

Conversation with Book Artist Robyn McClendon

Cory: This is Cory Huff with The Abundant Artist, and we are live with a slightly belated broadcast with artist Robyn McClendon. Hang on just a second while I finish our publishing over to Facebook. There we go. Cool! Alright, so thank you so much everybody, for those of you who stuck around while we figured how to get things going with the live broadcast. Robyn, I'm so glad you're here, glad we're able to figure out how to get you on.

Robyn: No, thank you.

Cory: And I'm super excited. So for those of you who don't know Robyn for whatever reason, she's had quite the career. We're gonna- I don't know how much we can cover in the next 40 minutes or so, but we'll talk a little bit about her career, and I just want to give you a little bit of an introduction to who she is. Robyn has exhibited nationally and internationally at the Smithsonian, the Corcoran Art Gallery, and is in the permanent collection at the MOMA as well as several other places. She's a Master Bookbinder and Papermaker, and she studied basically, you've been doing this stuff since the '80s, the paper art since the '80s. And you've also been- are, and have been an adjunct professor at some different art schools, and you won experiences not only for your fine art but also some of your design awards. You designed the Dorothy Irene Height's Uncommon Height Project award, then you've been- your work has been sold in IKEA, Target, you've done work for UNICEF, you've just, you've had quite the career. I'm excited to have you on.

Robyn: Thank you so much for having me.

Cory: Yeah! Awesome. So first thing, I love, like as I was reading through your bio and reading what other people have written about you and stuff I noticed that you travel a lot.

Robyn: Yeah, I do.

Cory: And as somebody who also travels a fair bit, and so just like side note, like, when you travel a lot people start to say "Oh, you travel so much!" but then you start thinking about all your friends who've traveled more than you, at least I do. And I'm like "No, no I don't travel all that much, I only travel like once a month." But I love, I love that you travel so much and you describe yourself as a gypsetter, which, I had never heard that term before. So I love that. So let's talk about all this travel that you do and how that informs your work as an artist. So let's start there.

Robyn: Sure, thanks. You know, being a visual creative as most artists are... I'm getting a little feedback but I think it'll stop, maybe.

Cory: It sounds fine on my end.

Robyn: Okay, great. So I'm big on defining the visual vocabulary as an artist. And I think that more artists are able to define their visual vocabulary the more unique their work is, and it's sort of like our words for branding, you know, cause we think about branding, but it still sounds so commercial. So I think for fine artists it's a visual vocabulary. And so for me I find mine is, it constantly is tweaked and expanded by traveling and going to so many different places. Also I'm an abstract emotionalist, a term that I came up for my work a while back when I realized that my emotions play so key in the way my language is formed. So you know, your emotions are

developed with travel. It's going to different cultures, meeting different people, and being able to rub against your own mores and your norms and your standards. And you sometimes until you travel and go somewhere else, you think your standards are world standards. And so, that's what I love about it.

Cory: I love the- you think your standards are world standards thing. I have never been so out of my element as I was when living in Paris. I think I, so, I've lived- I speak Mandarin and I've spent a lot of time with Chinese people, and I got really comfortable with Chinese people. But I felt more uncomfortable in Paris than I did with Chinese people, which is hilarious to me.

Robyn: It really is. It's funny, because when I went to school and university, for my secondary degree I went to University of London, and so that was one of the points early in my life where it was a big travel decision for me, obviously living abroad. And I'm thinking okay, London's a good place to start, it's English speaking, what have you. Everything is opposite! And I remember the first time I was kind of walking around by myself and I stepped off the curb, and you know we step off, we always look left and then right. But there you've got to do right and left. And I almost got plastered by a black cab that was not stopping. And I thought "Whoa!" That was you know that's a standard that you sort of hold as a paradigm you don't think about, and you go somewhere where you think it's culturally similar and it's still so much different. I know what you mean about Paris.

Cory: Yeah. It's easy to put your foot wrong. So have you heard of Paris syndrome?

Robyn: No, I don't think I have.

Cory: So, Paris syndrome is a real problem like, a diagnosed problem that people have- people go to Paris and they're so disappointed that Paris is not what everybody thinks Paris is, that they actually have a mental break.

Robyn: Yeah.

Cory: And the Japanese Consulate in Paris actually has a hotline you can call, the Japanese tourists can call to get help. Because it's such a big problem with Japanese tourists.

Robyn: Really? I didn't know that! That's awesome.

Cory: It's crazy.

Robyn: Yeah, it's crazy.

Cory: So how does that inform your work? Like you, obviously your visual vocabulary will grow as you encounter more things, but you know, are there any particular experiences you've had or things you've done that you think have informed your work?

Robyn: Yes. So a lot of the types of trips that I go on these days are- a big part of my work is I'm an archaeomythologist. And a lot of that came from university training. So I go to a lot of ancient sites, I participate in various expeditions to a lot of sites that haven't- that aren't even on the various registers, historic registers. So it's amazing on this planet how much incredible stuff is not even on historic registers. So when you go to these places, what it does is, because you're sort of going through the brush and you're pulling back literally, you're pulling back vines and

stuff, there's nothing more fascinating than to pull back vines and you see this wall exposed. And it's all this sort of chiseling in it, and it looks like some kind of languages, or it's a circle with a dot in the middle of it. And it really does start challenging the way you look at language, the way you look at symbols. And then you start using your imagination to sort of think- what does this really mean? You know, what's going on here? What was left behind by this culture? So I love a lot of that stuff. And even when I go to like, I'll be going to Australia in November, and even though I'll be going to the seaside outside of Melbourne, I love to just go around in a lot of undiscovered places, because there's not a lot of landmarks or you know, you don't realize how much when you're traveling you're relying on signage. You know, this museum says this is that, or you know, this building is historical because someone says that's so. But if you go to places not on these registers or these markers, you then have to really think about what was- the people that left this here, what were they trying to say? Or what were their lives about? And that stuff is fascinating for me. And then that finds its way back into my work.

Cory: Interesting. So when you are off on your trips, are you making art while you're there, or do you just sort of absorb everything and then come back to your studio when you return home?

Robyn: A combination. I'm a big journaler. I journal every day. I'm huge on that and it's amazing the amount of fine artists I come across who say "Oh I don't have time to journal." How do you not have time to practice your art? I mean that's a place to sketch or put some ideas down. And so when I travel I do- I go, I travel with my journals, I'll have certain inks or paints- you know, things that you can travel with. I do a lot of collaging. So I make sure that I pull ephemera from the places that I'm going and work them back into my images. I think that when you're in a different place, you're eating different foods, you're talking to different people, it's amazing how your art is responsive. It's organic, it's biological. So it's responsive to that environment. And I think we miss something when we try to just capture it and bring it back into our studios, we come back, you know, we're back in our space with our families, we're back to doing all those normal things, and then we try to go in our studios and recapture this magic that only existed in that place. And so I find that the work that happens on site is so much more, has so much more life and it captures that moment more than when I used to try to come back and do it.

Cory: That's interesting. So you- maybe we'll get a little technical for a second, cause I know everybody's going to ask. What kind of journal do you use? Like, do you make your own paper, and what other supplies do you take with you when you travel?

Robyn: Well, I'm big on making my journals just because I sometimes finicky about the paper. But I'm not at all snooty about that. Any journal that you buy at the art supply store is cool. If it takes your medium, if you like to you know use watercolors of course, just make sure the paper is conducive for the medium. But I'm going to tell you the truth, and not that I'm trying to give Big Wally W a plug, but they have a really great journal. It's on brown paper, it's like \$3.98, and it's called flatlay. And it lays totally flat. It's the most amazing thing. And a journal that lays as flat as possible is- that would be like a little key, I would give out just a little note. Try to get something as flat as possible, cause it's so much easier to work on. But no, I mean, anything that's the right size that you can carry with you.

Cory: What about- what kind of pens, or other tools do you use when you're traveling?

Robyn: Well I love gelly pens! I think gelly pens are great because they're very smooth, you know, they work really well, they're not expensive. I like the, what is the one? The Signo. I like the Signo series. And they have a white one that I absolutely love. And you can get it online on Amazon. But and then, but I use the Signo ball. And you can get those anywhere. Just about any place that sells you know, gelly pens. They sell those. And then I take a water brush with me, like the little, you know, you fill up the little container, it's a uh, just watercolor. I forget the name of the company but you can find it, and it has a little cap on it. So it helps for just bringing a little bit of moisture into it if you're doing some sketching or you're using a little color and you wanna... so I would say those are my staples. A good graphite pencil, but that's what I normally carry in my little case with me.

Cory: That's awesome. I love it, thank you. I'm envisioning a world of, an army of artists traveling around the world with a little art kit. I want to see more of that happen.

Robyn: Me too. I'm big on that.

Cory: So you're traveling around the world, you're having all these encounters and experiences, and it looks like you recently took a trip with your- you have two kids, right?

Robyn: Yes, I have three. I have two daughters and a boy.

Cory: And you recently took a trip with them.

Robyn: Yes.

Cory: Oh, there was multiple, okay. Like I was gonna ask when you travel, do you normally travel with your kids or is it all just work stuff, or how does that work?

Robyn: Well, you know it's funny because most of the time I travel without them, only because they have their lives- my children are 28 and 26 and my youngest is 16, so, but we try to once a year come together, normally in July, and take that whole month and do something. We try to go somewhere different. We have our bucket list of all the things we want to do. And every summer we pick and we do that. My oldest daughter, fortunately for me, yay, she flies for United. So now all of a sudden for the last two years all of my airfare has been...

Cory: Oh that's fantastic.

Robyn: I'm really getting spoiled now. So she'll often travel with me, you know, because we'll, you know, she's actually going to come to Australia with me for the first week of it. And then she'll go on back to work and I'll stay there for another couple of weeks. But yeah, I like, I've always traveled with my kids because I homeschooled them. So from the time they were little they just- we did everything together. And it was how I taught them. And for me, there were no lines of demarcation between my work and my kids and my family and my home. Because I realized in my early twenties after I came out of university that I wasn't cut out for the work paradigm. That was the first one I busted, like immediately. I was like okay, you better figure out how to make a living off this art because I cannot do this. And I had a good government job, you know. But once I started having children I realized I just didn't want to be one of these people putting my life on hold and I know a lot of people do and we make different decisions for different reasons, and I work with clients who have put their lives on hold and now they're trying to make

some changes, so I totally understand and it's not a judgment call. But I just realized that I didn't want to do that. And I wanted a family. So to me it was like, everything we do is life, right? It's all organic. So it was just about incorporating it all together, and luckily I was able to make it work, you know?

Cory: Yeah, and this is a great segue because I definitely want to ask you some questions about how your work came along and how you developed into being able to support yourself as an artist, so how did that, what was that early stage like? When did you get to the point where you realized like, oh, I can actually make a living doing this?

Robyn: Well, partly is when I, because I travel, like I said, I did schooling in Europe, and I sort of, that really opened me up to different systems of earning. You know, really early on as an American abroad, I think Europeans depend on more on several streams of income, at least back when I was, you know, younger and impressionable. And it sort of hit me, wow, you know, I don't have to just do one thing. I can do a number of things to earn a living. First came back and graduated from university like I said, I got my government job. Back then it was like a thirty something thousand dollar job, and that was a lot of money. But I just couldn't do it. So I thought I had to walk away from it, but I had already set the bar high to say I needed to earn a certain amount of money. At the same time, because I studied cultures and studied art from an anthropological standpoint, I learned a little secret that a lot of artists I still don't think have stumbled upon, that the starving artist myth was started by smart artists who were marketing.

Cory: Okay.

Robyn: To patrons.

Cory: Tell me more about that.

Robyn: Yeah, so it started by artists who wanted to up their patronage. And what they found is the wealthy were far more interested in helping people who needed their help, who needed their support. Who you know, were struggling, than people or artists who were doing well. Artists were doing well. But in order to up their patronage they kind of created this paradigm that they were struggling. So that they could just be taken care of. You know? And that's where it began. I read a book and it was written by a woman and I don't remember the name of the book, but it's that paradigm if your listeners look up the starving artist myth and where it started, her book will probably pop up. And when I realized wow, it was artists, smart artists marketing themselves to make more money, I realized you know, I don't have to buy into that as well. And I think what's interesting is we created our own prison though, because they forgot to send the email down the line, you know, to the rest of us oh, it's a marketing ploy. Got it!

Cory: Yeah, that's funny.

Robyn: It really freed me though. I love teaching and working with others, so it was an easy move for me to start teaching university. I started teaching, I became adjunct professor at the Corcoran School of Art, and I worked with fourth year BFA students on their thesis projects, which were like books magazine, creating these as a final, you know from cover to cover project. And so that brought money in, but you know as a professor you only work a few days a week. Yay! So I was

in the studio the rest of the time. And so you know, you just start figuring other ways to continue to make that money.

Cory: Nice. Cool. So I have a bit of a non sequitur question, but I think this is really interesting. So as I was researching you and reading what other people have written about you and seeing all that, there's pictures in all these magazines and other places, and you're quite frequently you're turned away from the camera.

Robyn: Like that.

Cory: Yeah, or you've got like your back to the camera and you're looking off into the distance. And it's a great inspirational shot, but I don't know if you're showing off your jewelry and your beautiful hair, or, why are you always looking away from the camera? I think that's so interesting.

Robyn: Thank you, when I saw that question I thought oh, that's a good one. The reason is that early on also I realized that you have to brand yourself, you have to figure out how to make yourself a little bit different. Your art defines you, but we are attracted to personality, and so you think of people like you know, the de Koonings, or the Jason Pollocks, or I mean Jackson Pollocks and all these different people, there are like characters. They had a personality that was also intriguing, you know, even poor Van Gogh cutting his ear off. I think that was just a marketing ploy, you know. So one of the things, one of my favorite artists and inspirational artists for her fierce independence was Georgia O'Keefe. And one of the pictures I love the most of her, she's looking off. She has like this black dress on, and she has this silver pin on and she's just looking off. And so I thought okay, I'm gonna do that too!

Cory: That's great! That's great. But the great thing about that is you, like, you've studied enough of art history like you kind of know your place, you know what you're inspired by, you're borrowing from places, a lot of artists need to develop that. They need to develop a sense of where they stand in relation to other artists. So that's super interesting.

Robyn: When I work with artists that I coach, and I do a lot of one-on-one and I do some group ones as well, but that's the biggest thing, is that it's like were the last group to get it that you know what, you gotta figure your story out and start telling it. And tell it boldly with pride. I mean, you know? You can yeast it up a little bit, I mean you know every cake needs a little yeast. It's okay to decide who it is that you want to be. And then put that out there. And it really does separate you from other folks. And it's not like you're not being real, just figure out what your authentic story is and start telling it. And we don't have to hide behind our art and just say- and not have our personalities. And we live in the age where everyone wants to connect now because we're doing so much through technology that you don't get the opportunity to meet all your clients or interface with your other artists in person. So how do you get your personality across this technology, you know? We have to kind of make it a little bit more, you know? You have to bring more of who you are to the table, I guess is what I'm saying.

Cory: Yeah. The way we often talk about that is figuring out- in business they call it the unique value proposition or branding, or you know what sets you apart from other people and we talk about that a lot in workshops and stuff that we do. So yeah, I think I really resonate with what you're

saying there about figuring out who you are so that you can present yourself well. So you have done a lot of different things to make a living, like you talk about being an adjunct professor. I know like on your website right now you've got some jewelry that people can wear, it's beautiful stuff. You also make handmade books, and you also get paid for design. So where does all of this come from- like how do people, if they're like "I love Robyn's work, I want to buy something of hers," where do those people come from? Where do you find your clients?

Robyn: Well you know, I think that from all over, really, I guess. You know people come through different avenues. One of the things I've tried to do is I first try to figure out what is the thing that unifies my art? Because I think you find out what unifies your art, it frees you to allow it to manifest in a lot of different ways, like versus the old adage well you have to only do one thing and you have to try to be really good at that to try to establish yourself as a fine artist or whatever. And I think to diversify, you are allowed to go in different directions. But what is the common thread? So for me, it is archaeomythology, it is art mythos, it is the idea that my work is defined by textual materials. I like things to look like they're lost or uncovered or rare or different or one of a kind, and that sort of thread runs through my work. Well once I determined that, I can do jewelry, I can do books, I can do a fine art painting. Because my message is the same, you know? And I think that's what we as artists until recently weren't allowed to connect with, because the whole gallery system wanted to keep you confined and controlled so that they could control their product. It had nothing to do with whether a fine artist could do a fine art painting and then go and take a wonderful photograph and sell that and then go make a pot, it had to do with that system wanting to own you. They could only own you if they made you think that you could only be in this box.

Cory: Yeah.

Robyn: And only do that, you know? So yeah, I think it goes back to that idea of first discovering what you know, what is your common thread? And then it's sort of really does free you to do so much. And early on, also, I read the work of Dr. Walter Russell, and he was born at like the turn of the last century, and anyone looks at this work, he was an incredible man. But he every ten years did something different. I mean, you know, he was a real estate investor, he actually came into the first idea of condominiums. Then he went to being a composer, and he got to the top of that, you know playing at the New York Philharmonics. And then he went into sculpting, got to the top of that. So he believed that you know we were designed to do so many things, and so focus in on it, and run that passion, and then go to something else or do multiple things. And that really influenced me as well. I think it gave me permission.

Cory: And the through line is, so it's not about what you make, it's about the ideas and the emotions that underlie the things that you're creating. That's what I'm hearing you say.

Robyn: Exactly. It's like telling a songwriter that they can only write love song. You're gonna get known for love songs and that's it, you know? No, they can write about stuff that's painful as well, so why, why do visual artists have to get stuck in only creating one way? I don't, I'm gonna go with that one.

Cory: So how do you manage selling all this different stuff? You know, I notice on your website right now I think there's one or two different items, but you make and sell lots of different things. Sort of on a practical level what does that look like?

Robyn: So what I do is I do restrict what I'm actually making at any given time. So right now the jewelry on my website, I've done jewelry for a long time. Actually it's been in the museum shops and the Smithsonian, I normally put even with my jewelry, I was very selective about where I put it and it always had a story with it cause most of it was one-of-a-kind kind of stones, etcetera, things like that. So I still made it to be fine jewelry, museum-quality concept, you know? I kept the conceptual aspect of it the same. And then I was careful as to where I placed it. As far as bookbinding, I don't create books for sale. I do them for my own personal work. However, I do in my art mythos retreats, what I will also be doing in Australia is I do teach aspects of bookbinding as a part of telling our stories. So I have a process called the holy grail. Which is really just getting stuff up out of us to define our common, our common aspects of our art. It helps you to find your art, your language. And then as a part of that I use the book because it's a familiar structure that we know. We put words and feelings and thoughts into as a way of capturing what happens, what came out of the workshop. So then I'll do books, I'll teach it like that. But I'm not currently doing bookbinding. I used to, like twenty years ago a part of my business was that I did that and I actually worked in some of the rare book room at the Library of Congress. So you know, you do kind of, things kind of evolve and you pick and choose how you want to use what you're doing. So that would probably be that, and then also I've used agents. So for some of my things I have agents that actually market things for me because it's kind of hard to do all that marketing yourself, you know? So yeah. You get some help.

Cory: So I imagine you have agents for your licensing deals, like the stuff you did with Target?

Robyn: Yes. So that interestingly enough is called the surface design industry, and I was teaching at the Corcoran when I discovered this industry which I didn't even know. And a lot of artists I found didn't know that there was something called the surface design industry. But it totally is for just about any visual creative, and the neat thing about it is it's a royalty system. So you go to set up a show, it maybe costs about \$5,000 to get the booth for a weekend. But-

Cory: This is at Surtex?

Robyn: Yeah, at Surtex, exactly. But at the end of it all, you can, I mean the first time I ever went there I took in about \$25,000 worth of orders and the probably another thirty over the course of six months. So it's a royalty-based system. They pay a certain amount for your work, and then you get paid on the end of the project you determine the term, which is normally a year, and then if that work does, and they pay you a percentage quarterly. If that work does really well they have to re-negotiate to be able to use those designs another year.

Cory: Nice.

Robyn: You still retain the rights to the designs. You also retain the ability to limit the use of it. So if you're a sheet manufacturer, then I'll let you use my designs, but only on your sheets. Now the next person over here who does rugs and your sheets are now doing really good, I can sell my designs to the rug-maker so when the person goes to the store and they buy the rug, the sheets,

the curtains, the lampshades, those are all done by different companies. So I'm getting paid on all of those items. It's an incredible industry for artists.

Cory: I love that, yeah. We do, we highlight licensing artists fairly regularly and we have a pretty in-depth breakdown of how the licensing industry works over at theabundantartist.com/licensing. So there are some resources there if you want to learn more about licensing.

Robyn: That's awesome, people should. I highly recommend that. It's good money.

Cory: We're coming up on just about ten minutes left, but I wanted to talk a little bit about, I'm glad you agreed to talk about this. So you did some work earlier in your career about the Middle Passage.

Robyn: Yes.

Cory: And for those of you who don't know what the Middle Passage means, that refers to when early in United States history when they were taking Africans from Africa and bringing them to the United States to sell them as slaves, that process of bringing them was called the Middle Passage. And so I wanted to ask, you know, obviously that is not work that is commercial in nature. So how do you balance creating that kind of work that is sort of soul work or emotionally important, with your other more commercial work?

Robyn: So, good question. I loved it when you popped that one up. What happened is that when I first went into the fine arts, I was obviously in the museum system, because that was the main way that, and the gallery system, that you could even be shown. It was a heck of a way to try to make a living as an artist, if that was the only way you were gonna go, right? So and then being a person of color and a woman, those are not traditionally categories that you could make it big, even like thirty years ago even as a fine artist. You just didn't fall into the right category. You had to be white male, educated with at least a BFA. That's what was the bar for you to get into the galleries, especially the New York system and all that. Well, obviously I didn't buy that and what I- being an anthropologist as well and studying history, I was not going to allow myself to be boxed in to have to make African American art. I don't relate to it, quite frankly. I don't have a problem with other people doing it, I just don't really want to sit around and draw little African American children running in an open fire hydrant because that's the only way they can get water in the summertime. I mean these kinds of paintings were rampant and that's what you were asked to paint. You had to paint something about Black culture in order to get high in the ranks as African American fine artists that would be recognized. That was just the system. If you were an Italian American, if you were whatever, you had to then paint that kind of stuff. It was just amazing the nonverbal restrictions as an artist. So I thought, it was an experiment, and it actually worked. I thought okay, cool. You want me to paint a thing about the African American experience, well I'm gonna paint about the Middle Passage. And so I just did a lot of work that I distributed, I had published on the Middle Passage. But I also kind of said that I felt that it wasn't the truth. I don't feel that the Middle Passage happened the way it did. I think it was one of those early false flags as a lot of the events were. And so a lot of the studies that I did sort of pointed to that. Well what happened is that I was, you know, I was allowed to- and with those shows I mixed a lot of abstract. Cause even if you notice my early work on the Middle Passage it was still pretty abstracted. Unless you knew the icon and the imagery, you wouldn't necessarily

know that's what I was talking about. So I began to mix those into shows with my abstract, more abstract emotionalism that didn't have any of that in it. And so many people started relating to the abstract expressionism, it began to sell. And so I got known for that. And that was kind of, it was another one of those sort of marketing ploys, honestly. Just to put it out there and say okay, you tell me the difference between this abstracted image of a slave ship, and this one that's not. And the art is still the same. So it was just one of those type of things. I was kind of maybe being a bit rebellious.

Cory: So- and you mentioned the fact that the fine art business is dominated by older white men.

Robyn: Right.

Cory: And you know, how have you managed to sort of navigate those relationships and norms, and what's that been like for you?

Robyn: Well, I think what happened early on, it's changed a lot now because with all the platforms like this, I mean you're able to produce and publish your own broadcast, you're able to take complete control of your product because of the technology. Same with me and others. So now it's kind of hard to hold, because the technology and the internet leveled the playing field. So it was an opportunity for everybody to get a leg up again. If you can change your paradigm about how you saw your world and your work. And I think on the- there are a lot of the controls were dropped, because the gallery system for fine artists controlled it. That was the lock and key, right? Well, the internet when everybody could get on and start publishing, and we could just start relating to one another and your clients naturally gravitated to you, the people who were buying your work didn't understand the gallery system. They just bought what they were presented with. And what they were presented with opened up, they bought that too. They didn't care what your nationality was, or what your ethnicity or your gender. It's like, I like that piece of art! I want it on my wall! And so that's what really started breaking it up. I think what happened early on is that a lot of artists that really wanted- there were a lot of white male artists that were my contemporaries that didn't like the gallery system. So we all kind of started joining together and doing group shows and just really started to take back and take control of our own businesses. And that was the internet really, I think took care of a lot of that.

Cory: I love it. So take control of your future, don't wait on others to do it for you. Just do what you want to do. I like that.

Robyn: And that's true, exactly, it's true now and there's a lot of artists I come across who say that well I'm not, I don't have formal training you know, I don't- NO! You don't need formal training as an artist. It's whatever you are already doing that got you to this point. It's enough for you to do your art. But look at it as a business. Take control of it as you would any business structure.

Cory: Yeah.

Robyn: And then you move on from there.

Cory: I'm so glad you mentioned the untrained artist thing, or rather the lack of formal training. So we've been running this podcast, and I've run our blog for eight years and probably about half of the artists that I've highlighted who are like financially successful are artists who don't have

BFAs. You know, they come from engineering backgrounds, or some other you know some other background besides fine art. So-

Robyn: Exactly.

Cory: I love it, I love it. So we're running out of time, but real quick I want you to tell us a little bit about the Arizona Artists Guild, because I know this is something that you just started and I think it's important for you to talk about it a little bit.

Robyn: I'd love to, because it fits in to what we were talking about today, it fits into the work that you've been doing for the last eight years. Myself and my partner Yvette St. Amant, she's a Canadian artist, she's been published, she's always done her art, she's always made a living from it like many of us you know. When we met up we decided, actually I started working with her as a client. And I realized, why aren't you already doing, why don't you have a blah blah blah? And you know if was overwhelming, she was like I have to think about it, then she comes back a week later, and she says you know what, you're right. I want to do it. So she said would you do it with me? And I was like okay. So the Arizona Artists Guild, because it fits into one of my main underlying missions. I'd like to get the greatest work into the world. That's it. And so when I work with clients the same way- the artist's guild goes broader than just artists. Anything that has your passion, craft, and skill combined. So it opens to musicians and writers and woodworkers and artisanal wines and food and olive oil- anything. Anything where your passion, skill, and craft come together. So we're founded here in Arizona but we serve the world. We have a membership that's only \$45 for the year, but it gains access to all the marketing, group marketing we're doing, we're publishing our first magazine, it comes out this month, in which we feature artists, we advertise what the artists are doing, it'll be sold on Amazon and we'll do one every quarter for sure. And so it's like a business model to help artists come in to a structure, to find out what other artisans or artists that are doing similar things, kind of group people up, pair people up, and while we're doing our own SEO marketing, we're doing yours too because you're a part of the guild. And it's already in the last couple months pushed so many of our artist to the top in terms of rankings and what have you. Yvette, my partner, she's very very good with this kind of thing. So in the first month we've had over 700 unique views to our website in one month.

Cory: Nice.

Robyn: She's awesome. So that's what the guild is doing. It's arizonaartistsguild.com.

Cory: arizonaartistsguild.com. Great. And what is Yvette's last name?

Robyn: It's St. Amant. She's a great gal- we have a lot of fun together. But we're really excited about this guild. And it goes back to the guild system. The old way of learning, so we're also doing some classes and things like that. So for artists that feel that they're untrained a little bit but they want to continue to do their work, we're doing some certification programs that will help gird that up for, you know, not a lot of money or anything like that. But to get certification. And it's just that thing that you do to just say okay, well I'm a member of this guild now I want this certification. And that goes a long way to help people feel a little bit better about this whole education thing, you know, which is a joke really.

Cory: Alright. Well Robyn, thank you so much for joining us today. We're out of time, but I certainly appreciate you coming on and sharing your time and experience. I really appreciate it. For those of you who, if you don't know about The Abundant Artist, we provide training and courses and coaching for artists who are trying to learn how to run a business. You can find out more at theabundantartist.com. We'd love to help you out in any way we can. Robyn McClendon, thank you again for your time.

Robyn: Oh than you for having me, this has been a lot of fun. Appreciate it.