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SOUTHCOAST Artists Index

This story was collected through our partnership with the SouthCoast Artist Index, led by Ron Fortier.

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Storyteller Name: Tim McDonald

Ron Fortier

This is Ron Fortier with another episode of the In Focus Podcast, brought to you by the South Coast Artist Index and. We have. I think this is so far until Thursday. That's another story. He's the furthest away guest that we've had from from the sunny shores of Fitchburg. Please introduce yourself. I always like to do that chick. You've heard the podcast. I don't know how many page or you already know what I'm getting at.

Tim McDonald

I'm Tim McDonald and I I'm a painter and I I teach at teach, painting and drawing classes at Framingham State. This semester I'm on sabbatical, and so I'm just a painter, so this is great, and actually I probably am the furthest away because right now I'm in Wilmington, NC. So. So yeah, my wife and I have a little place down here, a little 600 square feet.

Ron Fortier

That's right, I got.

Tim McDonald

And it's it's mainly got, it's a as a wintering and writing retreat. And now I'm looking at. Whatever 7 to 12 years retirement probably down here. But so yeah. So I've been working on paintings since I've been down here. I have a little studio. Not in the house down like three blocks from the house. My sub let it just like a space inside. What ultimately is a warehouse. There's some screen printers. Next door and some guys with the business on the other side of me. And so oddly, it's kind of nice like not to have painters all around me and artists all around me, so I can. Just like work. And while conversations about the work are really interesting, it's nice to sort of work in this completely sort of like open space of not having art in my face all day long except my own. Yeah.

Ron Fortier

I got to kind of understand that, especially being an an instructor, yeah. I I. Back in Graduate School at the University of Miami. I'm trying to compress this story. Somebody saw my work and said, Oh my God, it looks just like said tomboys and dumb as I was. I thought it must be another freaking student. I'm not gonna even go and look there. I don't wanna. I don't want my. Head. I don't want that guy in my head.



Tim McDonald

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, it's too late. He's well, he's already. He already oddly lived there. Which? Is so kind of bizarre, but that's another story, too. Yeah. Are you the of the same mind, so to speak, that your brain just chews up what you see around you, and then it spits it. Out again.

Tim McDonald

I think so. I think so. I remember this. Quote from Romeo Bearden. Where you talked about an artist. Being like like a great fish with a wide open mouth and you kind of swim around and just sort of like, swallow everything and you keep what you need and you discard what you don't. And so it possibly could be that, you know, I mean I think we see so much. And I'm continually looking, I still look and look online, but right now it's like some of it, I think has to do with teaching, cause you always have to keep looking, you know, and. I think like when you're teaching. The stuff that you are teaching, the materials that you're working with, they affect what you do with. Your own work, you know. For a while I was and I still teach, collage and mixed media classes there, and I made a lot. Of work like that. Because I I I sort. Of like can't do it from memory. You know what I mean? Tell a lot of drawing. And so, you know, drawing as it plays a big part in my practice. But, you know, I think that as far as like outside influence and stuff like that, I think it's just like now I. I tend to think of like. Affinities and. Affirmations and and things like that, like things that I see that are similar or ideas that are similar. Like right now, the people that are sort of in my mind right now are Thomas Laskowski and Terry Winters. You know, as painters, but I also am thinking about the Tantric paintings of Rajasthan. I don't know if you're familiar with those, but they're these little gashes on paper stuff, yeah.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, they're absolutely. They're gorgeous. They're like little jewels.

Tim McDonald

Yeah, beautiful. Just beautiful abstract paintings. But they have another purpose and that's the way I've been thinking about work. You know, laskowski is kind of like translating experience into painting, not translating the experience. As a painting so that people can understand the experience. By translating the experience into painting like what is it, how does it manifest in process and material? You know it doesn't illustrate it. It doesn't make a picture for somebody so. Of what that experience is, but it it's more like an ambient kind of thing, yeah.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. No, I understand completely and. I'm thinking. When you when you've been painting, have you ever. You know, you're you're doing a piece and then all of a sudden left field right field wherever it came from, out of the blue bang, you're hit with this incredible revelation. Yeah. And you say, oh, what the hell? I'm gonna. Go with it, which is nowhere even near what you're in. Original tracking was your original intent on the piece, and then you do it and you look back and you go. Who the hell did that come from? And now you're like, hmm, I wanna see the next one. Where is that one gonna go?

Tim McDonald

Yeah, there's that one going to go. And and I'm thinking like when I came down here, the only parameters I. Had for myself was. I was making. I was going to use. A diamond format. And they were all going to. Be two by two. That's mainly because I'm going to need to ship them back to. Massachusetts when I'm.

Ron Fortier

Done. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.



Tim McDonald

Because I do have some 4 by 4 foot canvases back in my my place in in Fitchburg. But. You know, just it's just untenable just to bring them here, but then also to get them back. So, you know, I've been here. 8 weeks I've made eight paintings. You know, I've just been, like, working. I go to sleep. Yeah, I go to school to every day. I think about it. It's like it's like been a while since I've just. And I think this is like not having other people around.

Ron Fortier

God, you're slow.

Tim McDonald

I've just focused on the problems of painting. And I'm not thinking about. The stuff that is not penetrating is like stuff like about theory or about about history, or about anything like that. It's just like, you know, I I there's a, there's a lake in the middle of Wilmington, Greenfield Lake and I walk there with my dog or myself, usually with the dog and a pair of binoculars. And I walk around, you know, probably 3 or. Four times a week. Tremendous amount of bird life here. Everything from like black crowned night herons, great blue herons to little things like orchard Orioles. You know, there's alligators in the lake too, you know. They're just waking up. My wife and I took a paddle there yesterday in our kayaks. Right. And we saw like, basically a dozen alligators, you know? And. You know, and I walk around there every day, you know, and and it's like, you know, when I'm when I'm experiencing that kind of stuff and sort of sharing place with these other animal consciousness. That's the stuff that I'm I'm sort of like trying to translate into painting, not like things about how do you make a painting, composition, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, all that other stuff. It's just like, how does this? How do I make a painting that relates to to to? Maybe these ideas about not even ideas experience is about being in that kind of like deep time experiencing like what I've been calling. Ancient Cape Fear. Because we're in the Cape Fear watershed. So I think about all of these, these ideas or notions or whatever you want.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah.

Tim McDonald

To call them. That direct experience, it's it's of it. It's visual. It's it's auditory, you know, it's it's tactile. It's all those things. But it's also in time. And so I I think about that like it's the present with these things have been going always been going on with this with this other kinds of life and they'll continue to go on unless of course we hit that mass extinction which everybody talking about. So who knows what's going to happen with that, you know. But the ideas that come to me are much more poetic than than maybe painting wise or artistic wise. They come like. Like I had this thought the other day was like, you know this Wren was singing as Carolina Wren was singing. Standing on a branch, he's only about this big, you know, 3 or 4 inches long.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah.

Tim McDonald

Singing like he's got a, you know, Marshall Stacks. And my thought was like.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim McDonald

That red knows the origins of the universe. You know or or of the world of the world that we begin in that when consciousness and that's. What's coming, you know?



Ron Fortier

Or just gotta find a partner really quick.

Tim McDonald

And that's. Yeah, that's all. Yes, that's all part of that. Other that other thing, you know. And so I know it sounds it sounds a little bit woo and stuff like that, but I don't think it that's like it's not. Super spiritual and it's not. It's not magical or mysterious, it's it's just like the the depth. Of the reality of it for me.

Ron Fortier

What is, you know? Yeah. I mean, yeah. I mean, you know, we, we we, we labeled those things, you know, mysterious, supernatural, spiritual. But, you know, I had an instructor at.

Tim McDonald

Concrete. It's concrete reality.

Ron Fortier

SMU, Southeastern Massachusetts University, now University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Herb Cummings, and he always used to say one man's asparagus is another man's broccoli.

Speaker

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ron Fortier

And he was a very Zen guy. A whole other story about his war experiences, that sort of. He was a. Quaker that became a Buddhist or practiced some of the tenets of it. But before we get into your background, I'm gonna go back to the first time I think I, quote UN quote met you through your work. Yeah. And my reaction to your work was. *** ** * *****. Wow, this guy is either crawled into my head. Yeah, or I've crawled into his head and I gotta talk to this guy because. They're our painters. Is a friend of mine, Bob Radesky, Robert Brodsky. Who? He says I'm one of the few people that can look at his work and know exactly what. He's thinking, yeah. Which is kind of, I don't know. There's a label creepy or really cool. There are these little experiments that you've made. Are very very similar in nature to the experimentations that I've done. So we're going to get to that. The second thing is this is the first time I've actually seen your face because I have looked. I am low for an image of you and it's like missed the Mysterium. I mean, you don't exist. I mean, if Google can't find you for. God's sakes.

Tim McDonald

Yeah. I mean, there's pictures of the out on the Internet or. Anything like that, you. Know. Yeah. You know, we took a few pictures at when David and I, David Baggerly was a a dear friend of mine. And he's and actually. He's someone who can look at my work and get. A grasp of. It too and. Hanging out and having conversations with him, he's had some influence. On me, I've been bringing a lot. Of color, yeah. Into my work down here, which was starting to come in with some glitches and watercolors that I was doing like over the winter and trying to get some momentum going before I came down here. But. You know, I had a show. I had two shows with him. The first one, did you see our show at at at three? Yeah.

Ron Fortier

Hatch at S&G. Yeah, I I didn't get a I had a gallbladder blow up on me.

Tim McDonald

Oh yeah, that's right. That's right. So that thing I showed there was quite different. It was older, it was from a few a few years back. But I kind of forgot the question. Oh, but you know, are we going back to, like, no images of me? And first time you see my? Face it's like, you know, I just put art up. Instagram is the same way. I just I put



art up or art that I see or or things from nature like the other day I was in Greenfield Lake and and the frogs were making a tremendous racket, you know.

Ron Fortier

Exactly, yeah.

Tim McDonald

It was beautiful. It was like all different types of frogs just singing, you know? Yeah. And so I just. Turned on the video and pointed it at the lake with the audience with the audio on and then I just put it on Instagram. You know, it's like a frog chorus morning. You know, that's it. That that's the stuff informed of the work. It's not painting, not painting history, you know. Not not just. Anyway, all that stuff.

Ron Fortier

But that. Always comes in but, but it's all valid. It's all part of the influx of of things that. I mean, when you said that I flashed right back to the University of Miami, we lived on off of Ludlum Rd. SW 44th St. we're on the edge at that time of the Everglades. It's and y'all being Yankees. And like air conditioning, that's for rich people. We can tough this out, you know. Plus, it was expensive on a. Student budget. So we'd have the windows open at night and. All you could hear is. I mean maybe like, I mean like after a while. Like, yeah, but you know so much for communing with nature, you know? So going in fact, I just did a podcast with David yesterday. That one was really good. He that's his second podcast. But as I tell everybody, this is not a one and done. By the way, Tim, you know, I always want to go back and read. There's so much. I mean, we're not just pages in a book.

Tim McDonald

Yeah, yeah.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Books and David launched the first of a topical series called the Van Gobel. Yeah, and where an artist can just pretty much talk about and focus on their struggle. To get exposure to get notice, to get paid. You know that kind of. Thing so. Let's go back to your background. You know, when were you bit by the bug? When you know the whole 9 yards, you come up from your first set of crayons, the schools you went to?

Tim McDonald

Yeah. You know, I think it was. I I always drew. I always drew and a memory that I have is, you know, I was born in Amesbury, Mass. But when I was five, we moved to Warwick, RI, a suburb of Providence and. But we go back to visit my grandmother and sometimes stay over, you know, being New Englanders, you know, a 2 hour drive is definitely an overnight. Trip, you know? Yeah.

Ron Fortier

Free lunch.

Tim McDonald

What I remember is, so my grandmother used to say, I mean my my grandparents were were probably the. You know everything from, like, squeezing the little chips of soap together, even when you can still buy a bar soap. She did all that stuff. She would save the shirt cardboards cardboards to come inside shirts on my. Grandpa's shirts.

Ron Fortier

Exactly. Yeah, you're done. With the laundry on new short.



Tim McDonald

Yeah, she would give them to us with pencils and stuff like that to draw, and that's what I remember, you know, drawing on those things and then, you know, just like seeing the Sunday funnies. And we started with cartoons and copying the cartoons and then moving on from that. And then when I got interested in sports, I used to draw sports figures and all kinds of things. I never really thought about it. We had art classes in school. But they weren't there to look. Encourage you. To become an artist, it was. You know, part of the rounded education, you know, I think it was considered much more part of the curriculum than the way they treat it now. In many cases, they don't treat it at all, but. You know, I drew through high school, you know, and while I had an intense. Once it became like 15 years old. Like intense affinity to music and stuff like that, I think I never had the patience to. To learn an instrument. It's kind of like if I couldn't do it right away. I decided I didn't want to do it or it wasn't. No, but I could always listen. But anyway, that's another story. But. But I think like, you know, even like drawing pictures, you know, musicians, they always talk about, you know, they picked up the guitar and started playing songs so that they could meet girls, you know, for me it was kind of. I thought if I could, I could impress somebody with drawing, you know, then maybe they might like me, but nobody really. Nobody was really that impressed.

Ron Fortier

You know? Yeah, it's it's funny because when you.

Tim McDonald

Yeah, I kept.

Ron Fortier

When you go back to your early beginnings, yeah, I know about you, but I'm looking back and I'm saying there's nothing here that would indicate what I am now like visually, you know, anything.

Tim McDonald

I would say though, when I really started to realize that that it was just like something like expressing myself or having an idea and making an image. UM. It probably started when I started when I started. Like when I started realizing that probably when I started, you know, using drugs in the middle of high school, you know, and also seeing other things, you know, I would see like like the because I'm I'm I'm 59 years old. So I entered high school in 1974. So it's not that far.

Ron Fortier

Off from no, it's only three years away. From me, yeah.

Tim McDonald

Psychedelic era. And so I would see like. Images and magazines, music magazines, stuff like that. The posters that came from. That, yeah.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, Peter. Max.

Tim McDonald

Yeah, but even like the concert posters, like the mouse and mouse and Kelly. And yeah, yeah. Yeah. But even beyond that, like the prog rock bands had, like, Roger Dean of the Yes album covers and all that kind of stuff, you know, Pink Floyd, it was actually more like graphic design.

Ron Fortier

Fritz the cat.



Tim McDonald

Although it was like drawing. And it was much more comic like, you know, God, I can't believe his name are crumb people like that.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, OK, you cause I'm and you're talking. I'm going. Ohh. Crap and Beyoncé.

Tim McDonald

Yeah. So you know, I did a lot of paintings and stuff like that. It was I was. Really like more. Of an illustrator you know? And when I went to college at the University of Rhode Island, I had no. Idea what I wanted. To do and no idea what I wanted to do it. Was just like I applied. To college, everybody was applying to college. Yeah, and. And so I went.

Speaker

Me too.

Tim McDonald

And I was basically oddly, it was just like, you know, I like to write a little bit. So I was just like, what's what's writing like journalism? I had no guidance at all, like through high school. And my folks didn't really, it wasn't, you know, it's not their fault. It was just like, yeah, I think, like, my lack of drive and and or whatever. You know, they had, they just said go to college. You know, you know, you know, I wasn't a good undergrad, but I took art class. I found that I could take art classes.

Ron Fortier

Yes. Yeah.

Tim McDonald

So I was. Like, oh, that's the thing, because I couldn't. Even I couldn't do them in high school. Because I was in the college prep program, you know, I was considered a smart kid in the college prep college prep program and taking our classes wasn't part of that. Those were electives. Those were like, you know, and the way our, the way our school viewed them, it was a place to put the kids. Most of the kids who were, like, vocational or the other ones that were. You going to drop out or whatever didn't fit in somewhere else? They know that even though in those classes I didn't feel like I fit in anywhere and maybe I should have been over there, you know? But I didn't know that either, because I didn't know that that was an option, really. And then what I found that was an option in college. I took a drawing class. It was, it was odd and and strange to me. You know, just to see all this stuff and some kids with some real skills, you know? And I struggled a lot with it. I struggled a little bit, but I was. If I was OK, you know, and I, I really didn't get the bug I spent. I spent more time. Cultivating our artistic persona. Yeah, and laying the groundwork for further for future addictions, then, then, then and going to shows. Going to hear music and stuff like that. Because then by then it was like the beginning of the punk period, you know? And so everybody was in. A band. Everybody was in it, you know. Just go to chef, you know. And so that's what I was. Doing was terrible. Undergraduate. Yeah. But I got out of school. I managed to survive. It took me 5 years. I got out of. There and with with. I want to say. That you. Know I hate to say this, but you know some people say your art degree is useless. Well, mine undergraduate art degree was pretty useless and that wasn't not anything about them. That was all on me. You know, I just did not participate in the. Way that I could have. I can Fast forward. I lived in several places around Rhode Island. You know, Newport, Providence, whatever, you know, continuing to. Just see music here. Music. You know, I was sort of like had a connection to all the scenes in some where the peripheral way or very direct way and probably the problems I met David sometime in the 90s you know by then it was it was after I quit drinking. That I started, I think to really take aren't making seriously. Still living in Providence, wasn't thinking about Graduate School or anything like that. I was just working a job and.



Ron Fortier

You spent a lot of time with the Met.

Tim McDonald

Spend some time at the Met. We're going to operate hotel and the Met, you know, back on the other, you know, in the old oldest location, you know. And then after that at the Met. And then after that it was the Rocket Club baby had, you know, saw Nirvana, that there, that was amazing.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Yeah, that's.

Tim McDonald

UM, but. I think it was after I quit drinking. You know that I. Began taking it seriously because I looked back and said I've been making the same painting for the last 10 years. You know, it's sort of like Arrested Development. I saw it that way. I understood it as a risk of development. So sort of staying in the same place and so. You know, and then then from there, I just sort of. Did it, but it was like. At a certain point, my wife and I. Moved to Tennessee, she got a teaching job teaching English down there to small liberal arts college, and I got a studio in the produce shed of a of. Farm organization that we worked in down there worked with down there. They did organic farming and stuff like that and they had a room. And so I traded doing art classes on the farm for a space. But it was really. Pretty lonely, you know. So I decided to go to Graduate School and there was so I would have somebody to talk to. You know, there was some painters, but it was like.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Now look at you now. You don't wanna talk to anybody.

Tim McDonald

Yeah, but it was like there were people there. They were mostly Sunday painters, you know, so when I.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah.

Tim McDonald

Like trying to talk about something they didn't really know what I was, what I was getting at, so really lovely people and they made nice work. But it wasn't, you know, the same. So I ended up going to East Tennessee State University and in Johnson City and had a great experience. I loved Graduate School. Yeah, so much so that I didn't do it in two years. Three years. And so I spaced it out. It took three years and. It was great. It was great. I just sort of like stripped everything away that I had done before. And started over and. Had a my second year. I don't want to call it a fallow period, but it was like there's things like I started making these abstract paintings that were kind of about the landscape and stuff like that. In my first year, my. Second year, there was a part of me that wanted to go back to doing representational work, which I had done before, you know, and not that I didn't do it successfully, but I didn't really have a direction. I was just like trying all kinds of things and. And then I discovered. And caustic when I was there, I took a workshop and in caustic painting and so I. I did that and tried not to be seduced by the therapist and tried to make actual things, you know. And ended up working on paper and incorporating a lot of drawing and stuff like that into it. And that was my thesis work. I don't even know if it's on my website, it might be mud and ashes is what the what the final thesis project. And while I was in Graduate School, I went into the teaching market. I decided I taught as a graduate assistant and. I liked it and. I didn't. I had a few interviews while I was still in my last year Graduate School. You know, because I was in my last year Graduate School. No one. Was going to hire me.



Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah.

Tim McDonald

So each year I had a whole bunch of interviews and I ended up taking the job at Framingham. I got, I got, I got a bunch of offers too. I think it's because I was older. You know, I'm like, I'm coming out of Graduate School at 45, not 25.

Ron Fortier

What year was this, by the way? OK. Yeah.

Tim McDonald

So my life experience and stuff like that. I think actually helped. So so that ultimately that background and then we moved back up here when I got well here, it's North North Carolina, but to Massachusetts when I when I took the teaching job there, I've been there for 14 years. I love it. I have great colleagues. They're like, they're wonderful people, you know, great art, great artists and wonderful. People, good teachers, yeah.

Ron Fortier

I've heard a lot of good things about Fitchburg just in, in general, not the art program specifically, but.

Tim McDonald

Oh, no, no, no, no. I'm at. I'm at Framingham state.

Ron Fortier

Ohh, Framingham state. I'm sorry. Yeah, alright.

Tim McDonald

Yeah, yeah, they don't. Fitchburg State does not have Fine Arts. Have graphic signs.

Ron Fortier

That's probably why I never heard anything about it then.

Tim McDonald

They grab some Framingham we have. Yeah, I have great colleagues. But I, but I I feel bad for them right now because they're. Trying to teach online.

Ron Fortier

Ohh yeah, it's messy. I was still at the bookstore where CPA faculty member walked in. I kind of recognized her. I didn't know what her discipline was, and she was just floating around like somebody who. Had no idea where they were going. She was just walking around and and I I started talking to her. You know about the inevitability, what was going to happen? And she said, Oh yeah, everybody's going to be teaching online. That's wonderful. Yeah. How do you do ceramics online?

Tim McDonald

That's that was my my that was my question.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah.



Tim McDonald

Professor Kerry struck at Framingham State. She's Grace Ramos is a great teacher. I knew that was going to be her struggle. You know, it's just like. How do you how do you do that? How do you? I mean, of all the, you know, like tactile processes. That's like hands in dirt you can't do.

Ron Fortier

Ohh yeah, but you know.

Tim McDonald

Kind of, you know.

Ron Fortier

I think in the long run it's going to make us all better. As teachers. I mean, you know, even though, oddly enough, I spent a couple of decades teaching, marketing and advertising in the College of Business. And the only MFA ever to do that at at UMass. Not by not wanting. Well, yeah, it was. It was a great opportunity. I was asked to teach because I spent. You know, all my years, my career in advertising and marketing because I couldn't, you know, you gotta do what? You gotta do. And because of that, I felt like it was an asthma, you know, walking into into the art building because, like, oh, that's a guy to tie. They'll talk to him. But I think it's gonna make us better teachers. I was just. Speaking with my daughter, my youngest daughter. And I'm doing this thing for the. Dartmouth Cultural Center. And I said, you know, I really need a hand to do this. And I'm the guy telling everybody how to do this. But now I've got to do this. Yeah. And I've done hybrid courses before teaching marketing, but this is a little bit different. So I said either I'm going to video you and you follow my instructions cuz I have a drawing technique. Some guy in Canada scooped me. Unfortunately, it was. It was called. You know, anyone can draw, which I really. Yeah. Yeah. Believe that. And I've I've done it in college level. When I was at CCR. Right. And I said or you're going to video me while I'm talking about because it's about biodynamics and addressing the the easel, blah blah blah blah. So but there are a lot of people who are just. Either Luddites cantankerous, frightened to death, yeah. I really think in the long run we're all going to come out of this conceptually, maybe professionally, maybe a whole bunch of other things, way better than we. Came into this thing, it's.

Tim McDonald

Quite possible. You know, my thing is I'm not necessarily. I mean, I'm not techie by any by any means, but I. Can figure it out but. What the uncertainty of what will happen in the fall? Yeah, we'll go back or not. It's like I can just see when I my plan, if all goes well is I'll be here through the end of June and then I'll I'll head up there. Back up there in July if it's if it's safe, so to speak, right. You know there's like over 3000 deaths in Massachusetts. So Baker might not be opening the state up at any time soon. You know. But but but my plan, that's what I gotta start preparing for my classes. Like, really intensely, like right away because I may have to do 2 versions. What's the live version and what's the online?

Ron Fortier

Well, I've had those discussions all morning because you know, my paycheck is dependent on how many, how many teachers I can convert from face to face to to online. And I'm telling them, you know, and I know this to be true. I mean, you can start. A Facebook. Group page you can. You know, I mean, there's so many different ways of doing. There is no one way. But yeah, stop and think about Bob Ross, who was entertained and educated people for, yeah, 30 something years.

Tim McDonald

He demystified it.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Now if you could. In chapter Rizing your course and I'll forget this is community learning, so you're probably



gonna have Max 12 contact hours. Yeah, and then you into disperse that with a zoom meeting where now you've got your class in front of you, displayed in front of you and say, OK. You got questions? Hold up your drawing, you know, so you can actually, it actually can work that way. It can work on both planes, you know.

Tim McDonald

To think Blackboard has things too where you can. You know, Blackboard collaborate and stuff like that.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah. Oh, I've. I've. I've done blackboard. I've done web, CT. I mean it. I just got. So when I was at Bristol Community College teaching art history, I just got so sick of it because I don't know why they kept changing the damn platforms. But you know so that I have a really killer website going, you know, and I went for the trainings and I got all the certificates and I got Gold stars for being so clever. And then they would change the damn platform. Was like screw this. Let me let me ask you along your path in life, other than your grandmother. Names Barry. Who were the people? That influenced your product. You guided, you inspired you. I mean, I'm lucky I can name 4 instructors alone at undergraduate school and 1 instructor in high school. How about you?

Tim McDonald

When I was young, I think. That I had like. Support from my folks, but at the same time it wasn't like pursuing it. I didn't. Say I want to. Be an artist you know. Put it this way. They never discouraged. Me from drawing. Whenever I drew so so there was that and. High school. Nobody except like some friends who would say, wow, that's trippy, you know. And then undergrad, I had a photography teacher named Bart Parker. Well, I learned an awful lot from. Let me back up a little bit. So when I. Was in high school. I had an English teacher, Miss Petrella. Who to sort of recognize something a little bit? Different about me. I was a clown in class. I used to like mess around and blah blah blah, but she. Knew that I wasn't. An idiot, you know? And so you know, it was right around was that year that I had. I really started smoking a lot of weed and so and and and my grades fell. Off, you know. I just wasn't doing the work, you know, and so and I was much more interested in in doing these other things than doing school. I was bored, basically. And so, you know, I I didn't care about The Secret Life of Walter Mitty, you know? But what she did was she gave me a copy of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's, a Coney Island of the mind. And bam, it was like, wow, here's somebody who gets me right. And there was one class where she let me bring in a bunch of records and play music in the class. Things that I found like that I thought would be like, poetically. Relevant, but not necessarily relevant, but but had a certain amount of of. Something that I found interesting and so I brought in. I brought in Bob. Dylan's blood on the tracks? And there was a band from New York, kind of a folk band. You remember a band called? Aztec two step.

Ron Fortier

Yes, yes.

Tim McDonald

Yeah. So their first album that had the the song, the Persecution and restoration of Dean Moriarty on it, and I played that and I played songs from Blood on the tracks. And I played songs. From Hwy. 61 revisited and. UM. It was like it was like I had my moment in high school there, you know, with that teacher. And so she showed me that she got me, you know? And so she she she began to approach me differently, you know. And not as someone who was troubled, but someone that just saw things not like the way everybody else did. Yeah, somebody that didn't fit. Yeah. And so even though I played basketball and I and I was sort of like a suburbs kid, you know, just like whatever. I was just like in my interior life, I think was much different. And what I was interested in. And so.

Ron Fortier

Or somebody who didn't fit.



Tim McDonald

So that was great. Undergrad because I wasn't paying so much attention. You know, again, it was like English teachers. That had they. They opened my my eyes to. To forms of literature, you know I had an English teacher that introduced me to the music. Of Philip Glass. Yeah, he said. You should go to the and actually the Philip Glass Ensemble performed at Uri while I was there and he said you should go to that performance and it was free. And I went. I was like. What is this? You know, it's like. And so these are that that like brought into my experience and because of that, remember back in the day with no Internet, you had to look for ****. There was sort of an engagement, you know, so it was a little bit different, you know. So I was curious. I had to find it. I found out about him and because of him I found out about Richard, Sarah and I found about. I found out about this.

Ron Fortier

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim McDonald

I thought about other composers and that's. How I found. Out about Philip Gustin, my teacher. Showing me this stuff, you know. You know, I had a couple of of you know, some of the painters were like second generation apex painters or they were geometric abstractionists and stuff like that. And and it was just not where my head was at the time, you know, and I didn't. I didn't understand that. And they didn't understand me. And so, you know, and plus I had this sort of like rebellious streak that I wasn't going to listen to anything they said. I had. I had a drawing, my first drawing teacher was a sculptor named Richard Calabro, and he. He was sort of a delightfully goofy, and so he was he was great. I I just liked. Him, you know. But yeah. Richard Calabro, some English teachers Jules Siegel. He's the one who gave me Philip Glass, a few others, but really. It wasn't. It really wasn't until I got to Graduate School many years later, you know, really started looking. You know, David, I think, David, when I met him in the 90s, he was he was a good influence on me. Just conversation wise and to see somebody as engaged with practice as he was, you know.

Speaker

UM.

Tim McDonald

But once I get to Graduate School, I have a professor named Mira Gerard, who was really great. He's the chair of the art department down East NC State right now. She's now the Dean of of of the Schools of Art and Music. I needed the evangelist. She was great and also Catherine Murray, who taught sculpture. She's retired now. They were just like, really great influences. And then while I was there at East Tennessee state. Mel Chin was there as an artist in residence. That's conceptual artist and graduate students and undergrads got to work with him on a project. We built a giant sculpture. We built a WMD. Yes, it was right around.

Ron Fortier

Weapon of mass destruction.

Tim McDonald

There was a warehouse of mass distribution.

Ron Fortier

OK.

Tim McDonald

In the shape, but it was in the shape of a Peacekeeper missile. You know all the specs were there same size when we made it out of plywood and all these donated materials and it was amazing. If you look up melchin. WMD online you'll you'll be able to see it. It won some prizes at the Orange Fair down in in Houston. It got used by food



not bombs and some other people. So the idea was we tried to use it in, in, in East Tennessee, in Appalachia to distribute like literacy materials and stuff about. Citizenship because of the the migrant community there that worked on farms, there's a lot of poverty there too. Appalachia is still in many ways, Appalachia, and so, you know, the winter clothes and stuff like that, you know, you parking at a church and people can come and get stuff. But. You know, it was very it was. Very cool project. Yeah. So those were big influences. And then after that, it's just like, oh, oh, I need to back up a little. Sorry. Like, Yacking away here. This is, this is the thing I can't forget because I was not a very good undergraduate and I I didn't.

Ron Fortier

No, it's fine.

Tim McDonald

Pay that much attention in art history. I knew that there were huge gaps in what I what I thought, what I knew or what I thought I knew. And so once I stopped drinking and started taking myself seriously as an artist to a certain extent I used to camp out on Saturday morning and Saturday morning. Ritual was to go to the Providence Public Library with a thermos of coffee and go to the start of the. Stacks of the art books and just look at stuff. Read with a notebook, writing notes and that sort of started this thing for me. It's like I have tons of these kinds of things. It's all, you know, my painting I'm writing when I'm reading, I'm writing, you know, it's not coming. As mostly just notes all my sketchbooks are mostly writing. There's a little bit of drawing, but. They're mostly writing. And you know connections that I make between one thing and another. Something I read, something I see something, Mark, I make. Oh, this is this and this. And that's where I make the connections. And I think that goes back. To that time I spent in the library. Yeah. So that was a huge influence on me. Connecting with our history while I self-taught a lot of it, you know I had. So if it was just like a refresher. Ohh yeah, that's what that is, so.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, that makes a a big difference because when you just said that, I just flashed on Evan Firestone, Doctor Evan fires. Who was my art history instructor at SMU? I had taken the prerequisite ancient medieval and then renaissance, the modern and but with him I took an ask, beating every time I walked into his. Mushroom. Yeah. And it's, you know, even though my grades were not. Good. Yeah, there was just something there between the two of us. I learned more about composition from this man than I did in studio classes.

Tim McDonald

Yeah, that's the same thing with photography. For me, yeah.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. And it wasn't that they were poor, poor at it. It was just that that's all he focused on. And in fact, I caught up with him a couple of years ago. I was thinking about going for a PhD and he said. You know, he knew that I could do it. And you know, predicated on on a story I getting back to, but but you know, he knows like a dozen Harvard PHD's and Yale PHD's who can't find a job. But I remember the last about 3 courses. Away from the ends cause I took they I took them as electives, he said. Why do you keep coming back into my class? I said because I'm going to prove to you I can get an A in your class and I don't want you to give me an A unless I prove to you I can get an A and you know, it's truth be told, I was working like 40 hours back then, working at scooping ice cream and cooking and stuff like that. And I was our history was like one of those things you kind of had. To learn but. You didn't really want to learn. And with him, it was like by there was like Chinese water torture in a good way, where drip by drip, he was breaking into my my. Skull. Yeah, and I, I I will never forget him for that. You. And just another thing I wanna ask you. It came out of your mouth and then this these references to music all the time when you said Marshall Stack and tell me if I'm wrong. OK. The first thought that came into my mind Marshall Stack was blue cheer out of focus. Marshall stack. I mean we're talking those big *****. Right. They were like 4 by. 8 cases or something.



Tim McDonald

Yeah. For me, it was. Yeah. For me it was.

Ron Fortier

Jimi Hendrix. OK, alright. So we yeah, we are the same mind when it comes. Down to that. When all was said and done, I mean, you know, we talked about the the instructors that that that influenced you. And especially you I think are probably one of the first. Full time instructors that I have had who still currently teaching, you know, out of the 30 something interviews that we've done. Two questions. Number one, do you feel you've made an impact on any one of? Their lives.

Speaker

Or did you?

Ron Fortier

Have a bunch of **** * in class that were just like you when you were sitting in class.

Tim McDonald

Oh, I have that too.

Ron Fortier

OK, if you understand them better than you understand the ones who you know were always like the artists in class and they did the yearbook cover and you know.

Tim McDonald

So mostly those are the ones that, that, that are never going to teach me anything, right as an instructor because they're trying to do what they think I. Where's the other ones? It's always like the so-called poor student that you focus on. You know, they take all your attention, you know, some of them just don't.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah.

Tim McDonald

Want they don't want? To be they don't learn right others. It's just like you got to find a way. But it's always like my my point of view is I'm not teaching a group of people, I'm teaching a. Bunch of individuals. And I just have to find a way to. How do I teach that? How do I teach this kid? How do I teach that kid? How do I teach this kid some? It's similar some it's, you know, I can teach you this one, this one, this one, this one with the same sort of thing. Another one. I have to find another way in. And. And oftentimes it comes from just trying to find out what they're interested in having a conversation.

Ron Fortier

Anyone that sticks out in particular? That was a, you know, a hard case or or, you know, you just had that thing from the very first. Day and you sit back and you go. God, I can't believe this person is where they are and. It feels kind of cool, especially if they call you up and say, hey, if. It wasn't for. You I'd be in.

Tim McDonald

The penitentiary? Yeah. No, no, I I don't think that way. Because, you know, oddly, they're all really good kids. Ultimately. Yeah. You know, like our kids. And Framingham state. A lot of them come out of working class families. We don't have a lot of. Kids coming from privilege. The ones that do do maybe have a sense of entitlement and they just don't want to do the work, but they still want a good grade. Because they've always gotten their way, you know, but most of them. Most of them are. Looking for you to teach it? You know. We have



this. I have this one student. She was in my. As a freshman, she was in my color design class and the equivalent of 2D design. And UM. She struggled a little at first. And then. It's a couple of kids I can. Think about she was very quiet. But boy, when we started doing collage stuff. In that class, she found her. She found her material. She hadn't necessarily found her voice yet. When she found her material. And I watched over a period of four years, this kid kind of blossomed, you know, where she she started to find her material. Not in any, of course, as I was teaching when. She took a printmaking class. And then. She took collage with me in advanced drawing with me, and then she was in the senior seminar and she had her senior. Show and she had all that stuff like her upper levels were actually were all in my classes and her stuff was brilliant. It was really good. Now, now, now there's some of it that you could say is like, that's a little derivative of Lorna Simpson or. Where there's a young artist out there doing these collage things called Deborah Roberts. If things are really interesting, you know, but there's also an influence from Romeo Beard and it's like what she was able to do was take all these influences, things that she had. Seen and looked at because we encourage him to just keep looking, you know? Plus you're an undergraduate, you know, it's like how original you're going to. Be when you're. 22 years old. When exactly? When you just starting to absorb things. But she was able to find her story in her language with this collage. Language with this collage. Stuff and it was great and it was really great she had. A fantastic senior show. Another kid, just like, really shy again. He was in my color design class. He only took a couple of classes with me, I don't know. Took the collage class with me or I just had him in the senior seminar I had him in coloring design. I didn't have him in several classes, but I followed him through his time there and he is another kid who found his voice in printmaking. Very, like, super shy, hardly talk during critique. You could hardly, you know. But then all the time. By the time he got to be a scene. Brilliant student had a great show, you know, as a printmaker, you know he's out of school now. The other one just graduated a couple of years ago. No, I have good kids. They they come through and they they're. They're it's a challenge. I mean, a lot of them are doing stuff that their families don't understand, you know, and a lot of them are doing stuff that that, that they have for the full that because their parents are. Not like my generation of parents. You know which it was like you had an art degree. What are you going to do with that? Some kids, some kids have that. Some kids, they have the full support of their families, which is great. You know.

Ron Fortier

Have you noticed a change in that? Do you have you noticed that some a lot of parents have pretty much said, you know what life is too short. Whatever makes them happy, as long as we can afford. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Tim McDonald

But the. Do do what you love. And and there is a there is, you know, I've seen a bunch of. That which is. Really great, you know, and some of the kids struggle, they don't have family support just for reasons. That are not like what are you going to do with that? It's just a different dynamic. And the thing we we. Always have to keep remembering is that. You know, we don't know their lives. We know them at school. But more often they come to my office and I learn about their lives because they. They're struggling. They're trying to work or their caregiver in their family or whatever it might be, you know. And so they try to take it all into consideration, you know, and just like, be as compassionate as I can and do what? I can, you know.

Ron Fortier

Tim, we got to wrap this up, but I've got one more question for you to go. With and, it's kind of based on, you know, the last question I asked you, when it's all said and done, what's what would you like to be remembered for as a teacher, as an artist, as a person, whatever. What would you like to be remembered for?

Tim McDonald

That's a really tough one.

Speaker

As a.



Ron Fortier

So Baba Wawa question, yeah.

Tim McDonald

Well, you know, I think that and this could change if we talk again.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Well, we will. We will.

Tim McDonald

Yeah, because we didn't come. You know, we, we, we sort of started talking about. Stuff I'd like to talk about. A bunch of you don't want to go back and find out about like. Why you thought I was inside your head so.

Ron Fortier

Ohh yeah, it's it's it's still the the bizarreness of this mental connection that we have. I I I'm not making this. Up I guess.

Tim McDonald

So, so, so. So I would think. That I. Because this this crosses over from. Being an artist, being an educator, OK, I always tell my students to do their work. Just do your do the work. Do the work. As scary as it is, if it comes out awful. Whatever. Like I'm struggling with the painting right now. The color is just crap, right? And I'm working. I'm working. I'm just, like, do the work. I do the work. You know, I guess that's what. Ultimately, what it comes down to.

Ron Fortier

You do the work. Yeah, you do. What's what's necessary.

Tim McDonald

I do the. Work. That's it, was reaffirmed for me in a in an interview recently, Wendell Berry, because from Mayor Wendell Berry, the farmer and poet and and and the conversation between Wendell Berry and Tim de Christopher, who's a environmental activist who who actually bid on a bunch of.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah.

Tim McDonald

Oil leases that basically illegal oil leases that the BLM put up. During the Bush administration. He bid on them and he won the. Bids. He was. He never intended to pay for them. He just got in there to stop the sale and he did. He ended up going to prison for it. But there's a conversation between these two guys and little Barry. Started talking about the Shakers. And he said, you know, the Shakers. They're apocalyptic religious group, and most in the judeo-christian. It's kind of apocalyptic, right. And he's he said, you know, the in their minds, the world could or will end tomorrow. Well, what do they do? They don't like. Wring their hands. They go to work. They make a chair, they clean the house. You. Know you know. They they rehearse their songs, they do whatever it is they do and they do it to the the best that they can. Yeah. So that was sort of like. An affirmation for me. To continue to do that stuff, you know, like, yeah, the world may. End tomorrow. But what? So what did you do? I went to work.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, no, and work is important. Yeah. Work is important, that's for sure. Tim, this has been wonderful. It it it? And it checked off a lot of boxes in my head. The you know questions and yes, we definitely gotta do another one. Cause I always say this is never one and done with there's.



Tim McDonald

Yeah, we didn't.

Ron Fortier

Just too many.

Tim McDonald

Even we didn't even get to Buddhism or jazz or anything. Like that.

Ron Fortier

No, no, no, no.

Tim McDonald

You know poetry and that stuff, so alright.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, and or or how you even bumped into Dave. Dave Bagley? Yeah. Which is another thing. What's that?

Tim McDonald

Yeah, a mutual friend.

Ron Fortier

OK, great. So I'm going to wrap this up until the next time, folks, I hope you've enjoyed this, this conversation with Tim McDonald. This is just the first of what I hope is going to be many and until the next time, thanks for joining us at the artist index. See you later.