preventing you from getting to your truer calling, or self, or whatever.

Susan: Absolutely. In terms of my commercial art, it's what's going to sell? What's going to make me money? Whatever. How do I please this client? This art director wants that. I could even have an art director saying, "Could you make a work that looks like that person's?" Have you ever had a client ask you that, to make work that ... Actually, they were usually asking me to make work that looked like Nick Wilton's.

Nick: [inaudible 00:11:50]

Susan: No, no, no. I couldn't do it anyway, but no. I think in my life, I think it's not that I would've been proud to tell you, this is how I go about my day. Hmm, what's expected of me? It just kind of happens. It just kind of happens, and so I just became super stuck when I decided, I'm going to stop illustrating. I wanted to become a fine artist, and I really had no clue how to paint. I did not know, and I just went into my studio, and threw paint around. I took some classes, and I just got super stuck. You're probably all familiar with these things, dancing around a little part of the painting that you spent a lot of time on, and you just can't let it go, or judging the work as you're making it. You can't even function, paralyzed, practically.

Nick: It's so exhausting.

Susan: Oh, man, or figuring out, oh, no. I'm going to do it this way, and then being totally bored with it, or having discovered strategies, and then using them over and over, or looking outside at other work for the answers. It was unbearable. It was just, I either had to ... When I saw your mentorship was available, it was a big deal. It was a lot of money. It was a big commitment.

Did I trust you? Are you going to give me the answers? I was at the end of my rope. I was like, I can't figure this out. I've been at this for 10 years and I can't figure it out, and so what I learned was you didn't have the answers. You had the questions. You had the right questions. My questions were wrong. The questions I was learning to ask when I began the mentorship with you. I had a series of paintings. Just like in CVP, I had a series of 10 paintings, and it goes right back to our inspiration boards.

We asked ourselves, what lights you up? What feeds your soul? What gets you engaged with your work? You can't help but think about what you ... It kind of crosses over into life, right? I love starry nights. That's living.

Nick: Or sunny weather, or [inaudible 00:14:36].

Susan: Yeah. Yeah, so when I started ... No one had told me to pay attention to how I feel when I paint, and I wasn't feeling real good when I painted. I was frustrated, sometimes board, sometimes just trying to control it. I was even trying to control when I was out of control. Does that make sense?

Nick: That's great. I think everyone on this call can relate to that, including me. I was doing that this morning. I'm just painting over here. I'm going to go crazy. I look behind me, it's like, I didn't go ... Come on. You're just filling time.

Susan: Right. Right. Oh, my gosh. The things we put ourselves through, and so I had started those 10 paintings, and they were all ... I don't know how many passes, several passes in, they were still so stiff. It's funny because looking back now on this painting, I feel like it's a little bit stiff now, but at the time, something happened when I was working on this painting. It was the music that was playing, or I just said, "You know, screw it." Really, I was months into the mentorship, and I just kept ... It was like hitting my head up against the wall, and finally on this painting, I don't know. I don't know. The switch flipped, and I just really let go, and I guess I mean by that, I was willing to let this painting be a journey and not focus on the outcome. I think that's what it was. [crosstalk 00:16:23]

Nick: I think that's so cool. Yeah, that's such a good nugget for everybody, and yeah. When you get to the point, or you're willing to go into territory you're not familiar with, which is terrifying, but that's where the learning happens. That's how people get results, going into areas that you don't know is when the authentic work shows up. It's kind of amazing, but it seems so simple, but it's scary, and ...

Susan: It's so stupid that it's scary, because it's just paint, but oh, my god. Everything is riding on it, everything. Who I am, my value as a human being is all riding on this. It's just awful, but that day, I don't know. That day I was willing to let go, and then that's the best part, because then I figured out what it felt like. I know now what that feels like, and I can recall that, sort

of, and I know when I'm not doing it. I know when I'm faking it.

Nick: That's so good. I'm glad we're recording this because there's about 20 blog posts in here, or a new class, or every ... What you're saying, which I love, it's like, it's not even about the painting. It's about recognizing the feeling of feeling liberated, and feeling juiced, and great, and that's the bar that you compare your head space to when you're painting at other times. You know you have to feel that. Forget about what's happening on the painting, because you're right. This painting, you're making better work now, or whatever. The painting's going to keep changing, but it's so important to get that feeling.

Susan: Correct. Yeah.

Nick: That is what makes the best possible work you can make, for sure, presently. You get that. That's a side effect.

Susan: Right. [crosstalk 00:18:24] I had never felt it. I didn't know it until ... I didn't know what that felt like.

Nick: Wow. I love that. I love that.

Susan: Yeah, it is. Actually, now I'm kind of addicted, because now I want that feeling. It is so liberating, especially if I do, as I'm painting, if I find I've just sort of somehow slid back into some control thing in my work, then it's time. It's time. It's time to just let it go, and it's a great feeling. Learning about getting really clear about what lights me up in my work and in my painting process, it made me obviously start asking these questions about my life. This was a game changer for me. Wow, pay attention to how I feel, what I want to feel. It was a far more interesting conversation than, is it going to sell? Does somebody like it? These questions that I started to ask, what did I really love, what made me feel alive, these were so much more interesting. I especially love that last one.

Nick: [inaudible 00:19:47] Yeah.

Susan: Does this path enlarge or diminish me? Now we're talking a little bit more about life, maybe, but in answering these questions, I really started to discover a part of myself that had been sort of ignored. I started kind of looking for guidance in my life, too, because while my work was starting to get really personal and exciting, I was feeling like, ugh. I was feeling a little bit of that disease in my life, and this book, *Through the Dark Wood: Finding Meaning*, it's about navigating the psychology of the second half of life. I think it's because as this therapist says, we're all born sort of true to our true nature when we're born, but we have layers of culture, and family, and whatnot that color who we become as an adult. We can kind of lose contact with who we really are, and it definitely happened to me. I don't know. I don't know why. I don't know. I didn't trust myself. I didn't trust my

own intuition.

When I went to art school, I didn't even trust the idea of becoming a fine artist. I went with the illustration thing because I could make a living. I made choices, a whole bunch of them, out of insecurities and whatnot, and then I find myself in this place, and it's like, what am I doing here?

Nick: Yeah. No, I totally get it. Yeah. Yeah.

Susan: Yeah, sometimes people get to this point through some kind of loss, or crisis, or whatever in their life. For me, it was my work that was kind of the turning point, and I think ... What was it? Did we already talk about the magic wand? We didn't, did we?

Nick: No. No.

Susan: No. During my mentorship with you, I remember I was kind of telling you things weren't feeling really authentic for me in my life. My work is getting better, but I'm kind of feeling stuck. The visualization that we did about our gallery opening when we're ... Did we do that in-

Nick: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, a lot of people do that who are on the call. Yeah.

Susan: Okay, so the visualization that you had me do was sort of write ... First of all, you gave me the magic wand. You gave me a magic wand and you said, "Here, you have a magic wand. Nobody can get hurt. Nothing can go wrong. Write me a paragraph that describes a day in your life in two years. What does your best self, what's that look like?" If you hadn't given me the magic wand, I couldn't have done it, because many, many times I'm sure the thoughts crossed my mind, "Well, you know what? I really ... " I was living in Seattle, been there for 20 years, and it's a beautiful place, beautiful part of the country, but I really wanted to be back home where I grew up. I wanted to be back on the East Coast, but I couldn't. I can't. I've got a family. I've got stuff I'm committed to. I can't do it, so I just shut that down.

When you gave me the magic wand, and I was only writing anyway. Nobody even had to read it. I could really go into detail about this day in my life, and I wrote about the studio of my dreams, and the town I lived in, and the people, and that it was sunny. I got frustrated because I'm reading it, and I'm thinking, "Why can't I have this? Now I really want it." I started talking about it, and it's like people say the universe can support you but only if you start moving in the direction that you want to go. That's sort of how things ... Once I started saying it out loud, it became more real. Not that all the logistics were figured out, but it starts to fall into place a little bit, and so anyway, not asking these questions is problematic, because you're not living your own life, right? This goes back to the inspiration board, and getting really clear on what's important to you.

Cultivating this kind of authenticity in your life, how do we do that? Jung said, "Life is a short pause between two mysteries, and our task is to make that pause as luminous as we can." I think as artists especially, this is super important. Who else, who else does this? [inaudible 00:25:25], right?

Nick: Yeah. Yeah, and I'm looking at this, your thing, the Neil Armstrong tag, and mystery creates wonder, and wonder is the basis of man's desire to understand. The best word that I use over and over again for people and for myself, as the highest bar that I can give if I'm looking at my paintings over my shoulder here, are they done, the gallery. I say to myself, "Would this instill a sense of wonder in a passerby? Will somebody be moved?" That really makes you up your game, but there's a mystery to it, and I need to be in the head space that you're describing when I'm working. I have to let go. I have to be out of control or not know. It's like I really have to show up in this way of just me, a humble person, to have that happen.

Susan: I think you have to find ways to invite it into your life because you can't pour from an empty cup. Finding ways to connect with what feeds your soul.

Nick: Oh, yeah. [crosstalk 00:26:43]

Susan: I think Carrie had a beautiful saying the other day, is how you would encode your work with this sense of mystery and meaning. Your marks will be encoded with this sort of resonance, and so yeah, so these are some ideas. I'm sure other people, I know some other people have even written on the forum about ways that they kind of invite that into their lives.

Nick: Yeah. I love these. I love these. I even do this a little bit with, if I have a decision. This weekend on Saturday, I had an opportunity to ... There was this run. It was this guy's birthday and it was a run, except he's not a tribe member of mine, but great, and it's going to be a really good run. If I didn't do that, later that afternoon a friend was going out to the beach, and he was going to see a friend of his that I kind of know, but I'm really inter ... He's really interesting. He's a filmmaker, but that would've been a harder thing. It's further to go, but I chose the one that had the most space in it for me, and it was an amazing day, and I'm so glad I did that. I even do this with just my choices between this person and this person. Yeah, I can run any time, but maybe I'll move towards this. I'm just reading these. I love ...

Susan: Yeah, because I think we gravitate towards comfort and not change. Change is just, ugh, I don't know. Remember you talked about, we talked about saying yes to something in your work, right, and that person who calls you and says ... You call and you say, "Would you like to go to a movie," and they say, "Hell, yes," or the one that's like, "Well, what's planning what time? I don't know. Blah, blah, blah." Yeah. I think it does. If you can do that in your work, and like I said, I'm kind of getting addicted to that. Yeah.



Nick: Absolutely. Absolutely. You can't go back. You can't go back.

Susan: No, no, no. No, you can't.

Nick: All of us, everyone listening, everything, we're all chasing that down because if you're trying to make your work stronger, if you're really involved in this, you're going to move towards those. It's either a hell yes, or don't do it. It's a no. We want that, and you can see it in people's work. You can see it where they're like, "Oh, my god." They're so in this. I love it. I want to own that. I want to experience that. I want to hang out with that person. I want to ...

Susan: Right. Yeah. Yeah. Okay, so then we're going to talk a little bit about metaphor, because it's a great way for us to understand some of these abstract concepts. Metaphor bypasses our rational brain, goes straight to the imagination because it's so visual, and [inaudible 00:29:54] ways to explore ideas that are sort of below the surface, and gives us also a way to see our work, and our creative process, and how they align with our life. I did some research on metaphor, and it's such an interesting topic, how it's used in literature, and movie making. When I'm painting, the journey of making a painting takes all of us on unexpected twists and turns, if we allow it to, that is, and just choosing to respond to each mark making event. What happens if I use purple? Then I think, "Well, what happens if I go back to school?" Ooh, this color's horrible. I hate it. You know what? That relationship kind of sucked. What can I do?

It's sort of like taking these things on, and seeing the sort of, how do I fix this mistake in my painting? How do I fix a mistake in my life? There's ways that we can learn. I guess what I'm trying to say, there's way that one thing can inform the other.

Nick: Yes. Yes. Yeah.

Susan: I sort of made some of these notes. Pam Coffee talked about how her encaustic monoprint process became a metaphor not just for the fire, because of its immediacy, but for life itself, and I was noticing how my art, led by curiosity and wonder, was so much better than it was led by controlling and in fear. I noticed that, wow, the same thing was kind of happening in my life. Anyhow, that's kind of my thinking on how we can learn from looking at the two things side by side. We've had so many conversations about that.

Nick: Yeah. Like I said, that's that art to life twist thing, that it actually ... That became so interesting for me, and people often, for me, they say, "Well, what's your work about?" My work is about metaphor. It is this. That's what I'm doing. I'm showing up, and I've stopped really having any preconceived notions of what I've been doing. That's kind of gone away. I

used to plan a little, or think that I was doing this series on color, and I can come in now, and this is my own thing. Some people need to do this at all, but I just like responding to how I'm feeling, and have it expressed in color, and shape, and form. If I can show, the more sensitive I can be, the stronger the work can get. I'm looking for a balance. It's like a visual poem, almost, that hasn't been said before, but you can feel it when you can kind of get it balanced. That's kind of what my work's about. My work is about this content we're talking about.

It became my work, and that's why I think for me, I'm so happy to be talking about this right now, and teaching this stuff, and be engaged with the community that's involved in this, because this is what fills me, and fuels me, and this is my art. What we're doing here, this is what my art's about. It's really fascinating.

Susan: The thing is is that once you start making these connections, you can't stop seeing it everywhere. I feel like I'm a walking metaphor. I was reading about these lodgepole pines, and how they only open their seeds after a forest fire, so they don't ever release their seeds unless there's a forest fire. I'm thinking about how, wow, sometimes it takes a huge crisis in someone's life, right, for them to get at the gem that they need to learn in their life. I just, yeah. It goes on and on.

Nick: The mentorship program that I did, the invitation, half of it is a description of my train wreck of a life, where I lost ... I was. It was like everything fell apart, and I hope the listeners are getting this bit, that the learning comes from the reconstruction, from the attempt. It's like, you come out of that, that's the only reason I felt qualified to help people, because I could say, "Listen, I have been there. I've lost everything. I've made art when I didn't have any money. I've gone. I've risked big time." If I had saved up all the money and whatever, so I got so much more in response. This, all of everything that we're doing with a team, and the academy, and the conversation we're having now, was only available because I lost all my savings and train [crosstalk 00:35:16].

Susan: Yeah, and you know what? Your story is so much more interesting. I tell people this all the time. They're like, "Oh, my god. I failed at this before. I'm afraid I'm gonna fail." I'm like, "You know what? That just makes it more interesting." Really, it is. I'm a terrible mother. I tell my son, "Do something you'll regret today," and he's like, "Mom, really?" Yeah, yeah, just a little. Not big time, but just ... We get one shot at this life. For gods sake, make it interesting at least.

Nick: Yeah. Yeah. Fabulous.

Susan: Okay, so metaphor in our work also can be ... We can also be talking about it in terms of the symbols, and the way we make our work. In other words, oh, okay, so I grabbed some examples of this. You've got Michelangelo's

David. The size of the sculpture itself is a symbol, it's a metaphor for his challenge to the papacy, for example. Even the overlarge head and hands, even though that was a formal way of teaching it, it was also metaphorical. Some of them were more obvious.

Nick: I love this Banksy one.

Susan: Yeah. The Banksy one. Isn't that great? [crosstalk 00:36:43] Right, and I like-

Nick: Look at that. Oh. Oh, yeah. It's so good.

Susan: I had to kind of read up on Jeff Kuntz, what this one was all about, and about this euphoric optimism of the modern, but the fact that these balloons are so unstable, impressive for a brief, shining moment, but then they have to die, or burst. Maybe that's what it means. I don't know. It's funny. I had a painting, long time ago. It was a figurative painting of three girls, young girls, standing at a party table, and there was cupcakes, and cake, and whatnot. They were helping themselves at this party table, and all I cared about in this painting was big shapes and the way they all connected, sort of formal things. Someone wrote in. It was on a blog post, and someone wrote in and said, "Wow, this painting just describes my life." I'm like, what? She said, "Well, my father is African American and my mother is Asian, and in this painting, you have the little white girl as the first one in line, and her plate is full, and the little Asian girl is waiting patiently, and has one thing, a cookie on her plate, and the African American girl has nothing on her plate."

This was for me like if I shared a dream with you and you told me what it meant, because I had no idea that my work had some completely different meaning for someone else, but sometimes that happens.

Nick: Yeah. Totally. Totally. Yeah. Yeah. It's not our business to really worry too much about that, but yeah. [inaudible 00:38:33] in it all over the place.

Susan: Exactly. [Karena 00:38:35] was writing and shared with us her exploration of spaciousness and chaos, and how these two opposing forces coexist and complement each other. We talk about differences all the time, but for her, this is what ... You can think. I could go off for an hour metaphorically about chaos, and spaciousness, and think about the pacing of your life, or your day, or any movie or event. You have to have those differences to make it interesting, right, so this is another way we can explore metaphorically our work.

Nick: Yes. Yes. Totally. Totally.

Susan: That's about it, Nick.

Nick: Great. Great. Fabulous. [crosstalk 00:39:22] Yeah.

Susan: Here's some more. I'm sorry. There is some more about where else I found metaphor. In literature, poetry, poems that are about one thing. What's Eating Gilbert Grape, that movie was all about responding to other people's needs versus our own true calling, and by the way, Johnny Depp looks just like Ferris in that movie and it's great, fun to watch.

Nick: [inaudible 00:39:52] I haven't seen it.

Susan: [crosstalk 00:39:53] Yeah. It was really cool.

Nick: We're going to have to have a special CVP viewing of that.

Susan: Absolutely. Yes.

Nick: Yeah. I'm not sure if I can communicate this, but this idea of having kind of spaciousness, the idea of differences, it really ... We try and do that in our work, the quiet conversation and the loud conversation. I was shooting. We were doing another video yesterday, and I was kind of going from the script, and I was going too quickly. There's a lot of information, and you tend to, if you've memorized something, and you say it really fast, and I had to really slow down, because going slow is the difference between lots and lots of information hitting you. Things work really great when they have metaphor, when they have a secondary meaning, so you feel two things simultaneously. Do you know what I mean? Like, oh, yeah. It's like a painting that is really loose, but it's also reminiscent of blood, or whatever. There's several things happening, and that's so great about poetry. There is the cadence of it, and then there's the imagery that you see as a result, so that you put those two things together, and it's just a couple things, but I think that really makes art profoundly more powerful, and more relatable, and lasting.

Susan: Right. You can't see a spring blossom just coming up out of the ground without thinking about birth, and life, and new beginning. It's just movies, too. The differences thing. I don't know. I know in some movie I've seen this horrible, bloody, graphic scene while they're playing some really beautiful classical music in the background. It's really [crosstalk 00:42:01].

Nick: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, and that's what I'm always trying to do. When I'm working, I'm often trying to think, "What can I layer with this?" I'm so in this, because I was struggling all morning on this painting, and that's the problem with it. I can just see it over my shoulder. Oh. It's that big long one there.

Susan: Oh, nice.

Nick: Yeah, but it doesn't have that duality yet, doesn't have a thing to rub against. It's just kind of like Nick doing cream marks everywhere, and it just

... I don't know. It's getting there. I came in today to really, like, I got to move this thing, but that's what we're doing. We're applying one thing to complement another thing.

Susan: Right. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I was surprised I did not know that in feng shui, that whole philosophy is built on metaphor. There was a Chinese village that wasn't doing as well as the village next to it nearby. They were fishing villages, and they were trying to figure out why. Instead of the just logical, rational way to figure it out, like well, how many businesses do we have, whatever, they looked from a different perspective, from ... Was it from the sky, they looked at the pattern of the borders of the towns, and one of them looked like a fish and one looked like a net. They decided that they had to change the boundary of the town so that it did not look like a fish, so that it would do better than the ... Honestly. This is an ancient tradition in the ancient philosophy and culture, but that's how important that is for them. [crosstalk 00:44:16]

Yeah. A certain part of your house, and I'm sure there are members who have way more experience with feng shui. I can barely remember how to say it, but a certain corner of your house is your finances, right, so you don't put a tidal wave, photo of a tidal wave in that part of your house. You put [inaudible 00:44:38] plant, for example. That kind of thing, so it's like all of-

Nick: I think of feng shui as, and I'm really tall, I'm really big, and I don't like spaces when we get ... One of the conditions I can't stand is a closet that there's so much stuff in it, so if you try to pull something out, all other things fall down. That's a bad thing for me, and studio space is, the way mine is written out, there's just a bunch of stuff in here, and it's like, god, I got to get rid of some of this stuff because it's blocking the ... I need freedom. I need clarity, and access, and that's sort of how I think of it. Feng shui is just the study of space and how it affects it, right? [inaudible 00:45:25]

Susan: Definitely. Yeah. If you have a house, and when someone drives up to your house, there are big shrubs that block it, and a big gate, and a fence, you're probably not going to get a lot of unexpected visitors. It doesn't look friendly and inviting. You can find ways to open it up and make it look more inviting, right, so it's just sort of ... Yeah, I think it's how something feels.

Nick: Yeah. Yeah. There's a town near us called Nicasio. It's out in the country, and there's this road. You're moving really fast, and you go into this little town, and it's a small town. There's a baseball diamond field. Really, there's like 150 people that live there, and you come, but there's a house right at the end of the road, and then the road turns to the left and kind of goes around this house. We're talking cars going 40 miles an hour. There are headlights that hit this house and then they turn. If someone's drunk, they drive right through the house, and I'm always saying, "It'd be really

interesting to see what's going on living in that house. [crosstalk 00:46:30]  
That road, and that house, it's like how is it different?

Susan: Right. Metaphor is also found in storytelling, Native American storytelling traditions, like the story of the coyote as a trickster, or even just stories about observing nature, and learning how you build community from watching ants, for example. Things like that, and of course, Freud was all about metaphor in dreams, and I am big into this because I dream a lot, and they're fantastical sort of stories. I'm like, where the hell did that come from? I'll write them down, and sometimes in the process of writing, I'll see little double meanings in words and things like that. You know what I'm talking about? Lately I've been dreaming a lot about the ocean, and water, and tide pools, and tidal waves, and things like that. Freud really believes, and a lot of Jungian psychotherapists believe, and I do, too, that these are sort of like ... They're messages from your own subconsciousness, an intelligence that's beyond your rational, everyday thinking in your brain, probably worth just giving a little bit of attention to.

Nick: Yeah. Right, right, right. I know that if you write dreams down, you tend to start remembering them more, that's for sure. You keep a notebook by your bed, and you jot them down, and then you look at it in the morning. It's like, oh, my god.

Susan: Right, and it'll all come back to you, and it's just ... For me it's another way to cultivate mystery and meaning. There's this whole other world at night that, I don't know.

Nick: Yeah. Yeah. Fabulous. Yeah. Yeah. It's fantastic.

Susan: It's a great conversation, Nick. I always [inaudible 00:48:42].

Nick: I know. I know. I know, and yeah. Everything I'm doing in my life now just comes out of this. Yeah, I kind of pinch myself sometimes.

Susan: Same here. I am now living on the East Coast, and I do have that little studio on Main Street, and it's pretty ... It's way more meaningful for me. I've been able to bring public art to this little town and make a difference, which has felt really good, and I'm much closer to my family, who I haven't really spent a lot of time with for the last three decades. It's a good feeling. [crosstalk 00:49:30]

Nick: And it's sunny.

Susan: And it's sunny. It's not today, but yes. For the most part, yeah, exactly. Yeah. It feels good. Yeah.

Nick: Awesome. Look at, I'm checking the time here. If you see how fast this goes. I was telling you, we're trying to keep it like 40 minutes, because

people can't ... There's so much to talk about, and it's such an interesting subject. We're kind of coming down here. If there's any calls, questions, or additions to this, I know how many people are on this call, so thank you for being here. It's great to have everyone here. So many people here. I know it relates to a lot of you guys, but we'd love to hear from you. We've got some time. [crosstalk 00:50:13] We could answer some questions or whatever or compliments.

Susan: Maybe they have an answer to one of my questions. What are the metaphors that you're exploring, or what kind of practices might contribute that you use that contribute to this sort of invitation of wonder into your life?

Nick: Yeah. Yeah, so Ferris, do you want to ... I've not been paying attention to chat here.

Ferris: Yeah. I'll take care of this. I'll step right in here, so we do have a couple hands raised. First, I'm going to go to Karen Meadows. Karen, I just saw your hand went down, but I'm going to reach out to you anyway, just to make sure we didn't miss you. Karen? Karen, can you hear us? Did you have a question at all?

Karen Meadows: I can hear you. Can you hear me?

Ferris: Yeah. Yes.

Susan: Hi, Karen.

Nick: Hi, Karen.

Susan: Perfect. Hi.

Karen Meadows: Hi, I love this stuff, you guys. This is right up my alley, and I had a question earlier, but I feel like I have another comment, so I'm going to ask the question and then tell you something that I think is interesting about space. I was going to ask you, Susan, it went right back to the very first, I don't know, few sentences. How do you know when you're not doing it? How do you know when you're not? What does that feel like?

Susan: You're talking about in my painting process, how do I know? Yeah. I have to check in with myself, because it's really easy to slip back into that control, right? It's very easy in the beginning. The first two passes on a painting, right? That's the most fun. Anything goes, everything is possible, and then you do something that, because you're working in that head space, you do something beautiful, and then all of a sudden, you're attached to it, and then you're ... Right? That's kind of that, yeah. That's why we work in a series, so how do I know. I just keep checking in. I just keep checking in, and asking myself if I'm getting stu ... It's hard. It's hard. What do you think,

Nick?

Nick: I think that's right. I definitely think having four or five things to look at, where it's like, okay, well that one's definitely not in the running. Something was happening on that fifth one, though. Clearly that's got a little bit more juice. How was I feeling? Gives you a little bit of reference.

Karen Meadows: I think I've seen you, Nick, I've seen you just wreck stuff. I almost feel like that was just ... You just killed the kitten, and it was ... I know that there have been times when I'm frustrated with a painting, and I'll walk it back to the utility sink, and scrub everything off of it, and all of a sudden something beautiful happens, like what is that? Right? It's always when you're not in control that something like that will happen, so I don't know. You trick yourself sometimes.

Nick: Yeah. I definitely look at it. I say to myself, "No way." I'm not going to be held hostage by this bullshit. I get pissed, like I'm going to kick some ass. No, yeah. I don't even want to do this anymore. I've spent way too long of my life dicking around here. I don't want to be stuck in the studio doing garbage. Come on. That's how you got to be. I'm going to do this, and nobody's going to stop me. You really have to kind of ... That's how I do it.

Karen Meadows: Right. Wow. [crosstalk 00:54:05]

Nick: ... because wrecking it's like, nothing's precious. [inaudible 00:54:11] I don't even need this crap that I thought I like. It's out to here, so I'll cover [inaudible 00:54:16].

Karen Meadows: I love that. What a great answer. That's great. Yeah, thank you. I don't know if I'm [crosstalk 00:54:29].

Nick: All right.

Karen Meadows: Another thing I wanted to make a comment about. I had a studio at home for about 30 years and I've lived in the same house for 40 something years. When I retired, I rented a studio about five miles away that was just a white box. I always can get there when I'm in my new studio. I can find that space that we're talking about, and I can't find it anymore at my studio at home. It's really interesting because there's so much of the past in my studio at home, in terms of family, and oh, crises. You name it. [inaudible 00:55:19] It has so many layers of the past in it, so now I'm just using it as a teaching space, where I bring three people in and I teach encaustic workshops, and that seems to bring life back into it that is now feeling better, strangely enough. It had to get some new life into it, and I just thought that was an interesting-

Susan: You actually had to build [inaudible 00:55:43]. Right?



Karen Meadows: It still doesn't feel great when I'm down there alone working, so I always want to go to my other space, and [crosstalk 00:55:57].

Susan: Right. Good for you that you have that.

Karen Meadows: That's a great story.

Nick: Yeah. That's really cool. Thanks for that.

Karen Meadows: Thank you.

Nick: All right. [inaudible 00:56:06]

Ferris: Thank you for that question, Karen. All right. We are now going to go to Lena Bogart. Elena, I'm going to unmute you right now. Elena, can you hear us?

Elena Bogart: Yeah. Yes, I can hear you. Can you hear me?

Ferris: Lena, looks like we might've lost you there. It looks like you might've muted yourself, but we can come back to you. We can come back to you later. It's okay. We'll just keep going. Lena? Are you back right there? Hello? Lena, looks like we're experiencing some trouble hearing you. We can come right back to you. We'll be back to you in one moment, okay? Let's now go down to Sally [Veech 00:56:47]. Sally, I'm going to unmute you. Sally, can you hear us? Hello?

Sally Veech: Yes, hi.

Ferris: We got you. Perfect.

Sally Veech: Hi, guys. How are you?

Susan: Good.

Sally Veech: Hi. I just didn't want to lose the thought in my head, and I did come in late, but when you started talking about meaning at the end, I just feel like that's so key to especially people at our age. I think most of us in the program are close to middle age, or at least 40 or above, and ... I can't say it for everybody, but it seems that way, but it seems like when we get a little bit older in life, we are more looking for meaning. [inaudible 00:57:34] Maybe people don't think about that until we get at this stage, and I'm wondering ... Art, it's just means more when there's meaning behind it, and I also think that there's something missing in modern life, where we often don't have as much meaning. I think that art can really give that to people.

Susan: Absolutely.

Sally Veech: It surprises me how so often we just don't have that much meaning in our lives. People do, but we don't stop to think about what's meaningful. What does my life mean, and I just love how that's something we can give to the world through our art.

Susan: Right, and that we can give ourselves, as well.

Sally Veech: Right. Right, so yeah.

Susan: I don't know if you were on the call when I mentioned the book by James Hollis, Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life. It's called Through the Dark Woods.

Sally Veech: Oh, no. Okay. I'll go back and look at that.

Susan: It's available as an audiobook, and I tell you, I listen to it. Every sentence that he says is packed with stuff that I have to pause and think about for a minute. Yeah, and I think you're right, that yeah, sometimes we even use ... Not everybody, but religion can give us meaning.

Sally Veech: Oh, right. Exactly. Yes.

Susan: Some people use it to avoid meaning. I'll just go on Sunday [inaudible 00:59:35], and I don't have to really think about the mystery that is really behind all this. I feel like you're right. We have to invite it in.

Sally Veech: Yeah. Sorry. I also think it's interesting because I was just talking about this today with my son, that okay, so the different art forms, music is in everyone's life, like music, that art form, but visual arts is not. It's not in popular culture, except for maybe tattoo art or graffiti. I wish that could change. I wish we could do something to get visual arts more noticed.

Susan: [crosstalk 01:00:26] Yeah, that art isn't that important. I tell them, "Every single thing you're looking at, wearing, driving has been designed by an artist, so don't forget that."

Sally Veech: Yeah, that's true. All right. Thank you. Looking forward to hearing the rest of everything. Sorry if I repeated something. [crosstalk 01:00:48]

Susan: No, thank you. Those are great thoughts, Sally. Thanks.

Ferris: Thank you for that question, Sally. Now I'm actually going to go to a write-in question, and Cheryl is going to ask this question. Cheryl, you ready to go?

Cheryl: Yes, I am. Can you hear me?

Ferris: I can.

Susan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Cheryl: Okay. This question is from Diane, I think I'm going to say it right, [Calhein 01:01:08]? It's for Susan, and she says, "Could you tell us about the metaphors that are currently showing up in your work via images and color?"

Susan: Oh, good grief. No.

Cheryl: I suppose Nick could answer some of this, too, so.

Nick: No way. That's your part of the question. It wasn't for me, anyway.

Susan: Oh, my god. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know how to answer that right now. I'm not at a good place with my work right now. I'm mad at-

Nick: What's it feeling like? What's it feeling like?

Susan: When I completed my last series, I was really happy with it for a while, and now I hate. I hate it, because I see ... You always are looking ahead, or at least I am. I'm always looking at, it can be better than this, it can be better than this, and the vision in my head is so great. The actual thing is falling short. I have some ideas, and I'm sort of in between. I'm preparing to move my studio, believe it or not, and start on a new series, a new body of work, and I'm exploring some ideas in my head that I'm not quite ready to verbalize. I really think this last series was just me trying to find my voice, was just as simple as that. Trying to figure out what mattered to me, trying to figure out what shapes do I love, and I still do that. Some of it is just the paint. Sometimes it's just the paint that's just like, I've fallen in love with this little tiny smudge mark, and I don't know what it means yet.

Sometimes I don't know those things until later. It's like a dream. I just dreamed it. I don't know what it means until like two years later, and I look back, and I think, "Oh, my god. No wonder I dreamed that," right? Yeah, so I don't have a really concise answer for you, Diane, but thank you. Nick probably does.

Nick: No, no. I think that's-

Susan: What are the metaphors you're exploring, Nick?

Nick: I think what you were saying, really, and it's the same for me, is that I am constantly exploring what are the yeses for me, and sometimes it's really clear, and sometimes it is metaphorical, and sometimes there just crazy similarities between what I'm going through personally and what I'm going through in my art. I just am making a mark and it reminds me of a person, or it reminds me of a relationship, or it remains me of how I felt when I left

at my dad's service. It's like it's all this inter lacing that goes on, but it's not like I sit down to say I'm going to do a painting about loss. Certainly my struggles now are, I think my challenges right now are connected to the loss of my father, for sure, and just ... There's a lot of change about to happen for me is all I can say, and it's this restlessness, and I'm about to take my own advice with the magic wand. I'm ready. I'm ready for that, and I don't think I was entirely.

In all areas of my life. It's just whatever. It's in my personal life, and I don't even know if that's an answer, but that's-

Susan: I think it is, and I think ... Maybe there are some artists who say, and I'm sure, I know there are, "This series is gonna be about this," and then-

Nick: Sure. Yeah.

Susan: It's a way to work. I haven't done that. For where I'm at, for my history, it's too much control. I'll get caught up in that shit. I don't want to go there, so it's sort of more happening as I go, kind of like you said. I find a new mark that I love, and then I'm figuring out, well, how can I support that? How can I make space so that it can be more the way it wants to be? If you think about the metaphor in your life, well it's like, well, okay, I want more quiet and solitude. How can I rearrange things so I can get what I need? Yeah.

Nick: Great. Great.

Ferris: Good question.

Nick: Good question.

Ferris: [inaudible 01:05:51] question. Okay. Elena, we're going to come back to you right now. Elena, I'm going to unmute you right now. Elena, can you hear us?

Elena Bogart: Okay. Yes.

Ferris: Oh, we can hear you. Can you perhaps come a little closer to your microphone or your computer? You're a little quiet right now.

Elena Bogart: Okay. Hang on. I realize it's my last [inaudible 01:06:11].

Ferris: I think we can hear you now.

Elena Bogart: [inaudible 01:06:17]

Ferris: Elena, say something?

Elena Bogart: Is this better? Ferris, is this better?

Nick: Yes. Perfect. Just don't move anything.

Elena Bogart: I'm not moving.

Susan: Yeah, that's better.

Elena Bogart: Okay. There's no picture, no signal.

Ferris: We can hear you. We can hear you still.

Elena Bogart: That's fine. No, it works. It works. Go ahead.

Ferris: You had a question to ask. Your hand was raised. You had a comment, something like that that you wanted to-

Elena Bogart: Oh. No, just in answer to your question, Susan, what do we do to practice inviting mystery and meaning, we are packing up, actually. We're leaving the Bay Area, and I watched this incredible movie Minimalism, and I promised myself to get rid of half of my stuff, including precious brushes. I packed up a whole box of brushes. I couldn't believe it, which I had dragged along in my life for 20 years, since I did for finishes on walls. Anyway, just to make a long story short, I realized how freeing it is to get rid of stuff, to make space for meaning and mystery.

Susan: Yeah.

Nick: Great. Great.

Susan: That's great. That's a great idea, because like Nick's closet story.

Elena Bogart: Exactly. So horrifying.

Susan: Yeah.

Elena Bogart: You didn't hear of the movie Minimalism, it's called.

Susan: No, but I will look it up, for sure.

Elena Bogart: It's a docu-

Nick: Where are you going? Where are you moving?

Elena Bogart: For now, to Tahoe, but then we will move back into the Santa Rosa area. I want to build a whole community. It's my dream. I'll tell you all about it later.

Nick: You just did this kitchen remodel, right, or you just remodeled your house.

Elena Bogart: Yes. Now we're selling it. I can redo it.

Susan: That's perfect.

Elena Bogart: I can do it again, and again, and again.

Nick: Yeah, no. I think it's great. It's just coming out of left field, but I love it. I love it.

Susan: I want to hear about your community. Wow, that's a vision.

Elena Bogart: Yes.

Susan: Nice.

Elena Bogart: Okay, well, thanks for this awesome presentation, Susan. Great.

Susan: Oh, Elena. Thanks for being here. I miss you.

Elena Bogart: Miss you, too.

Susan: A fellow mentee.

Nick: [inaudible 01:08:36]

Elena Bogart: Yes.

Ferris: Thank you for the comment, Elena. Cheryl actually has another comment, a write-in comment that she would like to read on behalf of someone in the group. Cheryl, are you ready right now?

Cheryl: Yup. I sure am.

Ferris: Perfect.

Cheryl: Yeah, this was written in by Holly Dean, and she says, "Painting in a series and not being able to let things happen that I'm not in control of is helping me to discover images that I bring out. These images have become metaphors for me. My dogs have become a metaphor for children, or childlike innocence and playfulness. My most meaningful recent work ties into my imagining how my autistic grandson might view the world. I feel total freedom in exploring what he might see in my work." I just thought that was a beautiful ...

Susan: Wow. Wow.

Cheryl: Yeah.

Susan: Great. What was the book that was written ... Was it LMNOP? There was a book written from the perspective of an autistic child. Gosh, I can't remember the name of it, but I love that story, and you know what? I'll give you a little hint. Diana was asking about metaphor in my work, and I'm kind of feeling like there might be a place for some figurative work to start kind of creeping back into my work. Some of it is because of this dream imagery. You're talking about your dogs being symbols of childlike playfulness or whatever. I've had these repeated dreams about my cats. They died long ago. I don't have these two cats anymore, but I would dream that I forgot them, that I forgot them somewhere, and all of a sudden, I remembered that two weeks ago I put them there, and they're dead, they're going to be dead. I'm mortified, and I don't know what it means. I don't know what it means, but I'm looking back and I'm thinking, is it about femininity? What are they cats to me? What do they mean to me?

I don't know. I don't know, but I like the idea of some representational things having that kind of symbolism just the same as [Karuna 01:10:53] exploring chaos and spaciousness with non-objective imagery. I think it's pretty cool.

Ferris: That's a pretty nice comment, it seems like to ... Actually, we don't have any more raised hands, or comments, or anything like that, so that's quite a nice comment to end the call on. Nick or Susan, do you guys have any last words you'd like to share, anything like that at all?

Nick: I just want to thank Susan for putting this together, and an hour and 10. This is what happens when you get a great comment, but really. For those of you listening still on here, these are the people I get to work with, and we get to ... It's just so inspiring. Everyone in the community who can ... We all have this capability to share what we know, and it's just ... It's really fulfilling for me, and just big gratitude, so thank you, Susan.

Susan: Oh, yeah. Thank you. Gratitude from here, too. I'm just so grateful for artists in my life, just to be able to have these conversations. Poets, artists, musicians, it just ... I don't know. It just makes it all worthwhile.

Nick: Yeah.

Susan: Yeah.

Nick: All right, you guys. As normal, all of this is recorded. The show list will be on the site, so you'll be able to get access to that book. I haven't read that, Through the Dark Wood, so I'm going to get that audiobook, but hope you guys have a great rest of the week and a good weekend, and again, see you guys real soon. Okay. Thanks so much.

Susan: Yeah, Nick.

Nick: Talk to you later.

Susan: Bye, everybody.