

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Lanecia Rouse

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by artist and writer Lanecia Rouse, where I ask her: How can we find clarity through art? Welcome to Getting Curious, this is Jonathan Van Ness, I am, just, I don't even know how to find the words of how excited I am for this episode. Welcome to the show Lanecia Rouse, who is a multidisciplinary visual artist based in Houston, Texas. And this isn't in my paragraph to read but I'd be remissed if I didn't say it, whose Instagram is on fire; it's so good. It's, like, one of my absolute favorite, favorite, favorites to follow. Your portfolio includes a range of abstract painting, photography, teaching, writing and speaking. Lanecia, welcome.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:00:53] Oh, JVN, Jonathan, thank you. It's so good to be here.

JVN [00:00:57] So can I just say, this one day, I was minding my own business on Instagram and I realized that I had been, like, impulse buying purses for, like, the last two years because, like, I never really had, like, purse impulse buying money, and then, and then I did. And then I was, like, "Oh, my God..." But then you can only have so many purses. And then my husband and I started talking about art. And then I was like, "I am obsessed with art." I didn't know, it just didn't occur to me that I could afford it for so long. So, like, it takes you a while to figure, you know, figure stuff out. And then I think that, that Zuckerberg or something, they were eavesdropping on my Instagram Explore page because then once I started talking about art, there you were, like, you were on my Explore page, and I smashed that follow button and I've never looked back. I love your work so much, and it's so beautiful. So, how are you?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:01:56] I'm good! And I thank you for sharing that because I have been curious about what drew you to art and, and also how you found me. So that's cool to know. I'm doing really well. I, I love talking about the work that I do, and especially with people who are curious about it and who have a love for art and who, collectors like yourself, who really invest in the lives of the artists that they have living on their walls, right, that they're living with. So thanks.

JVN [00:02:24] So, what, so picture it, what happened? Like, where were you? Were you driving? Were you walking? Were you in school? When did you realize that you wanted to, like, grow up to be an artist?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:02:37] Wow, you know, my mom and dad said that I came out of the womb dancing and singing to Motown and Michael Jackson. And so since birth, really, I

have loved artistic expression. And music and dance was, like, my first love. I was in theater, you know, growing up. And I really liked art class along with chorus, but I also had, maybe this internal, it wasn't really, maybe external too, pressure of being excellent at things. And I was, like, the straight A student and trying to be the exceptional Black girl in all the ways.

And then in the seventh grade, Jonathan, I got my first C, and it was in art class. Yes! And little me, little feisty me went up to the teacher and was like, "Hello, I think there was a mistake, you made a mistake." And he was like, "Er, no." And, you know, I'm sure he said some things that were, like, really encouraging and, but all I heard was, like, "You don't have talent in this, you are not gonna excel at this."

And so I literally, like, put down the paintbrush. And I *loved* drawing and painting, but if I couldn't do it, well, then I felt like it was something I didn't need to put my time in. At that time, affirmation really mattered. And so it was then that I really put visual arts aside. And, I always, you know, had a love for it, I was interested in it, I really liked a good painting and drawing, but really it was just, like, "I'm going to concentrate on basketball, because I'm good at that, singing and church, I was really good at church," and so I ended up in ministry for a while.

And then fast forward to 2010, I had a depressive break, and I was just constantly burning out in ministry. And it was because I was wearing clothes that didn't quite fit, and I hit this, really, wall where I couldn't hide my deep sadness anymore, and I had to, like, tell somebody and I happened to live with my sister at the time, and she was just like, "We've got to get you help." And in the midst of getting help and doing my work, I met two phenomenal human beings from Houston who invited me to come to Houston to be loved on, to join what they called the 'Love rEVOLution' at St. John's Downtown, and to manage, believe it or not, an art project with men and women who were living on the streets.

It was a therapeutic art and economic empowerment program and my first comment to Rudy was, "You must be kidding. I am the girl that got a C in art class. I don't draw, I don't paint, what are you talking about?" And he was like, "You know, that's not what we need from you. We need you to come and direct and you have all of the things that our people need. So come bring yourself and the rest, you know, we can teach you and surround you with people who can support you." And so I came, and the arts and faith community here in Houston is amazing and they supported and helped me launch this vision, that was Juanita Rasmus' vision. And for four years I managed that project. But in managing the project, I, in the shelter, I would stick around and hang out in the art studio that we had. And the artists in the program begin to teach me things, you know, and show me what they're doing; the phenomenal artists living on our streets.

And then I would invite artists in to do workshops, and sometimes I'd be back on my computer doing my thing, administrative thing. But then sometimes I would sit down and actually take the class with the students. And I'll never forget, there's an artist here in Houston named Robert Hodge, and he was teaching a class on collage, and Robert was an artist, one of the first artists that I encountered their worked here in Houston, so I, I was a big fan. And to hear him look at my work and he kind of, he saw me as an artist, and he was speaking to, like, what I was doing and just really affirming and then kind of asking me some questions and telling me, you know, "Keep pushing and keep leaning in, and open the door for conversation."

And *that* was the moment when I began to say, "Hmm, maybe I am an artist." And I began to kind of, like, play all those tapes that we had been, like, truth, we had been speaking to the artists in the program, right, and I began to, like, play them myself and begin to speak truth to some of the negative tapes that were playing in my head saying, "This is not for you." And so it was in 2011-ish, 2012 that I began to create visual art, to make art with my hands. And that's how it began. But I was still-, had a full time job directing this project with the nonprofit organization, and I was definitely into it. And I don't know if you want me to keep going because there is a story of how I move, transition from there to, like, now.

JVN [00:07:31] Oh my God, I am obsessed with that story. I'm also just, like, you fully had me, like, all the way crying. It's so interesting how the universe will, like, just provide and make, and just kind of open doors when you ask for it. And one thing that you said in that story that I just thought was so moving is, a lot of us, I think, and myself included, when I first started hitting my, kind of, my mental episodic breaking points with all sorts of different compulsivities of my life, I tried to keep it in and it was really, like, asking for help that was the first thing.

It was actually really funny because the first time I went into treatment they did this weird thing where they, like, made us all put on blindfolds and then put our hands on the person's shoulders in front of you. And they took us to this, like, cornfield maze, and, like, blindfolded were, like, "Ok, get out of it." But the whole trick was, is that there was no way out and you had to, like, raise your hand and say, "I need help," like, that was the way out. And then, like, the whole, like, maze, it doesn't literally explode, but it's, like, "This maze explodes in an hour, you have an hour to get out." Of the 100 people in that thing, I was the *only* one at the end who, it didn't occur to them, I kept trying and trying, I'm, like, "There's gotta be a way out." So I would have been in the maze that exploded and, so I just, so just to say that that's how much asking for help doesn't come naturally.

And I do want to get to the story of hearing about how you transition from, like, a passion, like, "Oh, is this for me," and transitioning from a full-time job into, into that job full-time, because I think that's a really important story that impacts so many people. However, I want to just ask you about your art first really quick, because this is an audio medium and what I'm looking at right now, and if anyone's listening to this after they saw our social media for this episode, then they would be seeing some of your work that you're sitting in front of. I am lucky enough to be-, I provide a home for two of your pieces and they are so beautiful and just have such movement and such texture and they just filled me with, like, not to Marie Kondo, but I just get so much joy from, from your images.

Even this one image that I have in New York is, like, it's very dark and it's, like, it's not as bright as the one that I have in Texas, and it's-, but even that one, 'cause there's this, like, lavender, like, streak in it that's very bright. And to me, what that piece represents is moving towards, like, a light in your end of your tunnel. You're, like, you're moving towards light. And that has been such a thematic thing, like, for me in my life. And so I just would love to hear you describe to our listeners, like, what your art looks, like, what it kind of, what it feels like, what it looks like. I'd love to hear you talk about that.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:10:18] Sure. And I love hearing you say that light, like, leaning into light is part of what you see in that image, because I think my art for sure is, my whole creative process is one of leaning into light and, and also enjoying the shadows. So to say that, my work is heavily textured, it's known for its textures, its layers, like I'm, like I'm building layers. My process is slow, which, it's a little bit slower than the Instagram post and so I'm always people are always like: "Where's the art, where's the art, where's the art?"

But I do; I take my time. I'm trying to reclaim time in ways. And so lots of layers. A piece could develop over, like, two, three years sometimes. And then sometimes a piece can come about in a day. I love color, color expresses, like, emotions and feelings for me. I'm an intuitive painter and so I lean heavily into, like, how a color makes me feel, how, what a material, like, what does it represent? I provide a lot of space in my work and so you'll see a lot of, like, passive, negative space but that negative passive space is not always just, like, white or black. It could be, like, I'm looking at a painting right now that is this deep sap green, you know.

JVN [00:11:38] You know, I'm new to this art world and I feel comfortable and safe with you, so I'm gonna ask: sometimes when artists talk about negative space, I squint my eyes, and I nod and I say, "Yes, that negative space is wow," it really. I don't know what it means. What is this negative space?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:11:58] I love it. When I think of, like, negative passive space, I think of a lot of, like, Japanese art or, like, Asian art that you see where there's, like, a lot of white, right, around it, and it's, like, breathing room. And then there's an image, right, and so that space around the image is what we would call negative space, breathing room in the work for your eye to rest, you know. And it's, like, so it's also a part of the piece, it's not just there because they couldn't put anything there.

JVN [00:12:28] It was a choice.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:12:29] It is a choice! It is a choice.

JVN [00:12:31] And so, like, if I'm talking about, like, art terms, is, like, is negative space and passive space interchangeable?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:12:39] For me, yes. I've heard different people use it. I, I was always uncomfortable with negative space, and so I once read an artist that said 'passive space' and I was like, "Ok, I can kind of get with that." But, you know, neither one of them really does the job. The technical term is negative space though, yeah.

JVN [00:12:57] Ah! So, so, yes, we're going back to your technique. We're going back into the expression of your art and what your art looks like. I did not mean to interrupt, I just had to ask, 'cause, good lord.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:13:05] No, no, no, that's good. I'm glad you asked because sometimes we throw out these terms, like, all of us in our field, we throw out terms and if you're not a part of it, you don't know what it means. So thanks; interrupt me any time. But my work too, I, I do mixed media work and so I'm always, like, I will, like now I'm using a lot of newspaper and paper and I use thread and I like to find things. And so I'll go on a walk and find, like, bricks and stones that connect to a moment in time or, like, my thoughts around vulnerability and what it means to be human, and I'll break that up and create my own pigments. And so my work really holds, like, all of the things that interest me, that speak to and help me make visible what's within me.

And so, like I said-, I'm really drawn to poetry, and you know poets, I feel like they, like, this economy of words, they're really intentional about the words that they use and there's nothing that's wasted. And I think I try to bring that artistry to my work as well. I want my work to be contemplative in nature and to invite people to stillness and, you know, to pique curiosity a bit. And I really feel like my work is best experienced in person because there are all these, like, subtle, nuanced textures and even words that are there that you can't quite capture with the, the camera.

Questions I bring to my work are, like, "What does it mean to be alive? What does it mean to create a work of art that is alive?" And, and I just explore that, or, like, perception, I'm always curious about how we perceive things and bringing all those questions to the piece. And now I'm even playing with, like, collaging vintage images of Black life that I find in, like, Ebony magazines and vintage magazines I collect, and working those images into these abstract spaces, which is a new thing, but I'm loving it.

JVN [00:15:06] Ok, I have questions about this. So I, y'all, if you're, like, not driving or, like, not operating heavy machinery, I do suggest going to, it's, isn't it, it's, like, @LARArtStudio?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:15:16] Mhmm. That's it.

JVN [00:15:18] I have this, like, habit of calling people by their screen names, like, exclusively in Instagram. It's like, I don't know what my problem is, like, my friend, Wanyi, like, her Instagram handle is, like, @wanyizee, and we literally had to be friends for, like, two years before she told me, like, she's like, "You know, my name is just, like, Wanyi, right?" And I was, like, "Yes," but I do, like, I just, like, get into referring to people as their Instagram names. But, so go follow @LARArtStudio, but where do you get, 'cause when you say vintage magazines, like, how vintage? How do you collect them? Like, where do you find them? And also you, like, sculpt paper somehow?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:15:54] Yes. Yes.

JVN [00:15:56] How? There's, like, 12 questions in there, so just try to remember them as they came.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:16:00] Sure. First off, where do I get my sources? So I eBay, online, some people, like collectors, have actually given me old magazines that they've come across. And when I say old, like, I, like, have magazines from, like, the 20s, the 30s, the 40s. I am trying to go back because I do, I feel like the now is so informed by our past and then even what we're envisioning for the future, and so I am, I'm looking back to, like, talk about now and to imagine new worlds. And so Ebony, Jet magazines are my favorite. And every now and then I'll pick up, like, magazines from around Houston, the free magazines, and work some of that in. But I'm constantly, my main images come from those vintage, like, Ebony magazines that celebrate and share about Black life.

And then my, my partner in all of life, Cleve, we like to read the Sunday New York Times together, which will lead me to my sculpting. I, and I don't like to waste things. And so it's,

like, "I don't necessarily want to recycle them. These, these papers hold so many stories that I'm just really interested in, and it's, like, our world is our history." And, during quarantine I just got the idea of, like, really adding the newspaper to my work and I go, I like do this process dance of this uncertainty and so I'm working with my hands, these newspapers on top of the canvas, and then I'm pulling away and adding on and just-

I guess, you know, Jonathan, when I think about Black life and some of the other work that I do, it's like, we're always creating, like, a life and creating beauty out of the lives that we, we're born into, right, and the things that happen and which still, and so I'm kind of leaning on that tradition in my work and there's a lot of improvisation. But I am, I'm sculpting this newspaper and different materials, brick and stuff, onto, onto the canvas with my hands. And I like for my work to be very tactile. The sculpting also creates the space for, like, shadow and light work to take place and gives it dimensionality and, which, also points to a liveness, I think.

JVN [00:18:14] So when you said that you pull away, like, does that mean, like, by adding paint or, like, will you, like, take part of the page off or, like, what does that mean?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:18:22] Oh yeah. So many layers. So, so many newspaper layers, so many paint layers, I pull and, I pull the paper off and what's underneath is revealed.

JVN [00:18:33] Ohh! That's so fierce! Sometimes when I'm doing a big change on someone's hair, not so much now, but, like, in the beginning of my career, there would be a stage where I'd be like, "Fuck, like, did I go too short?" Like, or like, "I hope this fucking lifts," the way I think it's going to or like, like or like the formulation, like, "I hope that this deposits the way I think it's going to." And then there's like a moment in the creation where it's, like, frustration comes up, like, concern comes up, just, like, a little bit of, like, a panic. So I was curious if that happens for you as an artist in your art and then also just your eras and how this process has evolved for you.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:19:14] Ok, I'll do the latter first. Uh, yes! I pulled a quote from Helen Frankenthaler where she talks about the creative process being a magnificent struggle. It is so that, like, when I read those words, I was like, "Uh, yeah!" because there are moments in the birthing process of a piece or in that creation where you do have these, like, "Oh shit moments." Like, "I don't know if I'm going to be able to get to a place that I feel I want to go with the work." And then it's all this problem solving, right, and leaning in and trusting, as my friend says, like "trust your dopeness," like, trusting the skills that I have, right, and trusting my knowledge to get to a place, and then there's some pieces where it's like, "Oh, gosh, I've just so majorly fucked up, I'm going to put it to the side. And a year from now, I'll get back to that, you know, maybe."

And so, those are the moments when, like, I say, like, it may take a two or three years for a piece to come about. It's because of those kind of moments where it's like, "Ohhh," and I don't want to force it, right. I don't want to, like, make a piece come. I want it, like, I really, I'm wanting to mirror my life in some ways and my own journey, Jonathan. And I think it's so, for so long I tried to force myself to be something for approval, for acceptance, for belonging, and instead of just allowing myself to be and become, right, and to make mistakes and to be loved for who I am in spite of, because of, like, all of these things. And so I try to approach my canvases with that same kind of grace and, and love and so, yeah, but I do, I do have those moments. But it's also part of the, like, the magnificent struggle of it all is the problem-solving aspect and, like, figuring it out, you know. And art has taught me that if I just keep leaning in and keep pushing through, I'll get to the other side.

But yeah, so my eras, like, it's so funny, I've been at it since 2014 and so to think that I've had these different stages. But if you look at my Instagram, I definitely have. I am self-taught and when I began, I gave myself permission to follow my curiosity. And so there are times when I was like, I'm really curious about, like, oil and cold wax. I saw a painting in a gallery and, you know, there's something about it that spoke to me. I was interested in the textures. So it's like, "Ok, let me explore that for a while, and then I'll learn it, and maybe a year later, begin to build work around it and then share that with the community of my followers or people who are interested in my work."

JVN [00:21:56] I had a quick question about the cold wax, too, because I was reading that in your bio and, like, I wasn't, I was also just smiling and nodding when I read about that too, like, I didn't, what is it?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:22:05] Yeah it's a medium, just, like, this waxy kind of medium that you can add to oil paints and it quickens the drying process because oils are so slow in drying, and so it quickens, it quickens that process, thickens it up a little bit and you're able, like, you were saying, how, like, I love, like, layering paints, you know, and so I'm able with the oil and cold wax together as a mixture, it's called a medium and mediums are just things that we add to, to different paints that are too, like, I use medium to, like, apply my paper, to adhesive and thicken and change the texture of the paints that we're using.

JVN [00:22:46] So cold wax isn't like a, it's not like a, like, a palette of color is it's, like, something you can put in any color? Got it!

LANECIA ROUSE [00:23:50] No, no. Yeah, yeah it's a medium you can put it in any color which is different than, like, encaustic wax that I was, like, really interested in for a while

and I did work with and that is, like, wax, that is a beeswax and resin mixture. And you can get that clear, you can get in all kinds of colors and you paint with hot wax.

JVN [00:23:11] Oh!

LANECIA ROUSE [00:23:12] So cool. And, like, people who are masters at it, the work is phenomenal, like, just, the yummy textures, you can build like layers and thickness, you know, 'cause it's, like, once the wax like hardens then you add more layers and, uh, so that was a fun stage too.

JVN [00:23:32] I'm having two intrusive thought questions; I'm sorry, I can't help it. First of all, I, 'cause I just can't sit on it anymore, over your left shoulder, this, that, do you see this piece over your left shoulder, this piece right here. Yeah, up, that little baby one is that for sale?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:23:51] Yes!

JVN [00:23:52] I'm freaking out; must buy; charge me triple, like, we're doing that when we get off the phone, it's, like, I can't, I feel like you didn't send me her. Wow. Obsessed. Two, I'm sorry I freaked out. And then, like, my two pictures that I have of yours so far. What era are those from? Do those have cold wax? Are those just like acrylics? Like what are those made of?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:24:12] Yes. So they're 2020. But I say 2020 with, also, they have a history before. And so in the beginning of quarantine, I was like, "I can't keep making art like I did before. There's some things I want to explore." And so I took old paintings, painted them black, and began anew in this new space that I was inhabiting because of quarantine. And so the paintings you happened to buy are a part of that journey for me. And so one part was these real, like, emotive, instantaneous paintings with acrylics. And so your pieces have a bunch of acrylic on it and then even some yummy, like, cheese wax textures that I pulled in, brick, like the black one, there's some brick-

JVN [00:25:10] There is?!

LANECIA ROUSE [00:25:11] Yes, which creates some of this cool texture-

JVN [00:25:16] That texture!

LANECIA ROUSE [00:25:09] Yeah, yeah.

JVN [00:25:19] So, back to eras. What was, like, the first era?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:25:21] Yeah, so I was always drawn to abstraction, and part of it's because of my story in my process of grief. Abstract art just spoke to me. And the photographer in me, I loved collage. So when I first started, I did a lot of collage work, working with paper, always drawn to paper and encaustic wax. So I have a lot of pieces that are, like, straight-up acrylic and then I add wax over it and paper, like, that was always, that was the beginning. And then in 2016, I did this, well-, I moved from there to then just doing straight-up acrylic painting, right, where I was just creating these large pieces, small works with acrylic, very, texture was always a part of it and color, like, lots of color and layers.

Then in 2016, I began, I'm trying to get this right, I did a hundred-day collage project where I made a collage a day for 100 days. And I did that because I was really just living totally in the abstraction, shit was happening in our world, and I needed to be specific, like, I just needed to speak really specific and plainly about some of the things that I was feeling. And so I began, I did this 100-day collage project that was exploring women and, yeah, what it means to be a woman, and just different expressions. And then after that, I continued in my painting abstraction, and that's when I became curious about oil painting and cold wax. I hadn't painted with oils before. And so around that time I began to study and studied for a while, about a year.

And also during that time I was making my own pigments as well. I'd gone to Santa Fe and just fallen in love with the Earth and, yeah, was just really interested and had the desire to know about like, you know, "What happens if I add Earth to my paintings?" and, like, "How, oh, people make pigments out of, like, that's what pigment paint is, right," it's pigment dirt mixed with these mediums that then create these paints that we use. And I did this whole period where I used fluid oil paints. I found these paints out of France that you can pour and it takes about 32 hours to dry. And I loved that, like, the process really slowed me down. I felt at that time in my life that, like, everything was, like, there was this pressure to "Move fast, move fast," and those paintings, like, slowed me down and you could pour it and after 32 hours, the painting could be a disaster. And it wasn't as easy as my other paintings where I could just paint over it and start again. Like if he messed up, it just...

And so, that process, that taught me a lot, and I love the works that I created out of that, and I did a show of that in Houston. And then from there I moved to the oil and the cold wax. And then from there, I got back into my painting abstractions with acrylics. I realized that oils and encaustic wax just require a different kind of health kind of set up in my studio space and ventilation that I didn't have, and so I made a choice for my health and my

breathing to, to, to kind of put those away for now and concentrate on materials that I didn't feel were so risky to use.

JVN [00:29:02] This one time when I was doing hair in St. Louis, flying back to California, I had, like, all this developer in my checked luggage. Then I was, like, sitting at my gate and then they were like, "Jonathan Van Ness please come back to security." And then I was like, "Oh my God," I was, like, "Did I put weed in my bag or something, like, did what happened to, like, what is going on?" So I went back to security and the guy was like, "Is there something caustic in your bag, my hand is burning!" And I was like, "What's caustic mean?" And he was like, "It means it burns." And I was like, and then, like, I just looked over his shoulder and there was this open thing of, like, 40 volume developer, which is, like, what you mixed with bleach. And I was like, "Oh honey, you just need to go wash your hands." Like, you just put bleach, like, developer all over your hands, like, that's just for some bleach. And they were like, "You can't fly with this." I was like, "Oh, like, I have been every other weekend for years. I didn't know, I'm so sorry."

But yes, that's why I was thinking about what the word caustic meant and I was, like, maybe it means something different for art. But no, so I love that you did self-care and chose; that's good. It kind of reminds me of how I was with, like, Keratin treatments, like, I had to choose my health eventually. Like, yes, it makes your hair smooth. And yes, I like how it looks. But, like, my lungs and my throat and my eye sockets-

LANECIA ROUSE [00:30:14] They matter. They matter.

JVN [00:30:15] Yeah, they matter! They matter! I think another thing that I want to ask, where I want, I want to ask is following your, your stories in the morning, you, your studio and, like, the music that you listen to and, like, the light and just, like, everything about it is so, I just, I hear authenticity, I hear, like, wanting to really put, like, what you're feeling and what you're processing like into your work. So you had said earlier that you were in ministry, then you had that, the, what did you, what was the exact term used in 2010?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:30:50] Yeah, it was just a depression break, yeah.

JVN [00:30:53] Just a depression break, which every person who I'm obsessed with, like, always has to have one because I think it's like, what, like, what gives you the, you know, you're not sheltered, like, you've been through it, like, you've seen stuff. And that's why I think, that's, I think why I just love people that, that's artists, that's, that's what humans, and, and just the courage to be vulnerable and upfront about that I really respect and I love. And, but, and when you say in 2016, like, our country was going through stuff, like, yeah, and it, it has been for such a long time.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:31:28] A long time.

JVN [00:31:28] So, I'm curious about, in your work, and in your eras, and as you've grown, you're, like, more public facing, like, there, you've got people following you, like, people know who you are. And so in terms of art and creation, are there things that, like, as long as we have these people's ears that you want as a Black artist in the United States, like, what, is there anything that you want people to know about, like-,

LANECIA ROUSE [00:32:56] I mean, just a simple way of saying it, yes, my whole, I bring to the canvas my history, all of who I am. My body holds my story, right, and so as I'm releasing and making visible what's within me, of course I'm going to talk about, like, grief and my journey through grief. And I, like, light and shadow, like, the things, vulnerability is a concept that works because for so long I was afraid to be vulnerable.

I felt that I had to protect myself, protect my family and not be honest and show up to the world fully, you know. And that's one of the reasons I love you, because I feel like you show up fully and then it gives people the permission to do the same. And so in my, my work, in my I, I'm drawn to artists, I'm drawn to people who do that in their work and create that kind of space. And so I want to create that kind of space with my work of helping people, like, see the beauty of being human.

Yes, racism is real, it was real before 2016 and has always been a part, like, my, my, my dad's work was in race and he would say race and reconciliation work. He was the first cross-racial appointment in South Carolina in Methodism in the early 80s. And so that, I say that because that kind of set the foundation for, like, a life for my sister and I when we were constantly, like, confronting white supremacy as we were dwelling in predominantly white spaces and having to really figure out, like, in many ways heal our own imaginations and how we see ourselves, how we see other people and how we see, how we desire to see this world that we inhabit and to participate in creating that world. And that didn't come without a lot of scars, but also a lot of glimpses of beauty and, like, glimpses of hope and possibility for us as humans.

And so when I come to my art table, I bring all of that. The truth as well as, like, um, this world and, kind of, like, my friend Ashon Crawley, who's an artist and a scholar, he has this concept called 'otherwise possibility,' and I love his work in that area. And I think about, like, otherwise perceptions, you know, like, how can my work help to heal our imaginations in the ways that we see each other? We see this world that we inhabit and, and we feel about it. And I wanted my work to do that not only on the canvas, but even, like, the organizations that I align with and that I partner with.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:34:38] It's all about healing I guess, in many ways, the world, and James Baldwin, who's one of my favorite writers, he has this essay that I read often called 'The Creative Process.' And he, he says, like, the role of the artist is really to kind of, like, for us to do our own kind of internal work, right, and to, like, lighten these dark places that are within us so that then we can, like, shine it back into the world and then in that make this world a more human dwelling place, right. And, like, in all of us, in our spheres of influence, can do that kind of work, that kind of creative work.

And so, yeah, I, I partner with organizations. I come to my studio and I do that kind of work 'cause it's important the way we see, you know, and I'm always, like, I always have a camera with me and I forget that, I don't think photography is, like, an era for me, it's just a part of who I am. And so I'm always, I just walk through the world kind of looking and expecting to encounter moments that will make me pause, moments of unexpected, like, beauty and truth. And I think people, humans are so beautiful, and so I photograph that. And I think the cities and just the natural kind of weathering of the spaces that we're in are just beautiful and so I capture that. And my phone has over 90,000 photos on it because, like-

JVN [00:36:03] You got that, like, 84GB, like, the really big one.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:36:06] It's a mess, it's always telling me I'm having to delete apps because I have all these photographs, but I do. And I return to them to remind me in moments, like, where I glimpse even, like, moments of humans, right, like, the most, like, how this world would say, like, my my husband, Cleve and his best friend, Matt, right, like, this white man, they had, they're brothers, they and they they have it out. They talk about these stuff. They're honest and real with each other, you know, and Cleve will be like, "No, that's a white boy shit, like, don't say that. That's a problem. That is a problem. Check yourself. Check your perception." And, like, they, it's real and it's a brotherhood.

And so there are moments when I see them, like, genuinely, like, laughing together, belly laugh or, like, crying, and I photograph those moments kind of on the still because it gives me a glimpse of what's possible, right. When we are really honest about things like white supremacy and gender inequalities and economic inequality, economics and race. And when we have these real conversations with people who we, we trust and are willing to, like, be in relationship with and just do that hard work, the glimpses of what's possible when, and how we can truly share our lives together. And so, I don't know. I said a lot! Not sure if I answered your question.

JVN [00:37:27] Yeah, no, no, no you did. But I have another question. So, how, so you still, like, you're a person of faith, you still, like, yes, right? So how do you feel? Because I feel, um, to be honest, like, I don't know where I feel, like, I grew up in church, I grew up, like, going to Christian sports camp every year, like, I definitely accepted Jesus into my heart, like, very early, like 10, 11, and, like, was very, like, in that vernacular, like, I was very much, like, I know how to get into, like, a Christian vernacular, I know how to get into, like, a Christian-aligned, like I know how lots of different churches talk, like, I know how to, like, blend in in that space.

I think that one thing that is really hard for me to come to terms with is how the ways that religion has sought to, like, oppress and divide and marginalize. And that's been, like, really hard for me to kind of come to terms with. And I think even now when I see people like Marjorie Taylor Greene and, like, that Lauren Boebert who use their, and people like Donald Trump who have people like Paula White, like, lay hands on him and speak in tongues, use their faith to actually, like, bastardize the word of the, like, lots of different religious words, but also this consistent conflation of, like, this is also really off, like, this isn't into art, but I'm just having had the chance to talk to you and follow you, I'm just curious to hear about what you think about this.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:39:00] Yeah, I don't if I'm honest, I'm not sure if I have reconciled that yet. I am in many ways still on a process of kind of, like, deconstructing and reconstructing a, of, rel-, like, a faith identity that I can, that I feel like I can speak about and live into fully, you know. I, on a personal note, like, yeah I, my dad's a pastor, I grew up in the church in South Carolina. There has been a lot of unlearning that I've had to do just because of the nature of, like, where I was born and the kind of, you know, faith that was being taught and, you know, and experience in life, and so I've done a lot of unlearning and reclaiming of things and spending some time with theologians and people and communities that I feel like I'm in alignment with and then not really knowing what to do with the groups of, like, people with who say they're the same, like, we have the same identity, faith-wise, that don't seem to be in line with the God that I've come to know and, and to love.

And so, yeah, I, it's so interesting. I'm, I feel like I can talk about spirituality and God and art and how that works personally in my life and how I experience it. I think I'm still in this place of trying to find the language of talking about the rest. I'm still doing some work, you know. Listening to how people of faith, like, Christian faith in particular, have used their faith and this belief in the God of Jesus Christ in ways that have been, like, weaponized and, and it's caused so much pain and harm and it's just not reflective of the God that I've come to know, is deeply disturbing, I've been angry a lot.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:41:17] I mean, like, I start my mornings, you mentioned my mornings with a lot of quiet and stillness, there's only two people that I'll talk to in the first three hours usually. And that's Cleve, my husband, and my sister Ciona, because I need to enter into the day in a space of, like, clarity of thought, peace of heart, and peace of mind. And, and, and it came because of the past, really the past four years of waking up to the news cycle, waking up to all of these voices that are just speaking like, like, it broke my heart, and I would cry a lot and just get so fucking angry and just, like, "No, you are wrong, that is not loving, that is dehumanizing."

And that doesn't mean that I haven't had to learn a lot of shit, right. Like, I've had to have a lot of friends to be patient with me, offer me love and grace. And there are some people that I probably need to write up and, like, I do know I want to apologize to for because I was, like, this really annoying little Christian girl growing up in the South, you know, and like, my life experiences have just broken me open and transformed and healed my imagination, my way of seeing and being and understanding God and understanding this world that I live in and understanding the beauty of every human that I encounter, you know, and that's a daily work. Sometimes it's a minute-by-minute work of checking these, like, perceptions that I have.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:42:42] One of my professors in div school, Dr. Willie Jennings, he does a lot of work around, like, the Christian imagination, Jonathan, and in one of my classes, he said, he talked about how we're storied people, like, all of us in this world, like, we're just, like, don't even think about faith categories, but like we're born into these stories that are not of our own choosing, right. So there are these, these scripts that were written for us, like, like, you said at the beginning, of racism was created. Race is created way before, like, I came into this world, and I was born into this and that as we, as we live, as we evolve, right, like, we, some of us have more tools than others to kind of navigate and reclaim a new story. We begin to, we get to make decisions about, like, what things are going to continue to narrate our lives, are going to continue to shape the way we see ourselves, we see other people, we see this world that we inhabit.

And so I do, I just, I feel like we're all storied and, and I'm trying to choose every day like a story that's one of life and that makes more space for me to be fully myself and make space for other people to be fully themselves. And then I think the line comes when you start doing harm to other people though, I'm going to check that, you know, I'm going to be like, "No, that's problematic, that's problematic, that's detrimental, detrimental to the well-being of somebody else." And it has to stop, you know, and I, with confidence, will speak out to those things when I see them. I like questions, I will ask questions, but then there's sometimes when I'll just say like, "No, that is wrong, you know, like, that is wrong, it is harmful. Shut the fuck up," you know, in a very graceful way, I'll be like "Shut, shut up."

JVN [00:44:26] In your more Lanecia way, yeah.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:44:29] Yes, in my more Lanecia way. But no, that is my Lanecia way, for so long I felt like there were certain things I couldn't say, you know. But I do, I feel, I do, I just feel like we all, when you know, you got to share that, you know, and you can't sit back and allow people to do harm if you know, like, if you see, if you see it being done.

JVN [00:44:54] I guess I mean when I say your Lanecia way, it's, like, with the radiant glow that you deliver "shut the fuck up" with, that is, it is extra special.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:45:05] Thank you. Thank you. But yeah, no, the church has a lot of work to do. A lot of forgiveness to ask for maybe, if that's even the right word. And then there's a certain people that I'm just, like, "Hmm, I'm not with you," you know, and to be honest with you, I don't even say that I'm a Christian anymore. I, I follow the God of Jesus Christ. I like Jesus. That's where I am. I like Jesus. And then, and the more that I kind of fall in love with Jesus, the more it opens me up to see the beauty in some of the things Muhammad says, and Buddha, you know, when I experienced the loss of our child in 2013, Buddhist practices became, they kind of helped me get the language to, to deal with my sorrow and to be present and honor my pain in ways that my Christian faith just didn't, you know, like, I was met with a lot of just kind of, like, trite, almost, like, yeah, trite responses and just language that just didn't resonate with me. And so I began to explore other expressions, other, other understandings. And for me, I feel like the more I fall in love with, like, Jesus, it's kind of this weird thing, the more expansive my pool of, like, religious kind of, like, spiritual teachings and religious practices become, if that makes sense.

JVN [00:46:44] I, yes! Yes it does. I read all about Siddhartha and Buddha in, like, my 20s and I was, like, it is, it's, like, yes, I yes, you are hitting the nail on the head for me. So you had said earlier that, like, you know, you had your depression episode 2010, you ask for help, you end up moving to Houston, you take over this art collective, which kind of reminds me of how, like, I'd been doing hair, I love doing hair. I still love doing hair, but then when I started doing *Game of Thrones*, I was like, "Oh, like, writing comedy, producing comedy, like, writing and creating on camera. Is this, like, other artistic medium that I didn't know was for me?"

I didn't really think, I, similarly in like sixth grade, I tried out for like a community theater rendition of 'The Wizard' and, 'The Wizard of Oz.' And, but I thought, I thought I really was meant to be like the cowardly lion and then after I, like, called the community theater like 65 times an hour for three days to ask if I was the cowardly lion and that I really didn't want to be in the chorus. I obviously didn't get cast in that production. And so similarly, I

thought that like theater, and yeah, but that also made me think that that wasn't for me and that, like, entertainment, acting, writing, I didn't think that it was, like I was really welcomed into.

And so, and so similarly to doing hair full-time, I really wanted to transition to doing entertainment full-time, but that was, like, a fraught transition and it was scary. And when you mentioned that, you know, like, how you went from managing this full-time job that was in the art world to becoming a full-time artist, honey, you were, like, going through depression, you were going through mental health, you were going through the loss of a child, which I also didn't know until you just shared that and thank you for that vulnerability. But how did you find the, the faith and the leap of courage to, to make that transition? I am, I would love to hear about that story, which we briefly talked about earlier. But please, how did that happen?

LANECIA ROUSE [00:48:41] Yeah. So in 2013, I met my now husband, partner Cleve, and we fell in love here in Houston. And as love does sometimes, we created a life and her name is AJ, Annee Juredline. And I found out in August that I was pregnant and there was definitely a lot of, like, that's where my faith journey too, like, I began to face certain things and unlearn and just do some really hard work. I found out I was pregnant, the next day I called my therapist and was like, "Yo, we've got to talk," you know. And so I began to do some really deep soul tending, reimagining work for myself. And 'cause I wanted to be a mom that where she was born into a story of a mom that was like, I don't think we're ever fully, like, "together," I'm always becoming, but a mom that had a bit more courage than I had, a mom that wasn't just surviving life, but was really trying to figure out like, "How do I thrive?"

I wanted a daughter who, like, born into a story of a mom who was, like, an artist because she'd always wanted to be and knew, like, that's who she was and wasn't afraid to live into that. And so I started doing that kind of work to prepare to be that mom. And then December 4th, I went into labor. I had this term that the medical field called "incompetent cervix," and that just means my cervix needed--it's an awful name--but basically it means that my cervix just needed support in order to carry AJ full term and I didn't know and the doctors didn't know. And so went into labor and ooph, yeah, it rocked me, she was born, and if she had been with me maybe like a week or two more, her lungs would have been more developed. But her lungs were just, they couldn't, it was too painful to even, it would have been painful for her. So anyway, all that's to say, we decided to have, let her live as long as she could and took the wisdom and advice of our doctors, and Cleve and I just made the decision to enjoy her for the time that we had. And so she lived over two hours and died resting upon my chest. And, motherhood changed me.

LANECIA ROUSE [00:51:18] That moment just broke me, shattered me, and I remember that night I was in the room alone with AJ, the hospital was so compassionate just to allow her body to be there, and I began wailing out to the universe, yelling out to God, I guess. And then I was like, "Yo, I, this is hell." And it was, like, kind of like if you're familiar with the poetry of the Psalms and the Old Testament, like, it was one of those moments where I was like saying all kinds of things and probably not in such a glowy kind of way, like, I was just angry, I was hurt, I was in hell. And I remember, I said a lot, but I do remember me saying, "I need you to show up. And I need love to show up and I need it to show up in real, tangible ways, not just thoughts and prayers and these trite comments that we like to say to rush people through grief. But I'm going to go ahead and journey through this, 'cause I am still here, and this child that we had dreams for and hope for is not. And, that feels shitty. And if I'm still here, I need to continue honoring her." And have life.

And then, I don't know, it was just something about that moment that made me realize I have life for, until that moment, Jonathan, like, I had, there were nights where I would literally go to sleep, saying "Hey, you know, universe, if I don't wake up in the morning, I won't be mad at you, you know, like, I'm not going to take my life, but I'm ok if, like, my heart just kind of stops." And for the first time, with Cleve and AJ in my life, I was beginning to like, say, like, go to sleep really anxious, saying, "I hope I wake up tomorrow morning," like, I want to see Cleve's face. I want to be AJ's mom. And so, in the hospital room, I just made a choice that, like, "Ok, I'm still here. I got a journey through this and I gotta go through it slowly and I'm gonna have to reimagine what it looks like for me to live."

LANECIA ROUSE [00:53:35] In this new, people in the grief process, you've probably heard a lot of times, like, 'new normal,' right, everything sometimes something shifts is like a new normal. So that was another new normal for me. And I had to figure out, like, "How am I going to not continue just surviving, but eventually I just really want to thrive." And so, during my healing process, I was doing watercolors a lot, I couldn't sleep and it was really weird 'cause water colors was just, like, something that it was, like, a class we offer to the project but it wasn't like my go-to; camera was my go to. But I'd find myself, like, not able to sleep and couldn't stop crying and then I would just, like, play with watercolors. And it was so cathartic, like, I don't know if there was something about the colors, the, the colors in this midst of, like, my deep despair that was soothing for me, this repetitive motion. I've done some look at science now and they say that our brains, like, when we get into these zones, that we can get into them like, when I'm running, sometimes I get into, like, the zone where, like, my mind is so still, you know, there's like this clarity of thought. And that's what happened for me.

Like, you can get into the creative process as well. And, and I would get into this space where, like, my mind was still, I had clarity of thought and I could just really be with myself and I could sustain, could, could stand the pain, right. Like, it was just so intense. But there was this moments of, like, it's almost like medicine, you know, that kind of helped me continue to lean in and go through and find, I couldn't find the words, but I could, I could paint. I could release how I was feeling, you know. And so I got a piece of paper in the meantime during all this and I started just writing down, like, "What does it look like for me to live with this pain, right. Because I know this pain is, her absence is going to be with me forever. So how am I going to live?" And I was like, "I want to get a, I want to make art."

LANECIA ROUSE [00:55:40] "I want to get a studio downtown, I wanna, like, sell art, and I want to be an artist, like I'm an artist, like, I want to finally live into that." And my sister had written a poem called 'Do the Crazy Thing' and I had a copy of it. And I was like, "Yo, that's my crazy thing." Like, my crazy thing is going to be my bold, ambitious thing is going to be saying goodbye to ministry, this thing that I've been doing and people have thought of, like, this identity I've been living in for so long. And I'm going to lean hard into that identity of the little girl dancing on the Pizza Hut tables, right, who was an artist from birth and I'm going to be an artist. And so I told Cleve and he's like, "That's great, make it happen," because he knew the only way that I could really go through it is if I did it on my own you know with the support of others, and he was very supportive.

So I eventually got the studio downtown. My friend and I got a studio together and began making art. And I was doing the work that I was doing and eventually I realized I wanted to be at the art studio more than I wanted to be at the art project and that it was time for me to say goodbye and really just lean in. And so I, you know during this time, I was making the business plan. I was selling, getting my toes wet you know and saying, like, "Is this something I can do?" I was studying and, you know, nine months later, and that was not intentional. And I didn't realize it was nine months until I was doing some newspaper interview and the writer, reporter was like, "Whoa, that was nine months."

LANECIA ROUSE [00:57:17] But nine months later, from her birth and death, I literally resigned from ministry and became a full-time artist. And, I haven't looked back. I have, I still partner with religious organizations if it aligns and it feels like I can do it honestly, but I'm not a minister anymore. And it's taken a couple of years for people who have known me to kind of grasp that. I don't see my work as ministry; I am an artist who makes work, and I do have a story, I do have a faith, I do have things that I'm working out and loves and passions and all of that works into what I do. But I'm an artist and I'm living it, you know. I'm, I'm always studying and making, I'm prolific at it and wanting to, to share my work, share the things that ground me and inspire me and bring me delight with the world with hopes that it might do that for someone else, yeah. And I guess kind of going back, I feel, I

realized too, when I was, when we lost AJ, that there is something really powerful when we are honest and we show up fully into spaces because it does allow people to do the same.

I remember a woman who was in her 70s wrote me and shared that she had also lost a child in the same way that I did. And it was the first time she was telling anybody outside of her family about that loss and how it impacted her. It's like, you've been carrying that for, like, 40 years, you know, and what, and it was just, one, it was like an honor that she would trust me to enter into that space with her, but it's like, whoa, it was a reminder to me, like, "Oh, yeah, there is something really powerful about us sharing our stories," you know, and just being real about the things that give us joy, yes, but also the things that hurt and leave the scars, right. And then, even sharing the process of the healing of those scars. So, yeah, anyway, that's that. So I'm here today because of motherhood. And, and I keep doing the work and, you know, it's so funny, whenever I have a big moment in my art career, I, I thank her, I'm like, "AJ, look! Look at this, you know, like, look at look at how your life, your existence, like, yeah, like, we share this together," like, she's still, I feel like she's still here and lives every time I mention her name she's still living and and she lives through my arts and creation in some way.

JVN [01:00:15] Wow, that was, in, like, 204 episodes, I have, like, never been more present and, like, more blown away ever, like, literally ever. Wow. Um, I had a few more questions, and I'm, wow, Lanecia, you are, what an incredible being you are. Um ok, ok, it did just come back to me, it did just come back to me. I don't know if it'll, whatever, I'm just going. So one thing that you had said is that you are self-taught, but then another thing that you, that I've heard you say repeatedly is, like, you're always studying, like, you're, and I mean, I follow you, you're, I mean you are a, like, an eternal student of art because you're always like, inner, you're just always exploring your art.

And so I think, like, one thing in my experience of, like, doing hair is that like, I spent the first several years of my career, like, unlearning what I had learned in hair school and because really it's, like, it's the color wheel, when it comes to hair color, like, you've got to know how to, like, neutralize, cancel or enhance, you know, what these colors are lifting up to or what you're depositing onto. But other than that it's like, I mean you learn how to use, like, barbicide and, like, how to kill viruses and, like, bacterias and stuff in here school. But then, like, when you're actually out in the world, like, yes, you have to do that but you also have to know, like, how to deal with people and like how to manage your time. And like, really, and then there are certain states where you don't even have to go to hair school, like, you can just apprentice someone.

And so to me, like apprenticing someone would be, like, you're not self-taught, but that would be more along the lines of, like, self-taughtness versus, like, going to hair school.

And one is not better than the other, they're just very different. But, like, people that were apprentices, like, in my opinion, probably do better a lot faster because you're not learning, like, silly ways of doing things that you're never actually going to do in the real world. So I'm curious about, like, is there like a, because I also, I got to interview A'driane, who also my Explore page, Mark Zuckerberg, like, put in my Explore page when I started thinking about art and so, like, I love both of you so much but like she also talked about being self-taught, like, is there like a down the nose like existence in the art world of, like, people who are self-taught versus, like, is there even a university to, like, learn how to paint?

LANECIA ROUSE [01:03:00] Yes, and I do think there is this, like, a networking that happens when you're in school that is beneficial for your career. There are, it provides a space for you to really give thought to, like, "What am I saying in my work?" You have people, like feedback and folks that you're learning from and you're exposed to things as you're like concentrating on this discipline for three to four years.

So, yeah, and I think there, there's a history of like gallery spaces, museum residencies, really wanting to honor or, like, privilege people who have done that work over folks who haven't. But I think there's some shifting happening in that, I think, which is a good thing. I, I do encourage people, like, my studio and my, the past years have been like an art school for me, like, I have been concentrating and discovering what I want to say in my work and yada, yada, yada. And, you know, I read, I'm just always a student. I just love learning; I do. And so I've just, I brought that into my practice as well and encountering other people's work and learning from others and other people's stories and history. And part of, like, going to the gallery for me was this great thing of, like, I find artists that I was really interested in knowing, wanting to know more about their work. And so then I researched their name and, like, "Who are these people?"

LANECIA ROUSE [01:04:35] And I think that's the best kind of art, when you encounter a piece that, like, moves you and evokes something and then you become curious about the maker, you know, and it's like, "Oh, I want to know more, I want to know more." So I did that and I would find, like, like, Frida Kahlo. I don't think she had a MFA, I really don't think she did, you know, like, and she makes brilliant art, like, come at me if you like try to tell me that Frida is not amazing, you know, like, I would encounter all these artists who all took different paths and they kind of got to the same place you know or to a place, maybe not the same place, 'cause that's not the aspiration for everybody to be in a museum. And I don't think it has to be. But they get to a place and that place is good for them, you know.

And so I realized, like, "Oh, it's possible" to get into, like, when I envision the places, the place I want to go with my work and what I want to do, like, "I can, I can get there," you know, I don't, I no longer, at first when I entered in I was really intimidated by the fact that, like, I, other people had the degree and had spent this time and had the credentials and I didn't. And you know and I think that's just a product of the culture that we live in that esteems certain things over others, you know. And so I've had to like, once again, kind of check my perception and my-, Cleve has been very helpful in that of saying, like, "No, just do the work, put your nose down, do the work, keep growing and keep showing and do you, right." And so that's where, what I do. And I encourage people to do that you know, if you, if school is for you and you have the money and you're not going to go broke trying to do it, yeah, go, because, like, art making is, like, you're not gonna, it's, like, a small percentage of people who are able to really fully live off of the art that they're making.

LANECIA ROUSE [01:06:23] Most of us have to have multiple streams of income. And I'm fortunate that my multiple streams all still have to do with my creative practice. But you know, like, I have some artists that I love that are, like, working in coffee shops, you know, and just doing what they need to do in order to make their work, and so, yeah, if you, if you have the money, you can go to school, you get the scholarship, and it's not going to break you, yeah, why not. I think it's cool if you have the privilege and opportunity to just spend time on the thing that you love, like. Like, if medicine is your thing, you know, whatever your thing is, if you have, if you're fortunate to do that, do it. But if not, there's also other ways that you can continue to, like, to nurture your craft and your understanding and discover and explore your passion. And so I say, do that, yeah.

JVN [01:07:14] So you actually kind of answered the same question I wanted, or the question I was going to ask, but I want to expand out a little bit, which is so if you're, if you are an aspiring artist and you do have the privilege, you do have the money, the resources to like go to, like, a formal, like, four year, like, school, fierce. However, if, if that's not your truth and you are an aspiring artist and you are, like, serving Lanecia realness and, like, you when you wake up honey, like, 'Sister Act II' and all you can do is think about singing, then you're a singer girl. Then you wake up in the morning, all you can think about is painting then you're an artist. So you don't have to go to one of those, like, really expensive, formally trained schools, that you can, like, there's probably, like, isn't there, like, local classes, like, communally that people can get into or maybe even, like, assisting or practicing, like, an artist that you like and even just offering services maybe that way. Like, so there's, there's, like, to pull a Buddha quote, like, there's several ways to ascend, like, the mountain of artistry.

LANECIA ROUSE [01:08:10] Yes, yes, yes. And I think it just requires self-discipline and dedication, like, just to do the work, right. And museums now are great, and there's some

schools that are offering, like, online with, something that happened with quarantine is, like, people have gotten on to, like, "Oh, we can do, teach online and offer opportunities and make it more accessible to folks." And, you know, there's artists that also offer workshops online now if, once when kind of things open up again and it's safe, like, people will be help, check your local listings to, look at the artists that you really dig and find really cool and you love their work and see if they are teaching, see if you can apprentice with them, you know, like, go and spend time in their studio.

So I just encourage people to, I know, I know the show is called, like, 'Getting Curious' and I keep saying curiosity, but, like, I've been using this word for like-, I love, like, I just think we're not curious enough about things and especially about each other. And so, follow your curiosity and, like, foster that, you know, and lean in and you'll discover, like, new questions, new answers that just lead to more questions and just keep, keep going. And then eventually, like you said, like, there's a point where you just kind of have to say like, "I gotta, I got to pause for a while and just do the work, you know." And so I do have periods if I'm working on a large body of work where I won't be studying, you know, it's like, "Ok, I've done the prep work, I just need to come and be with myself, be with my work and be honest in that, you know."

LANECIA ROUSE [01:09:51] I think sometimes when people are starting off and, looking at my own story, like, there are artists that I loved and so I would learn by, like, engaging their process, so I would look at their work, check out the history and learn about their process and then like, "Oh, let me try." And then eventually I can't, like, "I don't, we don't need another Sam Gilliam in the world. We don't need another Alma Thomas. Like, I got to be me. I've got to be myself." And so I then kind of take the techniques of what I've learned and then apply them to be as honest as I can be in my work, you know. And so, yeah.

JVN [01:10:27] I typically don't do, like, a lightning rod round, but I'm obsessed with you. I do have a lightning rod round that I've been amassing. Ok, lightning round; light, you're, like, fuck this interview goes forever. lightning round: favorite artists.

LANECIA ROUSE [01:10:41] Ed Clark, Sam Gilliam, Helen Frankenthaler, Alma Thomas, Robert Hodge, Mark Bradford. I have a lot; I could go on.

JVN [01:10:52] That feels good! I feel like it's great unless you think of anyone else later that you're like, "Oh my gosh, I will not be living my best life if I don't include them." But that's amazing. Second question, top three unexplored mediums that you want to play with that you haven't played with yet?

LANECIA ROUSE [01:11:07] Sculpture, which gets to clay, like, I want to work with clay. I want to do more installations, I've only done one, but I would love to explore that. And I want to do a mural. I want to do a mural on a wall, I do.

JVN [01:11:21] Yes! Ok, favorite eras of art in general?

LANECIA ROUSE [01:11:26] Abstract expressionism.

JVN [01:11:28] Yes! Biggest misconception about art or artists?

LANECIA ROUSE [01:11:34] That we are just in our studios just painting the day away, float, float. I mean, like I'm branding and marketing and writing emails, I'm doing newsletters, I'm selling my work, you know what I'm saying, and I'm making the work, like, you have to do the work, so yeah.

JVN [01:11:49] Fuck, yes. Ok that was like the best lightning round of, like there was only four questions. I'm sorry, if I overpromised, but that was amazing, I'm obsessed with you, I can't get enough. Ok, and then the last question is, do you ever do yoga?

LANECIA ROUSE [01:12:05] No.

JVN [01:12:06] There's, that was not a shameful question honey. You don't need to, basically, but basically, like, in yoga classes, like, the studio that I used to go to, they would do this thing where, like, if it was, it's called, like, Yogini or, like, Yogi recess, where, like, you really wanted to do some certain pose, you wanted to practice your handstands but we didn't really get to that in class today. And you're, like, "Eugh, I'm just going to, like, feel some kind of way if I don't get my headstand or my handstand on." Is there anything that you would just be, like, remiss that I didn't ask or something you want to share about your art or your story or creating that we didn't get to?

LANECIA ROUSE [01:12:41] No, I don't think so, and I didn't do that in shame, it's just, like, yoga is so good for the body and I have to do, like, basketball, like, I need, like, fast-paced, like, things.

JVN [01:12:53] Lanecia, I wonder if this is, if this is what the universe brought us together for, for this question so that you can get some benefit from this conversation too. So yoga is kind of, like, there is one for everyone. There is, like, a gazillion types. So what I hear you saying is, is that you would maybe need something that is like more power, more like involved, more a little bit. So you're like a vinyasa flow person. You, I think, would really like like a Core Power Yoga that's just, like, one, like, chain that has, like, there's music, there is,

yeah, there's some, like, there's also a type of yoga that, like, I call it power yoga but other studios will call it like hip hop yoga, where it's like the music is next level. It will be like, like, my playlists when I teach yoga are, like, it'll go from Des'ree, 'You gotta be' to, like, to, like, some, like, musical theater moment to, like, 'Candy Shop' because it makes me feel really nasty and, like, I want to pop my dirty bits on the person's mat next to me because sometimes that's what you need, you know.

So it's, like, so there is, like, there are powerful, like, very, like in, like, like, intense yoga if you ever wanna, like, once things are safe for you can do things, I encourage you to explore. Because I do think there is one for everyone, especially for creative folks. Like, yoga is super creative 'cause it's, like, you know, like, you could link this pose to that pose and like how you transition, like with your body, is really fun. So I think you might like it if you find, but, like, really slow or chanty or like, like, Bikram, I got really into Bikram for a year. But, like, to this day, if I do it, like, because it's the same series, same 26 poses every class every time and those are always 90 minutes, like, for me, an hour and fifteen, I'm good, like, I don't need to be in there over an hour and a half. Like, so, so even that, so this isn't an episode about yoga but I feel really, I think you might, like, usually someone's got something to say, which makes me feel like we did a really good interview.

LANECIA ROUSE [01:14:57] No, thank you. Yeah, and thanks for the yoga tip because I do, like, my art making is about the, like, being in my body. It's really physical, like, that's an important part of it. And I, I had been attracted to yoga and kind of, like, what, but I just felt like ehh. So that's helpful. And it will help me continue to be in my body and breathe, like the breathing practices of yoga I just so, like, admired, the inhale and exhale stuff. So anyway, thank you.

JVN [01:15:24] You may be, just, be doing yoga accidentally though like painting. So you may not even need a queen and it may just be that you, like, are already living your yoga practice like in your life and stuff.

LANECIA ROUSE [01:15:34] Maybe, but I do want to try that-

JVN [01:15:35] Unless, unless you're, like, all up on top of it and like your shoulders are pronating forward because you're, like, reading and stuff. And it might be that yoga would actually just help to, like, get your shoulders together so that you can keep making art for, like, 15 gajillion years.

LANECIA ROUSE [01:15:51] Yes. Yes.

JVN [01:15:52] I love you so **much**! You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was the artist and writer Lanecia Rouse.

You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on.

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