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MBS ([00:00](#)):

I did a beginners class in ceramics earlier this year, and it really was a pretty interesting experience to go up against the potter's wheel and lose. I mean, forget actually trying to create a pot, I found it nearly impossible just to get the lump of clay centered on the wheel. I mean, I spent a lot of time trying to get the clay in the right and obvious place. Now, I did end up with a few lumpy, bumpy things to glaze, and glazing of course is its own adventure. It's not like paint, where you use green paint and you paint it and it's green. No, that would be way, way too easy. It's more like, here's a pot of reddish water, it's reddish glaze, and it will turn out greenish maybe, because we don't quite know what color it really will turn out to be.

([00:55](#)):

Every firing in the kiln is different, especially if you then use another glaze to go over the top of it. And truth be told, I love the glazing bit. It's do your best, create blindly, have whatever you've created be tempered by heat and stress,



and forces outside your control, and end up with something unexpectedly gorgeous. Gosh, a bit like life really.

[\(01:25\)](#):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Susan Collett is someone I've shared a glass of wine with more than once on my balcony, as she lives just around the corner from me in Toronto. She also happens to be one of the preeminent artists who works in clay sculpture and printmaking, something she's been doing successfully for 30 years.

[\(01:54\)](#):

Here's how critic Gary Michael Dault describes her work. "It actually teams with color, sparkles and scintillates with it, but not in a winningly decorative way. The color is sort of a rare treat, like the rainbow iridescence that shimmers atop an oil spill or on the belly of a fish. By which I mean that Collett's color is and is not immediately discernible and seems to depend on where you stand, and when and at what angle you peer into the oatmeal depths of these mighty yet fragile basket like vessels." Susan, my experience is actually very much like her art, subtle colors, surprising shapes, and art has long been a family affair for her.

Susan [\(02:41\)](#):

My father was a Sunday painter. He likened himself to Winston Churchill, and so I kind of grew up mixing the colors on his palette, at the corner of his palette while he was working on a painting.

MBS [\(02:52\)](#):

And like Susan, her father was not a career artist and certainly didn't nudge her in that rather risky direction. He was a businessman.



Susan ([03:00](#)):

And I think that I also picked up that side of things, the business nature. I took it very seriously to have this studio, that it is a business, and you don't really learn that in school. You learn that in the hands-on.

MBS ([03:13](#)):

That's something that a lot of creatives miss or avoid entirely. Truth is whether you like it or not, making a living with your art means you have to embrace the business side of it. Susan studied drawing and printmaking, but her future specialty, these big hand-built ceramic sculptures, well that calling seemed to be making itself known in a slightly sneaky way.

Susan ([03:37](#)):

At the family cottage, I used to make drip castles with sand and see how high I could make them. And interestingly, I always really enjoyed painting and drawing in school. I didn't even like the sandbox, I didn't like sculpture.

MBS ([03:50](#)):

Susan talked about mixing paints on her father's palette and her time spent creating drip castles. So we have color and we have form. I was curious which one of those two called to her the most.

Susan ([04:03](#)):

Certainly it's the color. I feel like in ceramics, it's actually kind of like blind painting because I have to let go and it goes into the kiln, and then that great alchemy that comes out with the glaze. So I think really it's the color and the two-dimensional that I was first attracted to. And then actually I found a way by making a business through tile work, which is the interim. So I used flat clay with texture relief work and painting, and then that worked further into sculpture.



MBS ([04:34](#)):

That's beautiful. Say more about this, how glazing works. I mean, this is a kind of nerd tech question, but what do you mean blind painting? I mean, surely you get the green glaze and you paint it on and it comes out green.

Susan ([04:49](#)):

Yeah, that's a good question. I find it endlessly fascinating. I think maybe because I was a printmaker. I took ceramics in the last year at the Cleveland Institute of Art. When I graduated with my BFA, it was in printmaking, not in ceramics, but I found a way of living through the clay because of the tile work and how I could apply and interact with society, I guess. So the glazing, it's a constantly moving target or exploration because you can make hundreds of test tiles, but then when you add it to a piece in its dimension, it changes again. So it's a constant alchemy of yourself, the materials and the kiln, and you can't see the colors until they come out, until they've been matured with the firing. So that's what I mean by blind. I can't really see it until it comes out of the kiln, and then I can add another layer and it can go back into the kiln. So it's layer by layer.

MBS ([05:46](#)):

So you're saying that if you're using a glaze, you kind of know the color that is going to come out, but you don't really know the color?

Susan ([05:54](#)):

Well, there are commercial glazes that you can use that are very reliable, and that's what I use when I do my workshops because I don't want people struggling and having difficulty in those basic levels. But the glazes that I'm making, I'm looking for cracking, I'm looking for transparency and other underlayer colors or double layers. So that's where the alchemy is, where you're never quite able to control that, and I somehow like that. And I like that also in



printmaking when it goes through the press and it comes out backwards, I like engaging with the materials that way.

MBS ([06:32](#)):

What does being an artist and a creator give you? I mean, I get what it gives the audience and us, because we actually have some of your beautiful birds up on our walls here. But what does it give you? I mean, how does this nourish you?

Susan ([06:49](#)):

I think for me it would be that it gives me freedom. I mean, I have to create a structure to get that freedom, but I think that's my goal, to put myself in the middle and know that there's something out there that's bigger than me that I'm reaching out for.

MBS ([07:06](#)):

Say more about freedom. Where does that come from?

Susan ([07:10](#)):

I guess it comes from understanding your way. I think I did well in school, but I worked really hard. I think I was like a solid 75%, but I worked hard at it, and I think that that's carried me through. And how I've had that longevity is not giving up and maybe a little bit of stubbornness is a bit of a superpower.

MBS ([07:33](#)):

I'm sure the stubbornness is part of it. I guess I'm curious to know around, your art gives you freedom and ability to do what you want and to create what you want. What do you feel that your art brings the world? What do you hope that it brings the world?

Susan ([07:58](#)):



I think I hope that it brings everyone into themselves. That it reminds them of all of the magnitude, like the magnificence of themselves, and that we all have a point of view, and that we all can make our own way through that. I think it's for a lot of my work, they're not easy. Some are quite dark, but that it's finding beauty in the unexpected places, and that applies to your life, that something good always comes forward out of chaos or difficulty and struggle. To remind them that we all have skills, like that we're strong amidst fragile times. I think I want to remind people that, of their own strength.

MBS ([08:49](#)):

So can you teach me how to engage with a piece of art? There are times where I notice myself in a gallery and I'm spending more time reading the label, describing the art than actually looking at the art. I'm like, "Yeah, I get it." And I'm like, I've given something that somebody's been working on for months or years or decades, and I've given it a cursory two and a half seconds maybe. I haven't really sat and been present to it. How do you sit with art? How do you notice art?

Susan ([09:27](#)):

Yeah, I mean I do that too. Just because I'm an artist I do it all day long. I am here in my own world and I go out and think, "Wow, what's going on there?" But there are keys, there are entryway points into things by form, and color, and contrast, and metaphor. Those sorts of things, can it be applied to each piece? Are they curved lines against hard lines and why? And is it bright colors against soft colors? What mood is it creating? How do I feel? So to each painting, sculpture, you can apply those simple, basic elements of art, to find a way in, to see things that you might not have noticed otherwise.

MBS ([10:14](#)):

So if I was coming to see one of your pieces in a museum, and your pieces are exhibited in museums around the world as well as private collectors of course,



and you are my guide, what questions would you be asking me to help me slow down and settle into myself, and actually start to go a little deeper into the work of art that you've created? How would you coach me? Yeah, so how would I help you to look at my work?

MBS ([10:50](#)):

Yeah.

Susan ([10:50](#)):

What things would I-

MBS ([10:51](#)):

Imagine you're standing next to me, in the museum, you've got one of your sculptures, I mean, for people who haven't yet seen your work, your stuff reminds me of, I'm want to say kind of like coral. There's this kind of organic, biological, draping, swirling, there's depth in it. But I'm coming across it the first time and you're my little coach whispering in my ear. How would you prompt me to notice?

Susan ([11:18](#)):

Well, yeah, okay. I'm just looking at a piece now, trying to remember my thoughts there. Well, I guess because of the maker, I have all the behind the scenes. I think I would point out that not only obvious of texture and glaze layering, but that the layers are also akin, are reflective to my own life layers, that life builds one on the other. And you'll see that in the layers of how I've structured piece. And that the idea about coral being a metaphor that it's seemingly fragile, but really strong.

([12:01](#)):

Yeah, I mean, I had an interesting story where a friend went and saw some work of mine in Florida, and she went into the lobby and she said to the security guards, "Oh, I'm here to see my friend's sculptures." And he says, "Oh, I'm sorry,



there's no sculptures here." And she said, "Well, I can see it over your shoulder, those pieces right there." And he looks around and he goes, "You mean the corals?" And she said, "Well, they're I guess my friend's sculpture, they're made of clay." And he said, he calls his friend on the CB, "Bob, get down here, they're not corals." But in the environment of Florida, his association and his understanding of things. And yeah, it's interesting, and I don't underwater dive, I'm too chicken. I don't know about corals in particular, but as a metaphor for life and our own feelings, I've used that quality.

MBS ([12:48](#)):

Susan, tell me about the book you've chosen to read for us?

Susan ([12:52](#)):

Oh, oh yeah, I love this book. It's Twyla Tharp, *The Creative Habit, Learn It and Use It for Life*.

MBS ([12:57](#)):

Me too.

Susan ([13:00](#)):

Oh, amazing.

MBS ([13:00](#)):

We're on video together, so we're seeing each other hold up our own copies of the book because I've had this copy on my top shelf ever since it came out in 2003.

Susan ([13:09](#)):

2003.

MBS ([13:09](#)):





It's 20 years old amazingly.

Susan ([13:12](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I received it around 2005 from my husband, a birthday gift, and then when I turned 50 in 2011, there's some math, we went to see one of her performances in San Francisco. And it's actually referred to in this section that I chose to read interestingly enough, it's the Surfer At The River Styx. I actually saw her performance of that.

MBS ([13:38](#)):

I mean, for those of you who don't know Twyla Tharp, as well as being an author, *The Creative Habit*, *Learn It and Use It for Life*, she's best known as a choreographer, somebody who shapes dancers and helps dance troops express that performance. So why don't we plunge into your two pages, Susan, I'm excited to hear them. I'm so delighted you've chosen this book.

Susan ([14:01](#)):

Okay, thank you. Okay. I'm very pleased to, I chose a section, it's chapter seven, called *Accidents Will Happen*. "The most productive artists I know have a plan in mind when they get down to work, they know what they want to accomplish, how to do it, and what to do if the process falls off track. But there's a fine line between good planning and over-planning. You never want the planning to inhibit the natural evolution of your work. A plan is like the scaffolding around a building. When you put up the exterior shell, the scaffolding is vital, but once the shell is in place and you start working on the interior, the scaffolding disappears. That's how I think of planning. It has to be sufficiently thoughtful and solid to get the work up and standing straight, but it cannot take over as you toil away on the interior guts of the piece.

([14:58](#)):



Transforming your ideas rarely goes according to plan. This to me is the most interesting paradox of creativity. In order to be habitually creative, you have to know how to prepare to be creative. But good planning alone won't make your efforts successful. It's only after you let go of your plans that you can breathe life into your works or into your efforts. When I was making *Surfer At The River Styx*, I had trouble coming up with the ending. I was yearning for something majestic and I wasn't getting it. Then one day in rehearsal, I saw it. I wanted all four men in the company, on stage near the end of the ballet, and I had them partnering one of the women. Four men, one woman. This is not usually done. Perhaps something unusual can happen within that combination. They were holding her low off the ground, and as she was circling around their arms and bodies in very risky form of aerial partnering, I could see her gradually, but organically snaking her way up their bodies.

[\(15:57\)](#):

She just kept evolving and moving higher. As the group of four men walked slowly toward the right side of the stage, and then it hit me, oh my God, what if they lifted her as high as possible, holding her legs in a perfect split, lit properly, that is theatrically, she'd be floating in air. That's the ending. It was a stroke of luck, but I was prepared to accept it for the simple reason that I needed an ending. At that moment I felt blessed, because it sent the piece into a sphere where the entire dance was suddenly coherent. I certainly hadn't planned it. It was a gift, but I also felt I'd earned it.

[\(16:31\)](#):

Your creative endeavors can never be thoroughly mapped out ahead of time. You have to follow, allow for the suddenly altered landscape, the change in plan, the accidental spark, and you have to see it as a stroke of luck rather than disturbance of your perfect scheme. Habitually creative people are in E.B. White's phrase, 'Prepared to be lucky,' and of course, you have to be present in the room to recognize the stroke of luck. The more you are in the room working,



experimenting, banging away at your objective, the more luck has a chance of biting you on the nose."

MBS ([17:04](#)):

That is a great, great passage. What is it for you that rings so true about that, Susan?

Susan ([17:19](#)):

Well, gosh, I think it's the part about making your own luck, that there's a great mystery or romance about the studio, that it's this romantic place that I'm hanging out drinking wine, and I'm waiting for a lightning bolt to strike. But actually, it's a beautiful place, but it's actually hard to fit yourself into society structure. And so yeah, that planning for me is not landing on all the cracks on the sidewalk and not missing those spaces in between. So planning is important. So yeah, it really resonates with me.

MBS ([17:59](#)):

How do you plan?

Susan ([18:02](#)):

Well, I think one thing grows on the next, and I think it's really important little things like I have notes for the day. I would like to accomplish this, this, this. Sure, go ahead, make it long, make it unattainable. Leave a little bit for the next day. Always when I leave, try to leave on a high note and leave something for the next day so I can hit the ground running. At least come in the door with a Danish or... Those sorts of planning helps the wheel go around for me and keep me on. Yeah.

MBS ([18:37](#)):



I get that on a day-to-day planning, do you think about projects in a, "This is my project for the year," or the month or the quarter? I mean, how do you plan out if you do, the bigger chunks of your creative endeavors?

Susan ([18:55](#)):

Yeah. Well, I think that would be sort of an exchange of myself and the exterior world. Doesn't matter how good you are, and if no one knows about you, you have to reach out, as ever hard that is, it's still really important. So that spurs me on too. So an invitation for a gallery exhibition, for instance, for me, I'm not good at, "Oh, I've got a deadline, so I better get working." I'm working all the time in between, so that when I do have that invitation, I can choose from the works at hand that I've been working on. Because I don't think it works otherwise, the pressure of having a show, you're like, "Does this look nice enough? Oh, is this pretty? Oh, that space is... I better use more color." And then it's not authentic to myself, so I try to make my own luck or be prepared when something comes calling. So that's a part of my plan, if that makes sense?

MBS ([19:58](#)):

It does. How do you manage your way through the doldrums? I mean, I'm assuming you get doldrums. I get doldrums as a creator. Sometimes I'm in the flow and it's like going well, and I'm writing or doing stuff, and I'm like, "This is excellent. See, I'm a legend. I can do this forever."

MBS ([20:21](#)):

Then there'll be some moment where I'm like, "I don't know what to do. I can't get going with anything. Everything is annoying, mostly myself." What have you learned around managing yourself through those moments? I mean, what do they look like and feel like for you, and how do you cope with them? Because 30 years in a career, you've coped with them.



Susan ([20:44](#)):

Yeah, that's a lifelong pursuit. I think for me, it would be that I guess in order to make a living and to keep this going, I can't sit around and wait for a sculpture to sell. I would be long gone. So for me, the trick is to have many things going at the same time. So if I don't feel like working on a sculpture, I'm exhausted, I'm mostly drawing. I have my sketchbooks, they're always at hand. I'm always drawing. So I can spend a week just going to Hyde Park and drawing. It's better than doing nothing. It's better than getting depressed. It's better than, okay, you're not getting that done, but somehow my subconscious can be working on that for me, while I'm drawing.

([21:26](#)):

Drawing's a really important part of the practice. As well, I used to go drawing and plein air painting with my dad growing up. So that was really instilled early on. And also, I work on many sculptures at one time, so that if one piece is overawed or I'm starting to change it, and then I'm losing an idea, I start a new piece, and I find a freshness in that. So I think that also helps me.

MBS ([21:52](#)):

And what's the hard... We've got these inner critics, our gremlins, these inner voices that can kind of talk down to us. What's the trickiest message for you to negotiate around from your own inner critic?

Susan ([22:10](#)):

Wow. Yeah. Gosh, some days are good. I think that just because you think it doesn't mean it's real. So I do depend on friends. I have really a wonderful variety of friends that sort of set me straight. And I have a workshop weekly where I have artists and students that come in and remind me that, "Yeah, I do actually do know a few things," and most of the time I'm here alone at the water cooler. There's nobody in the office but me. Those things help to spur me on or



give me a moment of pause from my grip, but I won't let go. Yeah, that's ongoing.

MBS ([22:57](#)):

When you say from your grip, and I'm watching you, so I can see you holding your hands up to the screen and holding on, what is that grip?

Susan ([23:08](#)):

Yeah, these big hands I've had since grade one, when they put me in piano because I could reach a whole octave in grade one. Yeah, what is that? It's like hanging on, but letting go at the same time, there's a Lawrence Durrell poem about that to relax your grip between cup and sip, and there's the beautiful, and that's where there's the freedom. That's the freedom that I was talking about earlier.

MBS ([23:40](#)):

You were talking about when she's saying, "Make a plan, but be open to the luck of it."

Susan ([23:46](#)):

Yes. Right, right, right. Yeah.

MBS ([23:50](#)):

Are there moments of luck that you remember that have been influential for you?

Susan ([23:56](#)):

Yeah, lots and lots, all the way along, all the time. I mean, even just going to art school and I was very conservative and I thought, "I'm going to go into book illustration. I'm a drawer. That's what I do. I can make a living by that." That was very encouraging for my parents. And then the illustration teacher said, "Have



you ever noticed that every drawing assignment or layout for graphic design that you bring in, you slip a print into it. Why don't you just go into printmaking?" He said, "You can always narrow in later. Go wide, go into the fine arts, and then you can always apply." And that was really instrumental in my direction. And I switched into printmaking my first year at the Art Institute. So that encouragement, that was a lucky thing. Maybe if you hadn't said that, I may have struggled with it a little bit longer.

MBS ([24:51](#)):

And what was the moment where you went from printmaking to being a sculptor?

Susan ([25:00](#)):

Oh, well, yeah. That was again, really terrific teachers at the Art Institute that were noticing my print work and saying, "Oh, you like carving wood blocks and woodcuts, you should come into clay and try the clay department." And I did that in my last year, and I just got a grip on that at the last, hung on, and in my graduating exhibition, you couldn't tell, you thought I was a clay... I took to it really quickly, and how stubborn of me because I didn't even like the sandbox or I didn't like three-dimensional projects growing up. I was always painting because of my father, and so yeah, I am a late bloomer for sure.

MBS ([25:37](#)):

I don't think you're that late a bloomer if you've been successfully working for 30 years, but I get what you're saying around this jumping from stone to stone to find your best stone.

Susan ([25:51](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Lots of stepping stones along the way. Yeah, yeah.

MBS ([25:55](#)):



You talked about always coming back to drawing as a foundational skill.

Susan ([26:02](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([26:03](#)):

What is it about drawing that is so important? How does that help you?

Susan ([26:07](#)):

Well, because my sculptures are so complex, I don't draw and then execute a sculpture. When I'm working with the clay, it's very stream of consciousness. I'm very in the moment, again, that freedom. But to get there, the drawing provides hand and mind coordination. So I'm practicing. I'm practicing that I'm in touch with my observational skills, and I draw a lot when on holiday, mostly outside of the studio, observing nature, fine-tuning that mind and hand skill, so that then when I'm in the studio working, I am practiced, I'm fluid with that. So it's important for hand and mind coordination.

MBS ([26:51](#)):

Nice. I know a tiny bit about your art, so I know you... What I would call, you have series' of things. I know you created a whole series of beautiful bird sculptures and different types of ceramics. You have some amazing huge vases for want of a better of a word, which have these big organic shapes.

Susan ([27:17](#)):

Yes, vessels.

MBS ([27:18](#)):

You have another series that are these coral that we've been talking about, more condensed and more denser. And layered with glaze and other things within it. I'm wondering how you find your next project? Because often when I'm working





within a bigger idea, I'll execute two or three things within it, and then I'm like, "It's beginning to lose its puff for me." And I'm wondering how you notice when you're losing your puff, if you do, and how you then find the thing that's next?

Susan ([27:55](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, you could stay with one thing. I feel like within one piece there are 10 other pieces. So that is how a series and how an artist builds on a body of work. And then I find one piece grows from the next, and then I realize if I had stayed there and made the vessels, the large vessels, I would've never found what I'm finding now. And so I'm always encouraged that just because I don't know it's there doesn't mean it doesn't exist, it's for me to reach out.

MBS ([28:29](#)):

That's so interesting. What I think I'm hearing you say, tell me if I've got this right, is creating the thing is both finishing the thing in front of you, but also uncovering the next thing that is asking to be created?

Susan ([28:44](#)):

Yeah. It's like you have the known and the unknown, which is so much about ceramics, like a metaphor for everything. Our own interior, our own emotions mixed with that exterior alchemic world. And so yeah, that always takes me forward very easily. The permutations are endless, especially in ceramics. I mean, clay can look like birch bark, it could look like a rock. You can have it reflective like water. Its permutations are... It really keeps me engaged.

MBS ([29:21](#)):

Connected to that last question, I think, is this idea of accumulation, as you say, 30 years, you've accumulated just a lot of deep wisdom and experience about drawing and printmaking, and building through clay. But I'm also curious to know what you've had to unlearn along the way to become the artist you are?



Susan ([29:48](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([29:50](#)):

If anything?

Susan ([29:51](#)):

Yeah. I'm trying to think of what did I learn? What did I unlearn? Yeah. Well, the clay itself and the process teaches you to let go into the materials and the process, and that whole thing about having a grip on things in life, you do have to be fluid and respond in the moment. I mean, it takes a lot of things to be creative, it's not just one thing. And if you're doing just one thing, then your balance is off.

MBS ([30:31](#)):

What do you mean by letting go? I think you said letting go into the material. Somebody who, I mean, as you know, Susan, I did a ceramics course two months ago and I'm like, "This is probably not my calling, because [inaudible 00:30:49] pretty ugly things there. But for me, I had a lump of clay, and I'm trying to make a shape into something. I wouldn't say I had much of a relationship with that lump of clay. I suspect you do with the clays you work with.

Susan ([30:31](#)):

Yeah. That's a-

MBS ([31:05](#)):



How do you let go into the material?

Susan ([31:07](#)):

Yeah, that's a good point. I have to say you can have preconceived ideas about things, but I have learned that actually some of my best pieces have come out of disasters where I over fired and the kiln went too high in temperature, and then the clay moved into the next clay body. I had the wrong clay body for that temperature. But what came from that was really beautiful, so that's beauty and the unexpected. Yeah. There's lots to think about there. I think it's working with your own preconceived ideas about things and that letting go of projecting yourself onto something and opening up into something beyond that. I think that even if it's ugly and it's going... There's something there. Turn it upside down. "Oh, wow." Often that can do it, or looking at a piece through the mirror.

([32:08](#)):

Also, some pieces over time that have been in the studio for a couple of years, I've built onto, and with distance, I'm able to see it differently. In fact, I just went to a show that I'm in at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery. When I went into the gallery, honestly, it'll sound very strange, but outside of my environment here in the studio, when I saw the work, I didn't recognize it. I was like, "What's that made of?" Do you know what I mean? I saw it-

MBS ([32:37](#)):

"Who's that artist? Oh, it's me."

Susan ([32:38](#)):

"Who's that artist?" But really, with time and distance, things can be readdressed and wherever you go, there you are again in a new form.

MBS ([32:49](#)):

So how do you navigate the different demands on your time. There's one demand which is around patience, and allowing stuff to show up and evolve



and find the right moment to appear or to be seen. There's another part which is like, "I've got to sell some of this stuff just to make money," and fund my professional side of being an artist. I'm curious to know how you dance between those two different experiences of time?

Susan ([33:22](#)):

Yeah, that's right. Well, on those days where I'm not feeling it, there's always things to do here. I'm ordering materials, and then in ordering materials, I'm realizing, "Yeah, I haven't used that glaze chemistry in a while, and that would go with some new ideas I have right now, and those things can cross." So I think that's part of it.

MBS ([33:49](#)):

How do you find your audience? I know I feel like I'm asking all these very specific things about being a ceramic artist, but for the people who are listening, I'm just thinking, we are all creators. We all have relationships with the materials with which we're creating. We all have an audience for whatever it is that we're creating. So I'm wondering how you think about or how you find your audience?

Susan ([34:15](#)):

Yeah. I liked the idea that I have a varied audience. Maybe because I came from printmaking, I think, well, I'm actually not really in ceramics, and I didn't really learn all the sort of... And then I think that I like unusual audience or unexpected audience. Like right now I have a piece out in the Burlington Sculpture Trail. They have an exhibition, and I have one of my sculptures under a plexiglass box sitting on Lake Ontario.

MBS ([34:45](#)):

That's great.

Susan ([34:45](#)):



Outside they created... And even to me it's like, "Wow, there's, there's the water going right by with my piece," and it's outside, which is very unusual for ceramics, and it's with other sculptures that are in bronze and copper and metal, et cetera. So I thought, "I'll enter," and then I got in. So I like to try unusual things like that to keep the audience broad. I'm not just speaking to the ceramic industry.

MBS ([35:12](#)):

Susan, this has been such an interesting conversation. I love your work. I love you.

Susan ([35:12](#)):

Thank you.

MBS ([35:18](#)):

I love your studio. I'm actually, as you know, filming a course in it next week, which I'm excited to get into. We're using some of your great art as a set really for this course I'm going to create.

Susan ([35:32](#)):

Thank you.

MBS ([35:33](#)):

But I'm wondering, as a final question, and you know what it is, because you've heard all my interviews, so you've heard me ask this to everybody, is, so what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said between the two of us?

Susan ([35:45](#)):

Well, I love that question. I think that's such a great ending for all your conversations. I'm always listening carefully at that point. I loved our conversation too, it was great, I thought of things I hadn't thought of in a while.



But I think also, no matter what you're doing and all these, the planning and the scaffolding and the time you put into your work, if you're not feeling well and you're not in good shape, I think that one of the best things recently, I've been doing an exercise program that I do with a buddy daily. That gives me energy and keeps me strong, and we bought a treadmill. My husband gave me a treadmill for Christmas, and those kinds of health things, eight hours of sleep each night. You're not good for anything without those basics. That's a part of the variety of a creative life is that balance is also essential.

MBS ([36:45](#)):

I was struck by the dynamic Susan's described that's helped her forge a successful 30-year career. It's got that dance; deliberate, but seeking serendipity, centered, but restless. There was a phrase in the conversation from Susan that I loved. She said, "I put myself in the middle and know that there's something out there that's bigger than me that I'm reaching for," and this gives me a clue to a dynamic that Susan describes that's helped her forge a successful 30-year career. It's got a dance. It's deliberate, but seeking serendipity. It's centered, but restless. Because I think it is an act of art to be able to find your middle. I put myself in the middle. So how do you find your middle? That calm eye in the storm, and to hold that position. It means to me, at least how I'm interpreting in the moment, is that you found your reason to serve, the purpose for the work you do. That is a rare gift.

([37:46](#)):

But Susan doesn't just wait. She's reaching out. She's moving from project to project. She's trying the next thing. She's experimenting with her glazes. She's building new shapes. Finding your middle doesn't mean be passive. It doesn't mean stop working. It means, now commit. There's a clip going around socials, which is wonderful. It's Jeff Goldblum quoting George Bernard Shaw. So in that very Jeff Goldblum way, he says this, "This is the true joy in life of being used for



a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one, of being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap, being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I'm of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it what I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of a splendid torch, which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to the future generations."

[\(39:05\):](#)

I feel Susan is showing us how to do that, in and how she does the work that she does. Susan also happens to be an avid fan of the podcast. She listens to it, which is fantastic, and she's been nagging, in a nice way, for years to have us actually number the episodes so that when I make a recommendation as I'm about to, I can give you a little more guidance on where to find it, because searching for podcast episodes is a little tricky sometimes. So in honor of Susan being the guest today, we've numbered the episodes. So here are two you might like to check out. Number 103, Danny Miller on how to travel through history, Danny is a brilliant Australian artist. And number 143, Debbie Millman, success, failure and design. Debbie is an OG podcaster, and you might get a sense from the title, somebody who is deeply immersed in the design world.

[\(40:05\):](#)

If you'd like more of Susan, you can find her website at [susancollett.com](http://susancollett.com). That's double L and double T. [Susancollett.com](http://susancollett.com). Thank you for loving the show and listening to the show, and listening all the way to an episode, and reviewing it and starring it, and referring it to people who might enjoy the interview. I appreciate your support and encouragement. You're awesome and you're doing great.