

The Abundant Artist: Interview with Maggi McDonald

MM: I don't do this very often.

CORY: That's okay, no problem.

MM: We're learning. Yeah, good! Yeah, just starting my day.

CORY: It's like eight o' clock in the morning, seven o' clock in the morning?

MM: Yes, which is why I have my coffee. It's the second one of the day. So yeah, that's really good. How are you?

CORY: I'm well, yeah, thanks for asking. I appreciate you getting up this early, I know it's-

MM: Oh no, it's all good. It's kind of like organization. I had my father in law come and pick up my son to take him to school and I've got everything organized so it's all good. How was the rest of your trip?

CORY: It was really good! Let's see, what did we do? After we left Gold Coast we drove down to Byron Bay. We had booked a snorkeling trip but we missed it because we didn't know that there was a time change.

MM: Oh my God yes, that's right.

CORY: And so we were there right on time, an hour late.

MM: Oh my God, yeah.

CORY: So we missed our snorkeling trip, but we drove down to Port Macquarie, and stayed the night in Port Macquarie and saw the largest colony of bats I've ever seen.

MM: Oh wow, yeah.

CORY: It was crazy.

MM: It's freaky right, the first time you see them? It's quite...

CORY: So Australia's keeping its reputation of having terrifying animal experiences.

MM: Yes, I believe.

CORY: Then we spent five days in Sydney and I ate every kind of Asian food under the sun.

MM: Yeah, you would, yeah.

CORY: I highly enjoyed that. We went and saw the opera house and, not the Tuileries Garden, that's in France. The other garden.

MM: Botanical-

CORY: Thank you, the Botanical Garden. So we went all the touristy things, and hung out a lot. I went to a board game meetup, just like a random meetup that I found in Sydney. So I had a good time, I enjoyed Sydney.

MM: Sydney's good. It's busy, it's very, like lots of people. Like it doesn't really stop.

CORY: It was- like five million is a big city, but it's not like a metropolis. So it's a lot like San Francisco, like it's a mid-sized city, but it's very condensed and I was not expecting that. So when we drove in I was like "Oh, it's a very urban city."

MM: Yeah, totally, yeah. But you've come from the Gold Coast and it's fairly quiet there, so it's very different. Oh, that's good.

CORY: I'm gonna shut this window so it's quiet in here.

MM: Okay, cool.

CORY: Okay, cool. Well I'm glad that you took the time to talk with me today. We can sort of go in whatever direction, feel free to... what's the word I'm looking for? Feel free to say whatever you want. We'll edit this before we put it out. And it's just on audio. We won't be putting a video online. So if you're like "Oh no, this is terrible," we can always edit it out. And just feel free to share, just keep this a natural conversation. You're awesome and you do great work and so I'm sure people will be excited to hear from you.

MM: Cool, that's good. I'm excited, it's been very busy again since like the conference, but focusing a bit more on getting some content out and Skillshare class and things like that. So more leaning towards the teaching side, which is awesome. So I got really inspired by that at the conference, and really ignited that thing that... I think more my purpose is to teach, it's not so much, you know, I love creating. But I think being able to share is where I really feel at home. So that's been an interesting journey trying to plan that all out at the moment.

CORY: Tell me about your Skillshare class, what are you teaching?

MM: I've been trying to get this going for like twelve months. So I was like "Okay, I will finally join." So like, they approached me and said "Can you please teach?" and I was like "Okay well it's all... "

So I started and I thought instead of diving in and doing... because you know how we tend to want to do the big things, and it has to be perfect and all that. I actually went "Okay, so what can I teach that is something that I do every day in my business that is an easier class for me to formulate, so I can get my head around the whole process?" Cause it's quite a process to have to do it. And they're amazing, they've got lots of guidelines and it's all step by step and there's like a teaching group that you join and they keep you kind of on task, which is really good for me because I tend to shiny object syndrome. I'll be like "Oh this thing's cool, that thing," so I have to focus. So I was gonna do, I just had started just flat lay basics for artists. So basically creating content while you're creating so that it's not something separate from what you're doing in your art practice. It's something that you're doing as you're painting, you can create some images and flat lay images for social media. So basically Instagram focused, probably mainly. But I think just being able to get some high quality content, because I think Instagram again has changed its algorithm. So I'm having massive problems with it. I'm posting at all these different times, I'm

experimenting this week because I'm finding that it's really, the algorithm's really stopping a lot of people's content. So that's been a little bit of work.

And then I think going forward, your content will have to be really strong for it to be seen. So you can't be banking on likes or anything like that, it's all gonna have to be about that content that you put out. So I thought that'd be something that would be, , easy, that's an easy class for me to teach. And it's also an easy class for somebody that's starting out to do. And it's something that they can, it's achievable. They can easily create 5 or 6 images and then have that in an image library, and then they can use that going forward. So yeah, it's not done yet, we're getting there. But now it's all the tech stuff, now I've got to figure out how do I film this? Where do I film this? How do you edit and all of these things, which is super exciting, but it's also on top of doing commissions and doing sales and everything else. So yeah, it'll hopefully be live by the middle of this month. You know how it goes. So yeah.

CORY: Nice, yeah. I know a lot of artists really enjoy teaching. I want to go back to something you said, you said, you're calling it a flat lay class? Is that what you said?

MM: Yeah, flat lay.

CORY: What is that?

MM: So I think in social media world, all the stylists, I think I don't know if this is as big in the US as in Australia, we have this real movement of flat lay. So a flat lay is basically when you're taking a photo with all the elements of your... say if you're an artist, you'd have your canvas basically on a flat surface, and you'll have all your tools and your paints and things around it, and then the photo is actually taken from the top. And it's from the top down, and if you're a stylist you may then be creating that with some products that you want to style. So it's very much a stylist kind of tool. They do use that very effectively in social media, on Instagram especially. It's really good for Instagram. But then I've kind of adopted that with my art and like I do most of my posts, the ones that perform the best are the ones where I literally finished the painting, just popped it on the floor of the studio, and I'll just have basically the colors that I was using to the side and sometimes even my feet, my toes sticking out, and those, that's a photo that I take. And honestly that's kind of what I feel people respond to most because it is, it's real and it's usually quite a bright photo with my art, so that's kind of what a flat lay is.

And you can use it across a lot of different things, like illustration things, once you have your illustration done and you have your pen there, maybe and a little bit of ink on the side, and maybe your hand in there. So yeah, I've kind of been doing that right from the start. And I actually find that that's the easiest way for me to create content without having to spend a whole day which I don't often have, creating content and going back and searching up scenes to create. As you're doing it, you can just be taking photos. And it's simple with a smartphone and once it's done you can edit it on your smartphone and then you just keep it in your phone library and then you've got them on the go. So that's kind of-

CORY: When do you think you'll have this class up on Skillshare?

MM: Well I am putting myself a deadline of hopefully the middle of May. So it's definitely something I want to get out there. And it's just something that I think will be really helpful to people starting

out. Not knowing, , how easy it really is, like it's really not that hard. And that's the thing. I think it's just all about sharing some tips that make it a little bit easier to get your work out there and create content, which is important.

CORY: It is important. So if you do have the class up by mid May, this podcast won't be out until after that. So we'll go ahead and include a link to the class in the show notes. So if you're listening to this in some random place you can get the show notes at theabundantartist.com.

So you obviously have, either you've learned it or you have some sort of background in product styling. Can you just tell us what that means?

MM: I can. So yeah, so there is a bit of a background. So I actually did department store retail management. So when I first came to Australia to retrain, and I started working in the cosmetics department and kind of worked my way up through one of our major department stores here in Australia. And a lot of that job was basically styling, we call it styling now. I think back in those days it was merchandising. So it's still merchandising in retail. And I did quite a few different departments, so I'm basically doing visual merchandising for retail, which I loved. And when I actually left my job at the department store to have my son, I after that took a job as a freelance visual merchandiser. So it's definitely something that you learn. So I did get taught how to do that, you know, things with height and things like that. And then I think it comes from also having gone to design school. We did learn a lot about design principles, so composition and having an eye for it and what things work together. And that has definitely shaped the way that I create my content and put things into a styled theme. Which is something that is a skill that's come from starting with merchandising cosmetics gift packs for Christmas. So it really does go back to the merchandising and retail.

CORY: Nice, that's awesome. I will often tell artists that they need to have more than just a straight on crop shot of their art when they're sharing it online so that people can get an idea of how big is it, and as trite as this question is, will it go over my couch? And that kind of stuff. Because people have a really hard time, especially non-artists have a really hard time visualizing how big is one meter by one meter and what does that look like and what does it look like framed, and all that stuff. So that's really useful.

I want to shift gears a little bit and I want to hear a little bit about your day, because you've been painting professionally for five years, is that right?

MM: Yeah, four years. Yeah.

CORY: Four years. So what does a typical day look like for you? Because you're full time in your art business. You get up and have a paintbrush and a cup of coffee, I saw that in an interview you said that. So when do you typically get up in the morning?

MM: Okay, so it's kind of evolved, and it changes every now and again. So at the moment, it's been like this for a while, I will get up probably about quarter to seven, seven. I'm not a morning person, really struggle. So I'm happy to do some work but I'm not happy to talk, so there's a bit of a difference there. So I will get up and make a coffee straightaway, then what I would usually do is go and sit in front of my computer in my studio and plan out my day so if there's anything that was left over from the day before that I hadn't written down on my to do list, I will make

sure that I go through that list and anything that's popped into my head since I've woken up I'll just do a brain dump and pop it down on a piece of paper. I've found that works really well, because I've got lots of things swirling around. Then I'll probably usually do emails, I'll check my emails. I like doing that first thing in the morning. And then I will make notes as I go through the emails with to do things and who I need to reply to. And then I will just get my head around what needs to be done in the day. So it's fairly structured. It needs to be structured for me, otherwise I lose focus really fast.

CORY: Have you always been really structured? Or where did you learn that structure?

MM: You know what, I think again going back to the department store retail, it was very structured, it was very much getting in at 7:30, getting ready for your day, working at your budget, making sure all your staff are kind of on the floor, everyone's good, then it's very much managing stock, deliveries managing customers, managing budgets. So I think, I really do realize more and more as I go forward in this journey that that business experience has been instrumental. I don't think I'd be able to be as structured with what I do in my business if it wasn't for that. So I definitely think that that's played a big role in the way that I look at my art business. And just something on this, I've been thinking about this leading up to having a chat with you. It's interesting that I think that I've always wanted to do my own thing. And it's always been this thing, I've always had this feeling that I don't want to work for someone else, it's been very very strong always.

CORY: Me too, yeah.

MM: I've just got this thing, my husband is completely the opposite. He's happy. He's like GM of a company, but he's in that company. I'm like "No, thank you." I will make my own roles, I will not be answering to anyone. I was actually looking through my files yesterday and I found all these CVs and resumes and things that I've sent and I was thinking "Know what, I will never have to send one of those ever again." It was a real moment for me, I was like "I will not be doing that." But saying that though, it's not waking up overnight and you start painting and it happens. It's a culmination of jobs that you've done when you were 16, of all of the things that have led up to getting to a point where you are able to run your business as a business, not just as an artist. Because that, I think, is where the difference comes in. Like you were saying at the Art Lovers Australia conference, and it was amazing to me because I do spend probably 50 to sometimes 60 percent of my time on my business and the rest on actually creating art. And I always thought that was the wrong way around, I thought artists, I need to be creating, I shouldn't be focusing on all of this business because that's not what artists do. And then knowing that that's actually the way that it should be. And I do think if you spend any less time than that, you will not be able to run it successfully as a business. But it's hard because we as artists, that's not what we're taught. So, this is where it all comes in, right.

So I feel, yeah. I feel like it's important to know that it is, like I think the minute I started doing this, when I went back to design school, and I wanted to be a stylist. I was not going in there to do art. I went in there wanting to be a stylist, because in Australia we're very [unintelligible] focused, and probably in the US. And it was this coveted job and I loved interiors, and I wanted to do all this stuff, and I walked into class. And within the first two classes we were painting paint chips. And I was in heaven. I'm just like, this is what I need to be doing. And then I realized that I want to make the things that the people that do the styling that they style. I didn't want to

style someone else's things, I want to be the one that creates that stuff. And I think from that moment on I realized something was gonna happen, I had no idea what was coming, but I knew something was happening. And at the same time, I made a very conscious decision that I would be running this as a business. And I think that's kind of been there right from the start. So everything I've set up in my business has been done from that moment where I'm like, I'm running this business. I'm not just running it as an artist in a studio creating. Which is amazing, I mean that is everyone's dream to have someone to do all of these things for you, and you just create. But realistically, you know, that's not how it works.

CORY: It takes time to build the business to the point where you can hire people to do the other stuff.

MM: Absolutely, yes.

CORY: Okay, so you get up 7:30 or so, you have your coffee and your paintbrush and you go do all your emails and you make your to-do list. When do you typically start making art?

MM: So I usually then would get, so this is my son, he's 10. We get him up, he gets dressed. And then I always do school drop off, by that time about 8:30. And then I'll come back home and I will start to create art. So I try to do the actual art-making first thing in the morning so that I can get all of that energy out. And I'm focused, and I'm very much a day person, I'm not a night owl. So anything that is important that needs to be done, needs to be done for me mainly before 3:00 in the afternoon. So I tend to focus, and I have a to do list, and I have a process of everything that needs to be done, and then, so what I would do is in between layers drying and things like that I would potentially create some content, if I'm painting. Otherwise I might do a little bit of research online. I've been doing quite a few little workshops, and I try and just stay on top of everything that's happening.

And then about 3:00 then it's school pickup. So then in the afternoon, so I do, and I like the fact that I get to do my thing and have my hours and be productive in the time that my son is at school. And after school pickup it's usually, anything I do in the afternoon it'll be packing. Packing up boxes and doing a post office run, maybe, or doing things in the afternoon that I can do with my son being at home. So it's a juggle. Somedays that works really well, other days it just doesn't work. And it's just not working. So those are the days you go "You know what, it's all good." I just, you know, I just step back out of the artist shoes and just put the mom shoes on and then we just kind of spend some time together.

So that's kind of my routine, and I do that Monday through Friday. Fridays I'll have a little bit of a quieter day. I tend not to book too many things in on a Friday. I have had to look at energetic boundaries and also conserving energy. I do go apparently, I've been told, a million miles an hour, and I've had problems with that. I have a bit of trouble with slowing down. So I've actually had to put some boundaries in there with what I can do in a week. And it's been very interesting for me, I've been reading a couple of books on this as well with the fact that so many things, so many of the things that we do now like creating eBooks and creating content and blog posts and things like that, they seem so easy to us because they seem so easy to us we feel very often that those things are not really work. So we're just cramming them in and we're just doing this thing and we're doing another eBook and we're just creating content and we're putting out a newsletter and all those things in like one day, two days. And we do that five days in a row and

we don't understand why we're exhausted. But I've learned how we're like, what? So I've learned that I've really got to make sure that I look after my energy as well. And creativity doesn't like just being switched on 24/7, like it doesn't work like that.

CORY: Yeah, there's only so much-

MM: And those brain waves need to just relax so that they can come up with new ideas. So that's been something that I've tried to incorporate into my studio practice in the last, probably two months.

CORY: You mentioned reading some books about boundary setting and energy and creativity or something like that. What were the books, do you know?

MM: So I'm at the moment, it's called Big Magic by Elizabeth Gilbert. So I have that on my nightstand, and I tend to read that maybe once a year, just to make sure that I'm recovering with that. And then the other book that I've been reading is actually by an Australian author called Denise Duffield-Thomas, and it's called Chillpreneur. It's very interesting, and I actually have been reading this book and it's had quite a few aha moments for me. Because I think also, this goes as women and we have kids and we do all these things, and I feel like you kind of think "Just because I'm able to do all of them and I can do everything doesn't mean that I have to do everything." And that idea that we are kind of looking at our parents, the way they did work and they did their work in the day, because technology has made everything easier for us, we do so much more. And we don't realize that we're actually working so much harder some days, and that's been a real eye-opener for me. I've been sitting with it for a couple of weeks now, and I'm just trying to, I think, digest and take that on board and then implement it into my business.

CORY: Would you define yourself as a high achiever?

MM: Yes, absolutely. Total overachiever. Always have been. And it's tough, because you know, I'm like "Oh yeah, I sold a painting. Okay, that's great, but on to the next thing." So I'm very much like that, and it's really hard because I struggle to sit into a feeling of contentment and success. So I do tend to drive myself. And the other thing I think is it's art. It can be quite precarious at times. And it's hard to feel "Oh, I can sit back and relax and just sit in this moment," when you don't know always when the next sale is going to be. It's still very much trial and error. So I think that's definitely something. You know, I do sell things, but I think more with a product-based business where you've got a product and you know that it sells and you sell a hundred units a week or a month and that's how it works. Art does not work like that. So it's very much, yeah. But total overachiever, yeah.

CORY: So how have you coped with that? What sort of strategies or, I'd love to know one or two things you do to deal with that. Because I'm the same way. I have a tendency to pile huge amounts of tasks on my plate and then I find myself working too hard and maybe doing too much. So I've been really leaning heavily into trying to learn how to balance that the last couple years. So I'd love to know one or two things you do to push back and draw boundaries around those natural tendencies.

MM: Yeah, I'm exactly the same. And it's a work in progress. But it's an actual conscious thing at the moment. I'm literally saying to myself, and this is out loud, I'll be like "You have done enough for

today. That's enough." You know, like I literally have to do that because there's this whole boom and bust. Because you're working away and you know, feeling really inspired and you're creating content and putting all of these things out and then you get burnt out, and then nothing happens. And that is just, it's this constant, constant kind of hamster wheel. And that is not ideal. So what I'm doing is basically saying to myself "Okay, so you've today done an email, you've created graphics, and actually putting them into words and knowing that this is what I've achieved today, and that is absolutely fine and we will, we can then work on the next thing tomorrow.

The other thing is also, I think knowing my energetic boundaries and knowing when I'm starting to get a little bit overwhelmed and tired and learning that I need to step away. And that it's okay to step away, that eBook is fine if it doesn't get published today. And the other thing is very important, it's a funny one, and I always say this, and it's also, I think Elizabeth Gilbert says this in Big Magic, it's just like "It matters at that moment, but it doesn't matter." You've got to be able to step away from it and just realize that what you're doing, it is very important to you, but it is actually not life and death. Does that make sense?

CORY: It does, it does.

MM: So I've gotta keep it real.

CORY: Yeah, I have found myself, so like you I like to make lists of things I need to do, but I have started putting, trying to put everything that I'm supposed to do for a week actually in my calendar. I use Google Calendar. And I block out two hour chunks to work on various projects. If it's a big project I might block out three two hour chunks in a day. And this morning I got up and I was super excited about something that I'm working on, so I started working at 6:30 in the morning. And by 10:30 I was wiped out, right, just tired. But I had already accomplished pretty much everything I had wanted to do today except for doing this interview with you. So I gave myself permission to go for a two hour walk and that was interesting. There's all those feelings of guilt that come up, do you ever experience anything like that?

MM: I do, yeah, I struggle with that too. It's like you know, it comes back to that thing of you're up sometimes at 6:30 and you know, some days I finish an artwork by 7:30 and then you're like, "Well technically in the real world I've now done my job for the day." But because of the way that we are, we're like "Okay, now I've finished that artwork, now I'm going to like start two more, I'm going to write a new blog post, and I'm going to post to Instagram and then I'm gonna schedule my posts." You know, it's just this never ending feeling of always wanting to, it's a fine line between being really creative and being inspired and putting out content. Because you know what it's like when the inspiration strikes. You just gotta go with it.

But at the same time, it's also understanding that you don't need to be constantly putting out that amount of energy. It's just not necessary. I've started actually using... I've never done scheduling for Instagram before or Facebook for that matter. I have just in the last two weeks started to use an really cool app called Plan, and it's got a desktop version, and what I'm doing is I'm basically scheduling out all of my stories for Instagram which is so cool. And then scheduling all my Instagram posts as well, and it's taken a lot of energy expenditure away from me. So I don't have to constantly think, this is my downfall. I'm like "Oh my God, what am I gonna post,

it's 1:00, I've gotta post, I haven't got anything, ahh" and then it's just that kind of constant, because I've always posted on the fly, is the way I work. And I've built my Instagram account never ever scheduling. Just literally picking up my phone and either taking a photo or popping something on there from my camera, and writing something. And it's always worked really well. But when you get to a point where you've got all these other things happening in your business, it's important to automate the things that you can automate.

So that's been really good for me. It's taken me like two weeks to figure it out, but it's happening like everything does. And then the other thing I've done that I've picked up from another female creative is to put an auto-reply into my email. And basically just say to people that these are my admin days and the rest of the time I'm in the studio creating, which then removes that feeling of guilt for me with not kind of checking emails every five seconds. Because it doesn't work. So I've set it up so that everyone gets responded to within usually within 48 hours. And it just takes the pressure off me to have to constantly check my emails. So that's been really good for me.

CORY: Nice, I like that. I like that. Yeah, and I did appreciate your email, we emailed back and forth a few times so I've seen your auto-responder that says "This is my time," and it's nice. It does, I'm sure it's really helpful for you. And it does give me some expectation for when I hear back from you. Maybe I should do something like that. Cause I'm the worst at responding to emails.

MM: Me too, so I had to do something. I was like oh my goodness, so yeah. It's been really good. So far I think.

CORY: Alright. Okay, so you have maybe more than almost any artist we've had on this podcast, you are seemingly everywhere on every marketplace and platform where you could conceivably sell art, right? Like you're on Saatchi, you're on Bluethumb, you're on Art Lovers Australia. And a bunch of niche design websites as well. So was this a conscious effort on your part to go out and find all of these places and make sure your work showed up there? Or how did that happen?

MM: Yeah, so you're not gonna see exclusivity next to my name. No, I'm joking. Do you know what, I think, so a few to these I remember starting, I'm also on Etsy still. Starting out-

CORY: There's a bunch more that I didn't name, but yeah. You're everywhere.

MM: So I'm kind of like this, I just get as much work out as you can, and you know more eyes on your work the better. So that's something for me. It is obviously a lot more work having it across the board. So I think for me, the thing is, I find that a couple of these online platforms I was approached to put my work on there, so that's kind of the one side. And then some of them I've actually joined because I wanted to be on there. What it does for me is I use it mainly for the traffic. I find that it's really good for getting your work in front of very diverse collectors and art buyers because each of these platforms have a very, very specific customer. And some platforms have customers that buy only framed artwork. Other ones will only have prints. And some of them will, yeah. So it's a diverse customer base, and what I find really interesting is that each of these platforms sell for me, I sell things on all of them. And I sell different things on each of them. And what that's teaching me is who shops where, what do they shop for, why do they shop there? And how much money do they spend? And it's just this constant stream of information that comes my way.

CORY: Can you give me an example of how, like give me an example of one or two of the platforms, how their audiences vary?

MM: So you will for instance have, say there's Art Lovers Australia and Bluethumb. So you have a customer that is more an affordable art buyer. That's not saying that there's not, there's twenty thousand dollar paintings on there. But you've got that customer that wants to buy art, they're an online shopper, they are the demographic. I look at my customers there, they're in like the 30-45 bracket, disposable income, very often a little bit younger than that. They're 30 and they want to buy some art for their home. They buy unframed art. I find it very interesting that people love just buying a canvas and popping it on the wall, and they're happy to do online shopping for art. So you've got those quite a few of those platforms across the board. So they tend to turn over artworks, people basically just going "I love that, I'm gonna buy it, ship it out, and put it on the wall." Then you have for instance, if you're looking at places, like we have The Block Shop which is a very big renovation show here, you have like I think you're got your flipping shows in the US that I watch.

CORY: Yes, like HDTV shows.

MM: Yes, HDTV yeah, so it's pretty much like that. So that's a different customer. So your customer there is very much a customer with disposable income, they're a home renovator, they're somebody that wants that piece that was on the show and that's a very different customer. So you look at your prices on that. You would obviously put your larger artworks on something like that, and you know that that is a different customer. They will not buy anything that's a 30x30, 12 inch by 12 inch that is on Bluethumb that you can buy and just ship it out. So that's a very different customer. Then you look at things like print on demand, like I've got print on demand services in quite a few different places, and it's an interesting one. Some of these platforms will only sell prints. So I will have originals and prints on there, but only the prints sell. So that's very interesting to me because it's all a learning curve and it's all data and analytics and being able to, not predict customer behavior, because that you can never do. But to understand your customer and how they shop. So that's been really interesting.

And then I think the other side of that is then knowing that when you are putting your work in a gallery, or not so much I think in Australia, we have beautiful gallery interior stores. So they are very, that's very much a market here, and that's a very different ballgame, because that customer wants an original artwork. They want it framed in Tasmanian oak, and they will pay the money for that. And that is your customer. So you know that the works that you're going to be selling on one of the platforms doesn't necessarily need to be the same in an interior store, because that's a different customer. So I think for me, and then I think to myself "Oh, you know, should I be everywhere? And should it be all out there?" And I'm not precious about my art. I honestly believe that the more people see it and the more people buy it, the more people have pretty things to hang on their wall. And it's always been like that for me. I don't feel like it's something that I know that there's always this thing about exclusivity. I don't believe that in the market at the moment, because we are all able to put our art out there, there's a lot of art. There's a lot of abstract art, and if you can get your art in front of more eyes, then that can only be a good thing.

CORY: Right. Do most of your sales come online?

MM: Most of my sales come online. Absolutely. I very very rarely sell anything in person. I sell through some of my interior stores, absolutely. But mainly the sales are online. And like I said before, across all the different platforms, but very interesting that mainly my own website. So I feel like the traffic generating the traffic on Instagram and Facebook, driving that traffic to one of the platforms or driving it back to your website. And out of all the platforms, my own website is still the one that generates the most online sales.

CORY: Right. Okay, when I was speaking at the Art Lovers Australia, I said something about finding partnerships because it's a great way to grow your Instagram following. And you were like nodding your head and raising your hand in the background. Tell me about some of the partnerships that have been important for your business.

MM: So I think we were talking about influencer types of collaborations at the time. And this is something I've done right from the start. I was actually part of a really cool Facebook group at the time. I'd get female entrepreneurs. So not art based, but people doing businesses. But we started with just basic product swaps or collaboration opportunities. And I think the one that stood out to me was collaborating with a very talented photographer at the time, that we'd connected through this Facebook group. I had sent her two of my prints, and she did a beautiful photoshoot in her home of these prints. And she had them framed, and I still use those images now. And what happens with that is that you're basically not only just creating content for your social media channel, and even for my website, I was using some of those images, because you're getting amazing professional high quality images in return for some of your product that you can use across all of your channels and your website. But you're also forming a relationship with this person.

So what's happened is four years down the line we're still really connected in Instagram and there's been quite a few other little collaborations along the line where we've actually got together and do shout outs on Instagram for each other and we're actually connecting with each other's followers, and it's been a really beautiful genuine connection with someone on Instagram. So it's a great relationship. So there's been quite a few of those along the way as well. And the thing is it can be as easy as getting in touch with somebody that you think might be a really good fit for your business, it's very important not to do these with somebody that's, like I'm very picky. And you need to be very picky because you are your brand and it's very important to protect that. But it's as simple as sending a company, we're talking, I would say smaller companies, it needs to be a situation where both of you are benefiting. So it's often really good to look at a smaller, like a stylist that's starting out, a photographer that they want to build their portfolio, you know. Anything like that would be a really good idea. And sending them a DM-

CORY: What about more established artists like you who maybe you already have a following? What kind of partnerships are you looking for now?

MM: So I'm now looking for things where it's going to benefit me in the long run. And cement as a somebody that's established. So I'm looking at, I'm now kind of looking at larger companies. So for me, it's interesting to me because most of my opportunities have actually, they've come to me through Instagram. So I've never actually sent somebody a message and said, in the earlier days I did but now I'm kind of going "Okay, so do I approach this company," and they're this

amazing, they do fashion. Do I start submitting things to them? So that's where I am at the moment. Basically making a list of companies that I would like to work with and being at this level where you are now, being able to actually submit yourself or submit your work for a collaboration opportunity and then seeing how that goes. And it's hit and miss, like that message could be going to the right person. We spoke about this and that person's like "Yeah, love your work, that's awesome, let's do this." It could be super easy, or it could just be like "No thank you, we're not doing it this way." And that's totally fine because I think it's just putting yourself out there. Which is something I don't, I do that on Instagram but I'm not one to, I don't really very often submit these. So I'm laughing, because my assistant Danielle, she's very honest with me and she's like "Okay, well you really need to be sitting down and doing that now." So that's my goal for the next 6 months. So we'll get back into it.

CORY: Awesome. Well we'll check back in 6 months and see how that's going.

MM: No pressure.

CORY: Hey I have a question- you did an Instagram video where you were showing some tools that you use in your studio. And you had a spatula that you use to spread paint and you mentioned that you found it because it was in your kitchen, because you used it to decorate cakes. And I don't remember exactly what you called it, but I would call it an offset spatula. So did you have a cake decorating business at one point?

MM: I did. So this is the backstory of the backstory. I forgot that bit. So this is the whole thing of trying to find that thing that is your thing, right? So the amount of tiny little creative endeavors that I've gone through to get to where I am today, my husband just, he just laughs. He's just like "All of those things you did!" So when my son was a year old I was not working, and I just, I was just spending a lot of time at home and I was getting a little bit antsy. And I remember his first birthday came up, and I decided that I was going to bake him a cake. And in true overachiever can't just do anything, just buy a cake, I decided I was going to make him a three tiered fondant covered cake. That's exactly what I did. And I went on to YouTube and I watched heaps of videos and I bought some fondant and some food coloring and I baked a cake, and I made him a cake! And it was three tiers and it was blue and it had like a little train on the top that I molded out of fondant, and that was kind of the start of a new business. And yeah, crazy. I know, like why?

CORY: So two questions- do you still bake? And number two, what is your favorite cake?

MM: So I totally suck at baking, right? So I was just gonna say, this is the thing. So now he gets, when I've got time I will do him a really nice cake. We have a birthday party every second year. That's kind of how it goes, an on year and an off year. On the on year he will get a fondant covered cake in whatever thing he can dream up, and he's very specific about what he wants. And on an off year, it's like he'll get a cake that I bought from the local store and like I put a candle on it, because I really don't like baking. I'm really bad at it. Yeah, totally. And my favorite cake is, well I love cheesecake. So if I have to choose, it'd be cheesecake. But yeah, it's a funny thing, because it just, there's clearly something that wanted to come out. And then I started, it's just the thing with business stuff. So I straightaway, I was like "I can do a business out of this." It's like crazy, right? So I was running this little business from my kitchen and I was baking cupcakes, I had a little Facebook page, it's before Instagram. And I had a Facebook page and I was baking cakes for

everybody, my friends' 21st birthday cakes. It was, you know, I enjoyed the creative bit of it. Made no money because, you know. How do you make money baking cakes, you know? But it was that era of Cake Boss and all of that kind of stuff, just taking off. And I spent many hours making little figurines. I used to make little animals from scratch, I used to make the little things. And that was kind of a starting point, I think. But I ended up going, "This is not working. I hate baking." Too much stress, not working. You know, kind of.

CORY: When I was in Sydney, I went looking for the Zumbo store.

MM: Oh did you? Yeah?

CORY: But it had already closed. So I walked about 2 miles from my hotel like early in the morning because it was vacation, and I wanted to go on a walk. So I walked two miles to where Yelp said that the Zumbo store was. But Yelp didn't say that it was closed. But then there were two locations. So I walked two miles from my hotel to Zumbo's, and then from Zumbo's to another location that was like a mile away, and that one was closed too. And then, it turned out that they had all closed. So. But I'm a big fan of Zumbo's Just Desserts cooking show. Oh my gosh, incredible. Like that is like the height of creative dessert making.

MM: Don't you think? It's just amazing. And I think that's where it came from. So the thing is, I loved creating the cakes and designing the colors and putting it all together and working out how I was gonna make a crocodile for a jungle cake and I love that. But the baking bit of it was like "What am I doing?" And I was baking in a normal kitchen oven, not an industrial oven where all of this space, I was like baking cakes for two days to get them ready and then kind of doing all of the things. But what it taught me was that you can pretty much do anything if you can learn it off YouTube! It's that simple. So it was a little bit of a side branch in the journey, I think. But it was, again, things I learned there and that cake spatula that I used is now the thing that I create my art with. So it's all part of journey.

CORY: Nice. Well Maggie, thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me today. I'm sure everybody's really gonna enjoy listening to this.

MM: It's my pleasure, it was awesome chatting. Yeah!

CORY: Alright, have a great day.

MM: Thanks!