

FRESH ARTS PODCAST] EPISODE 1: SHOULD I OR SHOULDN'T I GO FULL TIME WITH MY CREATIVE PRACTICE?

This is transcript of Episode 1: "Should I or Shouldn't I Go Full Time with my Creative Practice" from the Fresh Arts Podcast Should I or Shouldn't I, hosted by Reyes Ramirez, which was published on October 15, 2020 featuring Justin Garcia and Icess Fernandez Rojas.

Reyes:

Hello, and welcome to "Should I, or Shouldn't I," a Fresh Arts podcast hosted by me, Reyes Ramirez, where we explore the decisions artists make every day to succeed in their creative practice. We invite creatives who chose different answers to these pertinent questions. There will be no right or wrong answers at the end of each discussion, so this is not meant to be a one-size-fits-all sort of deal. Rather, we're processing the complexity of said choices to seemingly simple questions, in hopes of enlightening others to consider different factors in forming their own conclusions. Today, we're asking, should I, or shouldn't I go full-time with my creative practice? We have artist, Justin Garcia, and writer, Icess Fernandez Rojas, to discuss. Hello, you two.

Icess:

Hi.

Justin:

Hey.

Reyes:

All right. Before we kinda jump into this conversation, can I just get y'all to do like a quick introduction of like what, who you are, what feeds you, what, how you define yourself? So, Icess, please.

Icess:

So, hi, I'm Icess, so I'm a writer. And I love saying that, by the way, that I'm a writer. What feeds me, what fuels me, what kind of gravitates to me? Life gravitates. Like I'm gravitating to life, and what's fueling me right now is surviving through Corona, and that's what's fueling me right now.

Justin:

Yeah!

Icess:

I play with, artistically, and here's the artistic, here's the artistic drive, I'm coming to ya, I play with, or actually have conversations with redemption. Especially, as of late, with my work as of late. What does it mean to be redeemed? What is redemption really? Can someone truly be redeemed, and what does that look like? And, does self-forgiveness leads towards self-redemption? I know it's deep, right? But, you know, I'm a deep person.

Reyes:

No, pos wow! Justin, please?

Justin:

Well, I'm an artist in Houston, and I've been doing this for quite a while, and what really feeds me, and that I've found, is just being curious. I look at things that we may take, you know, for, for granted, and try to find the fundamental elements about it. I think the curiosity behind something simple that we overlook, and finding it, and looking in a different way is, is huge, and that helps us evolve. For me, that's what feeds me, is to find those things and, and bridge that through communication, through, through the arts, for a kind of like a language. That's, that's really what my investigative side goes for, is just what brings the best out of us through self-investigation, and outside investigation. Yeah, and the same thing with the COVID, trying to figure out what that next step, what the art world's gonna look like after this, and how it's gonna evolve itself.

Reyes:

Absolutely. And so, the topic at hand, is right, is going quote-unquote full-time with one's creative practice. And so, I just wanted to give a quick disclaimer, and say that, in the formation of this conversation, this question itself, I think, originally, it's gonna include the term part-time. But, I feel like that was a mislabel of like what it means to be creative, or an artist, or a writer, is that it's kind of like saying, well, I'm a part-time, I don't know, eater, you know. Like it's kind of like art and creative, you know, your creativity is something you do all the time. And so, I think when, when we ask, or when people say full-time with one's creative practice, they mean a certain thing. And so, I guess, could you kind of go into what, what you think when people say what, or rather what they mean when they say go full-time, or I would like to go full-time with my practice?

I guess:

I think what people mean, is that they want to dedicate their entire day, or be able to have the opportunity to dedicate their entire day to their artistic practice. I think, though, what it should mean, is that you're doing the work to be full-time. Because, being full-time artistic may not be feasible for a lot of people. Like we gotta eat. We gotta pay rent. Like, it's just what it is. And so, kudos to those who can do it full-time like legit. Like, I wake up in the morning, I do my art, I go grocery shopping in the afternoon, and then I come back to my art, like, kudos! Seriously, like, I am jealous! I don't have it that way, unfortunately. Or maybe, fortunately, depending on how you're looking at it. So for me, full-time means that I'm taking it from, oh, I'm just gonna write for a couple of hours, just to see what it's like, to doing the whole gamut, to doing like workshops with the piece, going to classes, doing the reading. There's so many components to art that's beyond maybe the page, or if you're a painter, or a sculptor, beyond the actual act of art, there's all these things that prep your art that you have to do. And so, that also needs to be included in the, in any conversation when you talk about full-time. Because, you can have, you know, your 9:00 to 5:00, but maybe at 5:01 you're racing to like imprint, to go take a class, you know, or whatever. And that's still full-time.

Reyes:

Yeah, Justin, what do you think about that question, right? What do you, what do you think people mean when they say, "I want to go full-time with my work."

Justin:

Yeah, it's definitely wanting to just make your income, and make a living off of your creative practice. And that's, I truly believe when you first think about that, it sounds amazing, and it's like, oh, my gosh! But, you know, the reality, I've been doing this full-time for over 15 years, and the reality is, it's, it's a feast or famine. You know, when it rains, it pours, and when it's a drought, it's like the damn desert. You know, I won't go for months without selling a painting, but, you know, then all of a sudden I'll sell, you know, one month what I would make in a year. You don't know, and that can, that uncertainty can be challenging if, if you're not used to it, and built to it. Knowing how to save of the high times, for those low times, 'cause they will always come. That it's, you know, and you've got to hustle. I remember when I first got started, it was great, you know, all my friends, you know, bought pieces of support. But afterwards you're, you're having to look at people you don't know to buy your work. You realize you're doing a fourth of painting for me, and three fourths of it is going out and meeting to the galas, to the events, to getting to know other artists, to where, where everybody's gathering, getting your name out there, right? It just doesn't matter how good you are, if no one knows who you are, and where to find you. And so, you're working on your website, and your social media, and all these elements that also take money, as well as time, and are just as important. So you find yourself doing a lot of the things that you may not necessarily thought you were signing up for, but are crucially important. It's tough to make a living as just an artist, just mentally. You know, there's that fight when you get into, when you're just depending on your, your art. Am I, for me, am I painting this because it's popular, it's blue, it's this, it's that, you know, people love that, so am I painting it because of that? Or am I painting it because it's truly what I wanted to do in the nature of active exploring, and creativity? You have that battle. So there's a lot of internal battles, and a lot of reflection you have to do when you become an artist, and going full-time, you're really forced with that. And unless you have, you know, outside money, then, you know, it can be tricky. I'm under the full belief, 100% that you need multiple sources of income coming in. Not depending on your art to feed that, will allow your art to be free in the nature that it was meant to be, for the free creation, and in doing what is truly what you're supposed to express. But when you put that pressure on the work, you tend to, it doesn't come out the way that it should. Whether that's another job, or you have residual income from property or renting, whatever it is, I fully, wholeheartedly believe it takes the pressure off of the creative aspect, and allows you to do the big major things that really help your career. Because, you were able to take the time and without the pressure to, to do it. But then, again, there's that thing that is said about, you see great movies about pressure pushing you to, to excel beyond, you know, all boundaries. But, yeah, that's kind of where I stand with it. I have multiple sources that I work on every day to day, and it really helps cover the overhead, so when I do create it's coming from a pure place.

Icass:

Yeah, just, can I add to that, or actually not add, just like, yes, a wholehearted yes! I worked with a business coach at one point, and that's like the exact advice she gave me. And she told me to think of it this way, and maybe this is something really good for you, for your listeners, that your day job gives, fuels, or not fuels, but so, but... What is the word I'm looking for? Hello, writer. Funds, thank you, funds the, funds the art. And you've got to think about it that way, especially, if you are not liking your day job at all. And I was that, there at one point, that, you know, you need to look at it as a way to fund your art. And you need to also think of it as, if you want to go full-time, right, that it is something that you need to think about as, as a way to put money aside, to be able to go full-time in that way. Because, it is feast or famine! Like I, I remember being a freelancer, and it's just like, sometimes, people don't pay you on time. They just don't. So you need to be able to reconcile that with-

Justin:
Yeah.

Iciss:
Stuff.

Reyes:
Yeah.

Justin:
Yeah, I agree.

Iciss:
Yeah.

Reyes:
So kind of in the, in that interesting topic, just kind of like a side question that may or may not be fun to answer, but, kinda going through like, what have you, like, what do you do, or what have you done to kind of like, quote-unquote like feed some, or fund the, your practice? So like me, let's see, I've been, I've worked at a Family Dollar, I've been a tutor, both private and at a university, or rather a community college. I've been an adjunct, I've been... Now I'm an arts admin, which, I think, when I was an undergrad, or like years ago, I would not imagine myself doing a lot of like arts administration, but it just happens to work out that way, et cetera, et cetera. So could you talk, I guess, Iciss first, like, yeah, what other stuff have you done, to kinda fund that?

Iciss:
I'm gonna preface this by saying, I've been really lucky. 'Cause, I haven't had to do, I haven't had to do any of that. I actually, what I had to do, though, is stay in a job and a career that was sucking my soul dry. Literally, sucking my soul dry. Because, you know, I needed to pay the rent, and I needed to be able to make copies at Kinko's. Unless we run copies at work, of my work, you know, because, I had access to time and space. And so, I've stayed in jobs where I'm just

like, well, I really hate it here, but, they give me a free computer, and I can kind of finagle some time to work on things, right? So that's kind of what I had to do in the past. Now I actually have a job that I really like.

Reyes:

Well, what is it?

Icess:

I am a Professor of English.

Reyes:

Oh, wow!

Icess:

At Lone Star College Kingwood, woo-hoo! No, it's, no, it's super nice, like I love it, I love the gig. And I think the difference, the big difference between past gigs... I was a reporter for a long time, so the past gig, and the current gig. And then the gig in between those gigs is that. I am in a place right now where I'm like, being a writer is an asset. I think that's maybe a thing, like, right? You want to go to a place, if you have to have a full-time gig, go to a place where they look at your art, and you as an artist, as an asset. Because, when you're saying, when you tell them I'm gonna take off these two days to go like work on the structure of this novel, because, it's like an un, unwieldy, they're like, yeah, sure, go for it. Like, pop some stuff online. Make sure you check in once in a while, and, like, enjoy. Versus, like, other places where they look at you, your art, your artistry, and are very suspicious of it. Right? I have also been a freelancer. I've done the adjuncting thing. And, like, kudos to the adjunct, shout-outs to the adjuncts, that is not an easy gig. Especially, when you gotta piece, you gotta piece together a full paycheck. Freelancing was great, I loved the freedom, hated the inconsistency. I've done all those things, so I've been lucky.

Reyes:

Yeah, I forgot to mention, I think at one point I sold plasma.

Icess:

Did you really?

Reyes:

Yeah, yeah, to buy stuff, no groceries, and stuff like that. Anyways, Justin, please. Yeah, same question.

Justin:

That's, it's tricky, I mean, I've done quite a few different things. What was it, specifically, the question?

Reyes:

Yeah. Like, what things have you done before? Like either jobs, or ways to make money, have you, have you engaged with, to kind of fund your practice, before you went full-time, or maybe even during?

Justin:

Yeah, so before, I actually, I sold cell phone accessories, back when Nokia was very popular. And you could buy all the different parts, and light up things, and the antenna boosters, and whatnot, and I was really big into that, just kind of goin'. If you all know where Harwin is in Houston, go down there and set up an account. I loved being a creative business side. My father was very entrepreneurial, so I picked that up, you know, the street smarts. But a lot of the businesses failed, you know, T-shirt company that I owned, to design T-shirts when that was popular, things like that. But, really, what was, kept me going was bartending. Quick, easy money. You know, and it was great. And I agree 100% with Icess, about having your employer supporting, or understanding, you know, your true passion, and giving you some freedom, or leeway in that. And I had some great bosses that understood that, as well, and allowed me to kind of maneuver both ways, when needed. So I really was more in the bartending field going through college, and then, in making money. But saving every penny I had, when I realized art is where I wanted to go. And, say, for about two years lowered my overhead, so all that money could be saved. And I saved it in cash, because, I don't know what it is about it, if I see it in cash, then I'm less likely to spend it. But if it's on my card, and I don't see, I mean, you know, I just spend it. It was very good for me to mentally practice that saving, and then had my first show, and continue there. So I was really lucky, as well, I mean, I, you know... Bold in the beginning. Now I look back, I'm like, oh, my gosh, I don't think I'd, you know, risk that like I did then. It really, you know, that was kind of my beginnings. And then slowly building up a following, to where now I can like, you know, maybe this art collector, or this person isn't buying right now, but there's three others that haven't bought in a month, that they're ready to buy, or, or do a commission, or something. When you build enough out, outside, then, you know, you don't have to have the same person come back and forth every month. So I think it's, that's really when you get into the art world, like you, you want to be able to expand, where your eggs aren't in one basket, where you're depending on one market, or like one second Saturday where people are coming, and that's the only, and if you miss it, 'cause it rained or something, then you don't have any income, like, you really have to be able to have multiple. And, as far as, like, what I do now to make income outside of art, is I own, one of the businesses is Portable Gallery Walls, that I rent out. So it's in the same field of arts. But it took many years to figure out that galas and whatnot needed better walls to exhibit artwork for my colleagues and I, and so, these walls with lights on it. And then, another product, liquid and light switches, this interactive art display for galas and stuff. But all serendipitous, like things that I kinda fell into, because, I was already in the business, and I just found a need or thing that was, that would help. And so, a lot of things like that, published a book, so I'll sell that years back, and just little things like that. I'd love to get into real estate, or things that, you know, are sitting there making money, and can just cover the overhead. Don't need to make a million dollars on like the stock or something crazy, just enough skillsets that when, say, the art world's hurting, like, other things are able to sustain in a level. I cannot stress that enough for

Icess:
Right.

Justin:
artists that wanna become full-time, like it's, you know, that's so important. Whether you have an inheritance, or a partner to help pick up the slack, or you have, you know, a career, now you've saved all that money. Now you can go, like you've, you've gotta have some security or else it will wear on you, and really hurt the art, which is what you wanted to do in the first place.

Icess:
Yeah. Can I ask a follow-up question to Justin, 'cause, I'm so super interested?

Reyes:
Do your thing.

Icess:
Oh, thank you. So the, so the outside income, right, like you were talking about having like the art wall, and whatnot, do you find that like maybe the outside stuff kind of inspires, or maybe informs, or maybe fuels something that maybe you do in your art, as well?

Justin:
Oh, definitely.

Icess:
No?

Justin:
I'll give an example. I wanted to do a huge concept idea, a installation, but that's gonna cost money. And no, you know, unless I go out and search for the, either the grants, or the sponsors that come once a year, and if you miss it, you gotta wait a whole nother year, or, you know, someone to invest in the idea, you're really having to put up your own money for it. And so, a lot of the big ideas that we have about writing this big book, or writing, or doing this big play, or whatnot, it takes money to get it, to get your idea out there, or your dream. Having that second source of income that comes in, allows me to be like, okay, I want to do this, I can do this. It would still be tight on the money, but, I can afford to do this, and put the money ahead in faith that I know that. And so, one of my things, was I did a huge installation. It was 100 linear feet, cost me a fortune to do for this gallery exhibit. And without those other sources, I wouldn't have felt comfortable doing that. Because, I did that installation that, that was very large, and, you know, like who's gonna buy this huge 100 foot? But, from that, a few years ago, now, I get a lot of my huge, a lot of my commissions are based off of that one event that I did, and has really upped my career, because of it. You gotta take those leap of faiths, but you also have to, there's gotta be some income coming from that, or source that's gonna come from it. And it's those big

things you see in the movies, and whatnot, that really propel people's careers in the arts and stuff, taking that risk. But it's-

Icess:
Right.

Justin:
For me, like, when an artist wants to grow to that next level, and do something that they've dreamed about, you really gotta have income coming in to support that from somewhere? And it's a lot easier, and feels a lot better when you can own it for yourself, and it comes from your source. That's one, my example of, of why I, yeah, I go that route.

Icess:
That's, that's pretty cool! Like, sorry, I hijacked your entire interview.

Reyes:
That's all right.

Icess:
Not your entire, this part of the interview. I just find it fascinating how, you know, how like the side hustles, and the things you have to do to fuel the art kind of almost informs the art, as well, right?

Justin:
Yes.

Icess:
I just find that fascinating. There was...so I got laid off of one job before I found the other soul-sucking job, and, one, and, ironically enough, how fate is, had been working with my business coach for a while. And one of the things that she said was exactly what you, what you, what you just said, was that, first thing, she's like, "Well, you've got "to lower your expenses." Which, totally did, by the way! But she also said, "You need to look at this "in a different way. "You've got to look at this "as a way of fueling what you want to do. "You also have to look at this as how it informs your work, "as an artist. "And that you really are putting money aside." Because, you put money aside to fuel your art, or fuel your writing. It wasn't art, because, it was like, "10 Ways to Like Surf at Surfside." It was like stupid stuff like that, that would pay the bills, right? Like, that's gonna help you not be able to write, or stop writing those content things, and start writing the novel, or start writing this. Then we put together a business plan. Okay, I'm gonna do, I'm gonna teach writing this way. This was like 2013, when nobody knew what Zoom was. Ohhh, Zoom! And I was teaching classes online, and doing all this, and that helped fuel and informed my work, as well. I always find it fascinating when people talk about their work. And I'm gonna stop hijacking Reyes interview now, and I'm gonna be quiet.

Reyes:

It's all good, no. I mean, you know, anytime you want, you can do my job for me.

Icess:
Never!

Reyes:
I totally welcome it.

Icess:
I have my own, but, thank you.

Reyes:
It's all good. Yeah, I think both of you touched upon kind of this next question that I have. So I have, I have had times in my life where I had time to just dedicate myself to my work. I was in grad school at one point in my life. There, all I would have to do is teach, adjunct teach a class maybe like twice a week, and the rest of the week belonged to me, and so, like, I would have time to read and write. But then, I found myself getting like very complacent, or lazy sometimes, or I'd be like, I was. I'm bad at keeping strict regimens. But then I've also had moments in my life, times in my life where I've had like three or four jobs at a time. And I would lament, and say like, "Oh, I wish I had more time to work on stuff." And so, I've had both extremes. And I did appreciate when I had part-time work, where I would just like, oh, I've just have to show up for five hours here, and once I'm done with that, I don't have to think about that job anymore. So I guess my next question is like, what are you, what do you feel are the benefits of like kind of the routes you've taken, or like the lifestyle you have, regarding your creative work, and, you know, the way you make income, right? So like, Icess, what do you feel are the benefits of like you being a professor of English, and being a writer?

Icess:
Ooooh! Can I take it back one step, and talk about reporting? Because, there was some-

Reyes:
Oh, please, yeah.

Icess:
There were some benefits to reporting. One of the benefits of reporting... Okay, so I say a lot of bad things about reporting, even in this podcast, but there's, there's some, there were some benefits. And one of the great benefits of reporting, is that I could work on deadline really quickly. Like, I can literally just say, I'm not gonna write when, like, the muse calls. Like I hate that phrase. But I'm not, I'm gonna do my art when I, when the muse calls. No, like, you should do your art like it's a practice, right, you should practice it. So I could just, I could write, literally, I could technically write anywhere. So that was the best thing. 'Cause, you know, that four o'clock deadline, that five o'clock deadline, that three o'clock deadline loomed, and you had to have something, or explain to your boss why you should keep your job. Like that, that was probably the biggest takeaway from journalism, and from my reporting days, so that helped a

lot. I think, the positive about being an English professor, is that you're around words all day, right? You're around, you're around words, you're around these pieces that you're teaching to the students, and what you didn't see when, during your first read of like Harrison Bergeron, or Dr. King's letter from Birmingham Jail, you see it again, and you see it through a fresh pair of eyes. So then, you're looking at it with a fresh pair of eyes almost every time, every semester. So that's been really great. And it's also that your work is also kind of inspired by it. I cannot tell you how many times Harrison Bergeron has inspired something in a piece, or Spider the Artist, with just a short story also inspired something else. So you're around words all day, and then, you're also around beginning writers. Who, they're just throwing a bunch of words on the wall, seeing what sticks, you know, whatever, make it a, make it an essay, you know. What is a thesis, teacher? What is a thesis? Three months in. So... So you're seeing writing as, or I'm seeing my art reflected back at me. And I have to remind myself that I'm constantly learning, even though I've, I've been doing this for a while, I have a whole MFA, like certified master, you know, like whatever. Right? But, I'm always humbled with the students, 'cause they take me right back to, I don't even know how to spell my own name sometimes, right? And I'm just like, "All right, let's take it "through this process." And so, when I'm humbled by that, I have to give myself grace, if I'm not writing that day. Or if I'm looking at something and think it's horrible, or if I'm just saying, you know, I just don't feel like it. Today is Corona day 15th, 11th, 100th, and all I want to do is watch Netflix, and like eat Chips Ahoy. And I will say, "Okay, well, yeah. "And so, let's all take a break. "All 150 of us, we'll just take a break, and like, "today we're just not gonna have class. "Today we're just gonna like chill out, like, you know." So... So that's been the best part, I think, of both, both careers that I've had, is that there's always been something that informs the art, informs the practice, informs the page, and that I can glean from. So I've been really, really, really lucky about that.

Reyes:

Absolutely. Justin, same question, what do you feel are the benefits of the route that you've taken, now, you know, that you're full-time with your work?

Justin:

You know, I mean, just knowing that everything that you go through, whatnot, is reflected in your work. Everything you're around, every... You know, whether it seems very much detached from who you are, or from, like, what you would want to be about, you're documenting that into your work somehow, and it's reflected. And so, I really just look at my experiences on, where I've, you know, traveled, and, and as what I need to document and reflect on. You know, in going back to some of these other side jobs that I've had, you know, there have been, you pick up on the great qualities of what that taught you, even at the time you don't even realize what that is, right? Like things Icess saying, you know, things that you wouldn't think are important to you, leave it, and then you realize how much structure about deadlines is important. You know, for the Portable Gallery Walls deal, being in the art world so much, and doing so many galas, and so many events, and being disappointed with the way they display arts, you know, on easels, and without lights, it really, I found myself wanting to better that for not only myself, but other artists, and for a personal show, and then that led to building these walls, and then that led to being rented out. And it's helped me stay in the art world behind the

scenes, as well as, being the artist on the scene for the galas, but supplying that and being a part of that. So getting more information behind the scenes has been important, and has really propelled and helped my career, because, I get to talk to people that normally, about things that aren't so direct towards art, buying art, and whatnot. I mean, that's, I guess that would be just realizing that everything you do for me is a part of the artist journey, and what we're reflecting. Like what's, what's your purpose, you know? Whether we're doing a dead-end job that we hate, there's something to learn from that. Taking that neg, that, that feeling and, and, and molding it into a piece of work, right? I truly believe the, the work of art the artist creates on many levels is, the artwork doesn't need to be just happy, positive. It can have any emotion, as long as the artist puts that emotion in there, then the work can respect the creator, and then others can feel, or, you know, we're documenting those emotions and turning it into a positive reflection that we can look at and grow from. And others can, too. So through all the bad times, and the good times, no matter what it is, we need to use, as an artist, in that journey that takes us there. And that's kind of how I feel, where I'm, I use those elements into my art career, and kind of move forward and trusting, okay, no matter what, that's whole purpose, is to, is to reflect that, um, and, yeah.

Reyes:

Yeah, no, I know what you both mean. I think, in each part of my life I've, how I've made money has kind of influenced what I've written about, or what I do. Like, yeah, certainly, when I was teaching children like writing, I think, in my mind, like, I was like, oh, yeah, I know how to do this for me, like in my practice. But then, like, when kids started asking me like, "What is that, what are you even talking about?" And then, like I had to pensively think even deeper, like, okay, what does that really mean? Like a metaphor, what is that really? And like, when you have to keep explaining it, you then find new ways to explain it, and you actually find new ways to use the metaphor, right? That's just an example, but, I'm sure you can extend that to many other arts and practices. Yeah, I think, I liked that note of like, yeah, everything you do kind of like feeds, or you take something from it. And so, I guess, y'all have already kind of talked about the limitations a little bit, but I guess the converse of this question, the limitations of the route you've taken, I think you both, you've both already answered that, but just for, just for austerity's sake. So the limitations, right, of the route of any decision we make, for me, right now, I just have one full-time job, and I...I do, I love it, I love the work that I do, I love talking to people, I love what I'm doing right now. But I think, sometimes, in the back of my head I'm like, I could be writing, or I could be doing this. Because, again, the first passion is, I guess, for me, is writing. And so, I feel like then, like the limitation is like, all right, so I dedicate X amount of hours to this part of me, who, like this, this Reyes at this time, this is who he is. And then, at the other times, he is this, he is a writer, he is this. And so, like I feel like I then have to parse out my time. But not so much anymore. I think kind of coronavirus kind of threw, is that everything is off whack, or like everything's melding together. Yeah, like what do you feel are the limitations of the route you've taken, Icess?

Icess:

Time, ironically enough. But not in the way that you would think. Because, I love my job, and I love what I do, I tend to hide in it. I think that's the big limitation. And by hiding I mean, it may

be I'm working on like a difficult scene, or I just can't quite get this poem, or maybe something on the page scared me, 'cause sometimes that happens too, right? And so, oh, well, you know, this journal needs to be graded, and I really should like design this part of the curriculum, and I should really do this. And so, the limitation is, that I have places to hide. And, I tend not to come out until I look around and say, oh, I haven't done, I haven't written in like three weeks, and I haven't done anything in three weeks. I think it's time to go back, right? So that, for me, is probably the biggest limitation, the time, but in that way of hiding, not in the way of not having enough. Especially, Corona, you're right, Coronavirus kind of is, was the great equalizer. We're all in line. And you would think that must be an abundance of freedom. It's not quite an abundance of freedom. You still gotta teach. Essays still have to get written. Things still have to get graded, right? But it's, now I have the luxury of like putting my feet up, and watching some Netflix, while I'm looking for a thesis. That's great, but, at the same time, I can hide a lot easier now, than when I was on campus, right? That's the limitation for me right now.

Reyes:
Justin?

Justin:

I'd say the limitation, yeah, it's having almost too much time to kind of escape without, you know, having your feet on the fire to create, in a way. You know, events and shows are kind of down in the art world right now, as far as getting too close to people, and what that looks like. So you have a lot of idle time to dive into your work, but at the same time, you know, there's a moment where you feel like, okay, well, there's not much to do. And so, you feel guilty not doing anything. But then, you know, for me, creating is not something I can, I can force myself to do, if it's a commission or something. You kind of want to allow it to evolve. But then you feel like you're wasting time, sitting around waiting for that moment. You gotta find other ways occupy your time that aren't going to eat through your pocket book. Right? So my limitations are really just keeping myself busy, and doing all the background stuff that I hate doing, when it comes to artwork. You know, redesigning the websites. Re, you know, working on social media restructuring, you know, my collectors list and, and pre-planning out the future of events and stuff. So it's, it's really making me forced to do the things that I kinda put off for a while. I'm finding my limitations in how much I, I want not to do those things. And so, I will go to my Netflix, or a movie, 'cause I'm, I love movies, so I'll watch the same movie over and over again, if I like it. You know? It's just getting that balance of back to normalcy, or what that's gonna look like, and putting, you know, all the energy in that right direction, yeah. But having no idea what that's gonna be.

Reyes:

Yeah. And, hopefully, this segues into the next question just fine, but like considerations of like what people should consider before making rate, like a decision of taking on a job, or going quote-unquote like full-time with the work? For me, I'm still trying to get used to like what puts me in the best situation to write. I think sometimes I'll sit down and the writing does, I'll sit, I'll sit down and dedicate work, a time to do my work, or my creative work, but sometimes it won't come out. And so, but the thing is, the important thing for me, was that I did that, is that I made

that block of time to do it. Which, again, I could have been doing anything else, but I chose to do that. And so, to do that, I've tried, I've been trying experiments like, okay, if I have a cup of coffee versus, right, or if I listen to this type of music, what best makes me... And so, I think my advice always is like, when people ask me like, "Reyes, how do you like, "you work full-time, you do this, you do that, "and you also write. "What, you know, what advice do you have, "or what should I consider before, "when I make that decision to work full-time, "and write, and blah, blah, blah?" I go, "Just find your happy place, and try to learn "how to be able to recreate it, so that, you best, "you know, follow through with your work "the best way you can." And so, I guess this next question then is, I guess, what are some things that artists should consider, right, whenever they're kind of in your situation, right, where you have a job, you have the work, but then, you have the creative work. And so, what do you think artists, people should consider when they kind of go through that, with that lifestyle?

I guess:

The same thing you just said. Literally, I think one of the things you've gotta consider, one, take it out of the romantic stage. Because, especially, for writers, people think, oh, writers, all you do is sit and write with a fountain tip pen and a beret, at a coffee shop, and just, you know, create art all day, which is a lie. It is a lie, it's a lot of hard work. So understanding, and taking it out of the romantic, and understanding that it, I'm gonna romanticize this for you, and maybe bust some bubbles here, but, it is a second job. It is. But it's the second job you love. And the second job that fuels you. It's a job, a second job that, for many of us, has to happen, in order for us to be able to function sometimes, so, it isn't, but it is a job. Just like you said, you've gotta find your happy place. I used to be able... So my family is loud. How come, how you can not hear them right now in the background, is proof that miracles happen. But, they are loud, they are super loud! Latina family. Half Cuban, half Guatemalan, like it's just loud. TV blares, plus everybody's on a tablet, plus there's music, I don't understand this chaos! But I used to be able to sit in the living room, and put on some headphones and just create. I can't do that anymore, since I've moved back to Houston. So, you have to find your spot, right? You have to be able to say, "This is what I need, "as an artist, to create." I need, personally, I need something that's semi-quiet. Whether it's a coffee shop, or a room with no sound. I need to be able... Smells are really big, so I do candles, or diffuse things. I need to be able to take a break once in a while, and force myself to take a break. So, literally, just write down what you need, as an artist, to create the art. What you need, as an artist, to continue creating the art. This is the second, third, fourth levels of income that you need. What do you need to create a system and process? Ooh, here you go, the teacher. The system, and process, and some practices you need to , or the painting, or whatever. Do you need to do a email blast? Do I have to do a newsletter? Yes, most likely you do, not everybody, but most likely you're you, so how do you get, though, those addresses? Do you need a website? Well, then, get yourself, get thee on WordPress and start learning. Right, like... You need to think about, if you're thinking about this, really sit with the idea of, this is a second gig. Let me take it out of the, sitting in a cafe with a beret situation. What do I need? What do I need to put in place, to make sure things happen? Find thee a really nice candle, essentially.

Reyes:

Thank you. Yeah, Justin. Same question, what are some things creatives, artists should consider, let's say, in your situation, right, before going full-time, or maybe during full-time?

Justin:

Yeah, you definitely need to set the tone in your environment, for sure. You know, whether it's painting, writing. Like I, when I was writing my book, I sat in the same coffee shop, in the same place, drank the same cappuccino at the same time every morning, and that structure, you know, was really important. And it's not something I've ever been really accustomed to, that was the first time, with the music coming down, alpha wave music, and the morning sunrise, and the smells. Everything was just putting me into a very awake, but not fully like stressed about the day and all the busy stuff, but, not asleep either, it was just this great moment. And that, for me, was... You, it takes awareness, like you gotta be, being an artist, and in this order, you had to be very self-aware, or at least curious about the aspects of yourself, and picking up on these moments. And then, not only like jumping in to like what, like when the muse hits you, right? But, okay, that's great if the muse hits you. But if you're gonna wait around a month, week, whatever it is, for the muse hits you, the percentage of that happening on time, when you have the availability of time, you know, and it's just right there, is, you're, is less likely to happen. But if you know those triggers, and you can implement those triggers, to have more control over it, and it trigger you when you are set to do, and have time, when you're not working your other job, or whatnot, those are the things you have to be aware of, to implement. And it may not hit you the way that, you know, on Tuesday it may not hit you, but maybe, if you do it again on Wednesday, it, just something triggered it. And slowly adding to that repertoire of things that will ignite that inside you, allows you to have more control over the creative process, and be more, more creative, and more productive, and efficient with the creative process. And that's, that's what I do with music. And it's not a specific music that I'll listen to. It's just maybe a genre, what I'm feeling in the moment, but I know that's important. I know in the morning time, for me, writing is the most, is the best time to do my deep thinking, and whatnot, with a cup of coffee. You know, and... And I like yell, using yellow pad paper, and pencil. And there's just something about it. Those are the elements that you, as an artist, you start to pick up on and, and start when, definitely when it's a business, when it is your career, like your choice, you. You've gotta take every edge possible to get you in that place, to be the most successful with what you want to do. Until that transition, where you can do it full-time. But, yeah, those, those are the elements in my studio. I like painting late at night. I like music to be loud, so it's just not deafening, but nothing else really is kind of piercing, it's just I'm in that zone with the music and feeling it. And I like painting towards the evening, or late time, especially, when people aren't awake. Either in the morning, or at night, because, you get phone calls, your mind's like, okay, you know, this meeting, that meeting. It's, for me, it's really hard to, mentally, I'm very bad at multitasking in certain elements of like daily life. Like I'm either hyper-focused on this thing, or this. When I'm being pulled in tons of different directions during the day, that's really not good for my art. I really need to kind of fall into it, and have that time to not be awakened from that moment, to really grasp all the elements. It's kind of like juggling, you know? If you have tons of other things distracting, you can't really juggle all the thoughts and everything that you need to, to do what you set out to do.

Reyes:

Absolutely. So then, just out of respect for time, we're almost near the end of our time, and so, I'd like to ask some kind of just random questions that, you know, hopefully, following such, I think, kind of great conversation and deep conversation, but, hopefully, you know, it's like, let us segue out of it, but, just some random questions. Icess, let's see, favorite takeout?

Icess:

Mai Thai. This place called Mai Tai, in North Shore. Fantastic Vietnamese egg rolls!

Reyes:

Very good! Justin?

Justin:

You know, a couple of things, but, I, I really like Pho soup, when we're getting takeout, something soothing. Or, ramen has been a big hit for me, for takeout, for sure.

Reyes:

Nice. Let's see, someone, something everyone in Houston should experience? Icess?

Icess:

No traffic.

Reyes:

Good luck. Nice, Justin?

Justin:

What was the question again?

Reyes:

Ah, you, something you think everyone in Houston should experience once.

Justin:

Oh, in Houston, I was like, okay, oh, my gosh! That was a good one! That was a good one! Oh, man. Let's say the Rothko Chapel.

Reyes:

That's a good one.

Icess:

That is a good one.

Reyes:

Let's see, favorite Houston artist, Icess, or creative?

Icess:
The Mendezes.

Reyes:
Say that again.

Icess:
The Mendezes. Lupe and Jasminne.

Reyes:
Oh, yeah- Lupe and Jasminne Mendez, yeah, absolutely.

Icess:
I'm about to get like 10,000 emails. "I thought I was your favorite!" "I thought I was your favorite!" And I'm just like, "Yo!" Like when you are the, when you are the, like, Beyonce and Jay Z of the poetry and writing world in Houston, like, there is no other answer! So...

Reyes:
Wow!

Icess:
Done.

Reyes:
Nice, Justin?

Justin:
Wow!

Reyes:
Favorite Houston creative artist?

Justin:
I definitely have to say, he's been a good friend and mentor, the David Adickes.

Reyes:
Nice. All right, and then, finally, any upcoming projects? So this is gonna come on October. Anything people should pay attention to, or keep up with you, Icess?

Icess:
Oh, good night! I'm teaching a class through Writespace in October, for those who are doing NaNoWriMo. I help you through a NaNoWriMo, right before you have to start it. I'm having a class through my own brand, Dear Writer, through, about monsters. And my own podcast just came out, it'll still be going through in October, called Dear Write, Dear Reader.

Reyes:

And we'll be sure to post the link to your website, when this comes out. Justin? Any upcoming projects, or things people should check out from you?

Justin:

Yes. I'm gonna be working on some new pieces that are gonna be more sculptural. And so, that's kind of a different direction that I've been wanting to work on. So this time has allowed me to do that. And, I'll be doing some writing, going back into some of the theoretical models that I was designing. I'm gonna kind of dive back into the science side of it. And... Yeah, and put together some, some big exhibits and, and installations next year.

Reyes:

Awesome! Okay, well, thank you, you two, for such an amazing conversation, discussion. I'm glad I picked y'all. Rather glad we picked y'all. It was between me and Angela, my, my colleague. Thank you, so much. I'll see ya later.

Icess:

Thank you.

Justin:

Bye, thank you.

Spokesperson:

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