



SOUTHCOAST Artists Index

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These transcripts were produced using the Zoom transcription feature.

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Ron Fortier

Hey, this is Ron. Fortier, with another in Focus podcast, brought to you by the artist index.com and supported by our friends at Heavenly Spirits Imports. And in collaboration with the New Bedford Whaling Museum. And the common ground project as well as the mass Cultural Council, and we have a guest. Who will introduce themselves as per usual, and let's get into it, yes.

James L Murdock

Hi there, I'm James L Murdock. That's MURDOCKI live in mid Coast, Maine. Thomaston, Maine, which is right next. It bumps into Rockland, which is a really a sister fishing city of New Bedford and when we first came to Rockland, it was pretty cool. Because it would come out. Ohh. You're from New Bedford? I was immediately everybody's friend, you know? So there's a long history of fishing and piracy between these two places. And Rockland is a beautiful large harbor. Thomason was a huge boat building, shipbuilding hub. We were the second builder. Shipbuilders in the state of Maine after after the cannibal in bass. Amazing huge ships built on this little muddy saltwater river, and so he decided the river we have of that. We have the Cushing, Peninsula, Cushing and friendship. You know Andrew Wyatts country and the Saint George Peninsula to the on the eastern side. Of the river. And Thomas's at a point where the river gets really wide, it becomes really a saltwater inlet. Which is, you know, Maine is scope and it's all over the place, but this area, there's a lot of awful lot of artists, some of them you'll never meet and see. They're all hiding out in the woods and there's, you know, famous people and not famous people here and very much like New Bedford Rockland was turned around. Through the arts. And it's now a big art Mecca. There's all these art galleries and stuff in the Main Street area. But where I live in Thomaston. At its height, like New Bedford, it was one of the I don't know. It had what it the exact number. They had three out of five millionaires in the country at the time lived in Thomas. That's how thriving the shipbuilding was. It's amazing, and they built these huge ships. I don't know how they did it for the winter. And I wound up here after leaving Swain school. I graduated in 81 with a BFA in sculpture. I went there to study paint. And I immediately got hooked on sculpture. I picked up metal. You put a torch in my hand, and that was it. There was no looking back. I had to have hot metal bend it, cut it, Weld it. So I got into that a big time. But we wound up in this area of Maine because I. Wanted to investigate wooden boat building. I I came across a book about it. In Kansas City, I was. Well, I lived there for a year after graduating. And I couldn't believe it. And as a as a sculptural form, I was like, and then I found out, wow, this there's some places in Maine that the actual schools, you know, want them tuition free. I want. To go check. That out because we wanted to come back to the coast, but I grew up on Cape



Cod. I consider myself a. Living in self-imposed exile here in Maine. But it's. Where I am too, although it's changing, it's very much similar to how it was in Cape Cod growing up. It's a New England seacoast. Village life and Maine. It's just like if there's a tiny little harbor, there's a tiny little town there and it's all like that. It's and that's how it is in this area. You know which which I love, but it wasn't an option for Cindy and I we really didn't. The suburban suburban thing came to Cape Cod big time, like a wave. And there was nothing there for me, and thank God for Swain school. You know, everybody was mortified and scared that I was going to go to Bedford, but. Slim is great and I vividly remember maybe my second day of school crossing from one from the Crapo across the street to the Rodman Studio D studio with the Courier building for classes and seeing all the people switching classes. And it hit me ohh I think I like this place. Everybody is really weird like me, you know, having gone through the high school thing where I, you know I was we were definite minority widow was the artist and we would run and hide in our Art Room. And and that was our, you know, our refuge. So. So we've been in Maine here for since 1982. And you know, we was now looking back. My family was my my mother. I remember, especially as like. You'll be back. You can't survive. And then you'll starve to death. There's nothing but rocks and potatoes and Maine. And her family was from Maine. My daughter was the first. We skipped 2 generations. She she's the first maniac born back into the the the, the Thomas Murdoch line, which is great, you know? So it turns out I have a a family connection here on my mother's side that goes way back. To the six late 1600s Thomas Thomas family came with the summonses and settled Mount Desert Island and.

Ron Fortier

My step sister. Martha Stewart's hometown now. She's on. Yeah, yeah.

James L Murdock

Yes, my my good friend who got me into that really helped me out with blacksmithing. Did a gate for her. It was one of the last projects he did. He he did a huge amount of of Steve also did a huge amount of iron work on on island. So yeah, here we are in my shop. I'm downshifted big time. I wrecked my shoulder in April. I had surgery over two months ago and it's not completely successful. I may be heading for a shoulder replacement. It looks that way.

Ron Fortier

What a drag it is.

James L Murdock

Getting old. I haven't been doing the metal working and I had just like last winter. This time it was my first real winter I spent in in this new. Built this building is about four years old now, although it looks ancient. I cranked out a. Lot of stuff, so I was poised and I've got all kinds of ideas for. You know, if I could flip this around for. Sculptures. But a lot of these wire, wire things you see are models for. Larger outside sculptures. And so I can't do any of that and.

Ron Fortier

Having to get yourself an assistant.

James L Murdock

I started to. Yeah. Well, if I could afford it, you know. If I had.

Ron Fortier

You might be able to run a grant for it.

James L Murdock

If I had the money and or the project. I would have. No problem doing that. I built 13 custom homes. Without employees, I've always just brought different people in and. Well, you know, some pretty intense projects, so.



Yeah, I would. Love the opportunity for that. Does any young people out there come up for the summer? We you can have your own little camp. There's a little camp out there. Without electricity. We lived in that for a couple of years. 3 summers before we built our house.

Ron Fortier

Can we stop yourself?

James L Murdock

So I don't know where that's heading. I'm hopeful that I'll get back to it just because I, you know, I'm dying to get these cautious done and then after that it's like, OK, lately I've been doing painting and I've been. I started painting with my left hand because I was in a sling and.

Speaker

And it's listening.

James L Murdock

I don't know if I can. Make a walk. Through here.

Ron Fortier

They're those. Those small pieces are gorgeous, by the way. Those are little little jewels.

James L Murdock

Thank you. Very unexpected result with these.

Speaker

Welcome.

Ron Fortier

I mean, they look huge when you consider the size of them, so the whole scare, you know?

James L Murdock

Yeah. When you photograph them and you, you know, you post just that photo of them, but there's a bunch of kind of lined up and. And it's interesting somewhat of a. Chronological order. But I put smearing the paint on really thick so they some of them are still slow to dry, but this one was the first one. And why? Because my right side I'm right-handed. Ohh couldn't let go of just rendering and make a realistic image. All that and I was like left-handed. I'm going to do abstract expressionism. That's what I want to do. So I had to get this. Got that out of my brain right away and I immediately went into all these. Other starting. Like this and I realized right away that it was. It's not my hand so much, but it was my brain was kind of doing a different thing of just imagery. And even though I try to start out abstract, there's always a narrative that creeps into. My paintings, it seems. What you saw?

Ron Fortier

Yeah, that's that's always been the the big challenge for an abstract painter. I mean, take it from me. I did it for decades. Prided myself on painting nothing and all that other good stuff, and it's really, really difficult to do that because. Your mind does not like. Chaos. Your mind doesn't like not knowing things. So you put.

James L Murdock

And then.



Ron Fortier

Two elements in there and boom, it will make. Something out of.

James L Murdock

It depends on who you are too. I'm not. I'm more of an intuitive artist and when I work with my my metal. And I've done a number of these figures so far. I start a plan for me is a starting point and. Something happens along the way. It's usually random, and if I'm paying attention it often turns into something really amazing and I go with that and the other type of painting. So it's not. It's not abstract, but it's more kind of an intuitive going with it. So my goal is always just to keep it whatever this is channeling through me, just keep it going. Don't think about it, and when I start thinking about it, that's when I quit for the day. I mean, I come in in the morning and go. I don't like that color. I. Like this color or something like that? But otherwise, I leave it alone and but there's a lot of great painters out there and they're very into the science of painting and they're painting for painters, really. And they do these amazing things with space and color and all that and.

Ron Fortier

Bruce Lee had this thing about, you know, be from his be like water consciousness and you know, he's his intellect and his intuition. You can't have you have you have to try to have a balance because if you're too intellectual you it becomes mechanical and it becomes soulless. If it's two, if it's two. Then it lacks form. It lacks. You know it lacks structure. So you have to have a really good blend to to the two of. Them you know. And that makes sense and.

James L Murdock

Well, here's something I wanted to throw out. Is it I had a house project and. I don't know if that's reading backwards or not, is it?

Ron Fortier

Yeah, I mean, we're not going to have video of. The podcast. But that's. We can, we can. We can post these up on.

Speaker

OK.

Ron Fortier

The on the on the podcast.

Speaker

OK. Yeah, all.

James L Murdock

Right. Well, but so you could see this.

Ron Fortier

Watch site, yeah.

Speaker

So it's a.

James L Murdock

I had. I was I. Was building 2 houses at once for this client. They had an. Architect involved long long distance and he was like every architect I've ever worked with, like major ego and I'm pretty, you know, I'm a Scotsman and



two at certain point I'll growl back. But I'm pretty humble guy. But he asked me, James, what's your process, what your process is like? I want to know what your process is and I and I thought about it. I said, you know, because I just had this. Vision of this in my head when you said that, I said I'm going to get back to you on that tomorrow. And I did because I immediately drew this out. And this is what I go through for a. Processes a problem solving method. It starts with design at the top of. This triangle, which is the vision and the idea, and then you, you, you have this other big point is the engineering. And then you have implementation. And so design goes from boom to engineering and engineering. Says, well, we can do this, but we can't do that. Or this limits or whatever and throws it back and forth. But eventually it goes to implementation and and then again there's an exchange. Of ideas. Things grow out of that. You try to implement something and it doesn't go the way you think. It's going to for whatever. Reason you alter that you alter your approach, so there's a communication that happens between those 233 things and outside of this. You have constraint in energy and that gives cohesion. You were talking about. With the abstract it goes gives you some cohesion to this thing, so it starts to spin, move around without some kind of constraint. Just pure energy, it would just.

Ron Fortier

Just spin yourself out.

James L Murdock

Right. It will burn itself out, fly apart basis so. So anyways that's my official thing on that.

Ron Fortier

I'm going to. I want to get back to the whole sculpture thing because from all the sculptors I've known, their biggest problem is baggage. They've got way more baggage, and I don't mean emotional. They have way more baggage than most people do, and obviously everything that they do is a lot of them for. The majority of their careers, they never get out of the Marquette stage. They never get out of the. Model stage because cost. Obviously cost is going to equate to sale price. Finding a buyer, finding the right. Yeah. You know the whole routine. So seriously at this point. I mean, if you, I don't know. There's. I'm sure there's a main cultural council. A main.

Speaker

Right.

James L Murdock

Yep, Yep.

Ron Fortier

Cultural arts and Culture Council or whatever, but these grants, and believe me, the grants today are are nothing like. They used to be. 40 years ago, where you had to open up a vein. Some of them are like just a basic questionnaire and you put up your resume and a couple of images and. Boom, you're done. And if you could if.

James L Murdock

Oh really?

Ron Fortier

You could get yourself a couple of. You know one at least, but I mean, at least a couple of young people who need to work with a master. And it's it's an opportunity of a lifetime. And they could be roughing it in that camp, like you said. And my God, what a what a horrible way to spend the summer.

Speaker

Well, you have to.



James L Murdock

Put up with me. But there's my beautiful queen, who, if you're around her, that's a great thing. So yeah.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. In fact, we've better get Cynthia on the show as well. And I did tell you that the next time. My brothers in in, in on a vacation right now he's a maniac, so I hope he. Really chilling out with with his wife that the next time we head up there that I want to make some time to stop by and visit you. Guys, because I mean. Generally I like to get off and to go to the coastal highway and we come out right, right by Moody's. You know, before you get in the Bucks, bucks.

James L Murdock

For sure. Yeah, I'm. I'm 20 minutes from movies.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Yeah. Well, which, which in main time is like a second cause, like, oh, it's just on the wall. How long is that?

Speaker

Yeah, that's that's.

Ron Fortier

An hour and a half.

James L Murdock

That's nothing.

Ron Fortier

You know the difference between was it main traffic and Boston traffic is in Maine, at least you travel in miles. In Boston, you travel in inches, so.

James L Murdock

Well, yeah.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, but and this this other thing too of, of of, of trying other media, you know, a sculptor. Well, it's just a little bit more than media. I mean, going from a from a three-dimensional world to A2 dimensional world, it's really good exercise for your brain. And I was just speaking with the Barbara Healy for. Podcast is going to be coming up. After yours. About, you know, print making for example. I mean that's one of the. Things that I really. Would love to have the opportunity to. I wish somebody would build a printmaking studio for other artists to use another. You know, it's like miniature.

James L Murdock

Yeah, my daughter, my my daughters got that going out in Oakland.

Ron Fortier

Golf and getting like 10 bucks. Ohh really? Yeah.

James L Murdock

Yeah, they found some cheap space somehow and a bunch of them chipped in on it, and they have a printmaking studio. We got a printmaking. Cindy is way into printmaking. Her painting is one thing, but boy, she. Just got way into the printmaking. I don't even know how many presses we have. We've got two or three, maybe four. I don't



know, but. Wow, two good working presses and yeah. Yeah, she does everything. That girl she does, she does handmade books, you know? Yeah. If you you talk to her, you'll find that out. But the printmaking that's.

Speaker

Right.

James L Murdock

That's it's a good thing to bring out, because I'm definitely at a point in my life now. That I want very simple minimal process and you're right, you can really get trapped with that. With the sculpture, you start doing these big outside things and you need a lot of people and you need machines and you need this and you need this and you need that. So these figures I'm excited about. I've never really been that drawn to the figure. I mean, I have. Painted and drawn it in school and and sketched it at times, but far less focused on it. Now I'm very focused on the gesture of a figure and what I can get out of it. And my sculptures are approachable for me. They're they're. I have an old vintage power hammer and I can shape the steel. Draw it out very easily without killing myself, so hopefully I'll be back to that. But and then for me, I, I stick them outside, they're going to rock outside. Done. My poor wife. She's got paintings all over the place. I don't know what we're going to do. I really don't. I. Mean she's so prolific. Is bad. It's really and so I'm sticking with these little ones. She goes you keep, you should know bigger. And I'm like, Nah, I'm doing this left-handed. I come in, I do it until I'm tired and I gotta do my physical therapy exercises. I gotta do this and that's.

Ron Fortier

That's another story. That's another story.

James L Murdock

It for the. Day, you know. And so I take that to my mental working too. And so I don't call myself a blacksmith. I I've looked at and worked with some and I know some really great blacksmiths. And I've made, you know, many practical things. Gates, railings, all kinds of stuff, but. I realized that my mental work I wanted to stay away from that because having done the traditional wooden boat building and then I had a long run of really high end quality, made furniture and cabinetry. That process was just also very tight, you know, and and it is the blacksmithing, it can be very loose. But you're coming from this long history of this. Process and people tend to stick with it. Use. That's why you see a lot of the colonial stuff in blacks. And so when my mental working, I really wanted to avoid that and. And so I, you know, I'm pretty happy. And it turns out really when I was doing sculpture, I started doing sculpture. I was looking at the great. American sculptors. The big outside things called her the suvio, people like that. And so I immediately was very kind of became kind of geometric. Because you're fabricating and sticking together shapes and it finds this geometry and I wasn't happy with it and I changed from that into and we didn't really have the the setup. I got a much better set up for it here for really pounding and moving metal in a more organic form. And so I've been drawn to. Creating organic form with a metal and I really like that there's not many people doing that and and it's because this is what I like and I spent recently. A year and a half working for a local sculptor, and he does. He's done all these huge public work projects and he's got his beautiful shopping Cushing, not far from here. So I worked for him for a year and a half and it was just beautiful. Stainless steel sculpture, 2830 feet high. Three pieces. It looks like a like a logo for fire flames, so it's like 3 twisting flames that go up with a with a light simple light in the center of that. But the whole thing was built skin on a skeletal frame and so. And it was all figured out by computer. You figured it out all, but I was amazed it was plotted off the floor. We had a full size drawing. Offset drawing of the same tape to the floor and we project up with a little laser pointer. And build this spine for this thing. It started with that and build off the spine with pre cut pipes that were cut from the computer on and on and on and that's good for him. That's who he is. But his stuff is it's all very kind of very futuristic, it's smooth and shiny and you know, like it has this logo. Feel to it. And I'm like, Nah, you know, I like the weird organic stuff and I love it cause I. Get into bending a line. And it's just like drawing I I reduce it to a simple line and I can look at that line for days. If I'm not happy with it, I'll avoid it and do something else and I'll come back to it and Wham, there it is. I got it the way I want it and I and I move on and so



and when I was at swinging, I think it was Peter Vocus.

Speaker

Right.

Ron Fortier

That name rings a bell.

James L Murdock

Yeah, it was a out-of-the-box pot. Who did these huge plates and they hadn't. They weren't functional at all, but you deliberately puncture them and push them and explode them and fire them that way. And he it was the same kind of thing he was. He didn't want to go for that perfect, symmetrical, refined thing. He was looking for this. You know this random thing, and that's that's what I'm after and it's because. That's what I like and it's one of the reasons I live here where I do I I have to have a horizon. I like the city, but I gotta have a horizon every day or mentally I can't take it. And I I can look in any direction. I have a horizon. I do it throughout the day and it's because I like the tree line. I like the rolling hills. I like the rocks. I like the pattern in the rocks I like. The way water. Moves on and on and on like that, and I got that from my sculptor, teacher Russell Daly. He was really good. He he clashed with a lot of people. He's very. Kind of a. Cowboy type guy. But he was trying to bring modern. He tried. He really brought modern sculpture into swing because prior to that it was due to a clay bust and you sits on the shelf and no, he was into, you know, much more into all of it. But one of his big things was and occasionally we would take a field trip and we go. Well, I'm gonna go look at this bridge, OK? And we go and look at this bridge nearby and. You know, we'd all be like, wow, that is just such a great thing. It's really cool the way it looks and everything. And then we go, OK, let's go look at another bridge. There's, like, ohh God, that thing's ***** awful. You know, it's like, what's wrong with that? It's like, develop a palate visually for what you see. And it turns out that in in boats. When both it was wouldn't both for me. You will. You will realize most times that the things that look right they work right because of that and. And so I developed a palette and an eye for that and that really. I transitioned into wooden boat building when I started my apprenticeship, which is a long story, but a great school and I'm so glad I went there. When I did.

Ron Fortier

Are they? Are they still in the in the?

James L Murdock

Unbelievable concept. It was tuition free. Just unbelievable. The guy was just an incredible educator, Lance Lee, who started this and.

Ron Fortier

Are they still in operation? Because I know a lot of them.

James L Murdock

Well, yeah, they're in. They're in Rockland. They've changed and it's now a tuition school, unfortunately. I wouldn't have been able to go there because we would. We wouldn't have man with 200 bucks. I had no money and weekends. But anyway, so when I was right in the very beginning of my friendship, I got really got my into it and got my hands on the boats.

Speaker

Right.

James L Murdock

And from lofting where you do a full size drawing. And by the way, American small crafts, it was just such a



wealth of it, it was mind blowing. It's just mind blowing all over the country. Just there's five kinds of's and six kinds of O's and twenty kinds of's it's, you know, I mean wow. And but there was this thing, they talked about fairness and look at the line and find the fairness in line sometimes you couldn't see it you'd have to you take this batten and you deliberately pull it. Out of line until it looked like really bad and go the other way until it looked really bad. But then you find this spot. In between you. Go. Ah, this that sweet curve. That's what Russell was trying to relate. That. And so I that clicked with me right away. And a lot of people had. A lot of trouble with that, that concept. Starting out of fairness. In, in things, and so I'm grateful to him and to Swain. And you get that to drawing that really looking at stuff you really begin to see things and you understand the fairness. And one of the things we did is Swain. Freshman year is we had to carve this chunk of Ellen. And everybody hated it, you know, and it was. Create the single simple solid shape. And the teacher got hosed. It was, you know, different sculpture teacher. It was 33 dimensional design and everybody complained and whined about it. But the idea was to make this smooth. And it's kind of going to wind up being similar than egg shape. But it has a smooth unto rip uninterrupted curve. And what can you do that? So it's more than just an egg shape. And that's what that was about was finding fairness. In in in form. That that was a great lesson that stuck with me and I I just stepped right into it both. So yeah, I got fairness. And and I got to the point with me and it was it carried on into house. Carpentry as well.

Ron Fortier

That's a space working.

James L Murdock

With me would say, James, we're gonna get James to look at that because he's going to put his eye on it and say that's not right. 20 feet over there or something, you know? And so that was a great skill I developed. I still have it and.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. So let's, let's see.

James L Murdock

Like that that I I want to keep the spontaneity that organic thing going in it. I don't see a lot of other people doing that.

Ron Fortier

No, this seems to be.

James L Murdock

So people who get model and claim plaster and have castings made, you'll get, you can get that because you're really getting this random thing with the hands going.

Ron Fortier

Right.

James L Murdock

Yeah, but I try to do that with my hammering. I I can be tight and really good. I can do the colonial stuff, but I'd rather be loose and just let it flow and and pay attention to this organic thing that happens. That's what I like to follow.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, one of the problems right now with education, they really start to come to the forefront and they just made an they just put an article about the second life of this, the the Star store in the Bedford, you know, the old



department store that was converted into.

James L Murdock

Hi, Jess.

Ron Fortier

An annex to the College of Visual and Performing Arts for UMass Dartmouth. Everything is digital, everything is. There's no, there's no tangibility, there's no, you know, one of the most valuable lessons I learned was from a in the foundation course where they plopped clay in our hands just a chunk of clay and they said, OK, I just want you to pop that. Clay up. And down just pop it up and down. Just trust me. Just pop it up in there. And it was amazing. Is that within the a couple of minutes or whatever that jagged piece of. Clay, you know anamorphic shaper clay now is almost a perfect sphere. And that's just from the palm of your hand. And you did nothing else except have the the clay touched the. Palm of your hand.

James L Murdock

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ron Fortier

And all those other things that that. Are just going by the wayside and it's not old guys talking about the new guys. It's it's a method, it's. A you know?

James L Murdock

Well, it's a skill set. It's a skill set. Yeah. And I've always felt that way with handmade stuff. I went through this with the the woodworking in the cabinetry and. There's a skill set. I shield away from unless I really needed the money. Doing things like kitchens because it's people would really go ohh. I can get a factory thing or for this and I'm like yeah, go for it. It's like I tell people right. Away. This is what I do. I do handmade stuff. It's gonna last a long time and it's going to be. I'll try my best. Most times it would work out that way. It's going to be exactly what you want. It's.

Ron Fortier

And when you sell?

James L Murdock

The house. Exactly what you want. It won't be another one like it. That's handmade skill. And we used to have that and really as bad as you know, all the bad **** we got with colonial times. It was really a renaissance of of handmade stuff in this country. All the woodworking, the shipbuilding, the iron work. It just went on and on. These people were so skilled with their hands, which, by the way, is one of the things I. Fell in love with me right away. Is people's hand skills are just. Although that's changing now. We have a whole different generation of kids and.

Ron Fortier

Oh yeah. I mean, look, look at your. Your mom was talking about survival, and I and I remember speaking to some old man or must have been one of my father's neighbors up in caratunk. And they survive because this blueberry seed, this clamming season, this lobster season, there's Christmas wreath season, Christmas tree season, cranberry season, blueberry season. So you basically that was that was what you did to pay the bills. But what you were. Was totally different from what you did and my brother. You know my younger brother, the one that lives in Hancock, he went to school to be a a tradesman. To be a a contractor. And then he decided to join the the Navy. In 85 he went into submarines.



James L Murdock

Right.

Ron Fortier

And then he said, you know, he was really happy. He joined the Navy, but he can't believe he did it during the biggest building boom of the 20th century because it was just skyrocketed in 85. It was like, huge. Building boom. Yep. And you know.

Speaker

Huge. Huge.

Ron Fortier

He never really found himself until. He got out of high school, which? He did miserably. That and then went into New England tech. I don't even. Know if it's still in business, but. I saw a house that he, he. Built for for. Friend, a friend and neighbor. And this is my little brother and I walked into this people's home and there was, you know, there's a Cypress pole holding up. The whole, I mean this hand, hue and Cypress, I mean the space. I'm not a sculptor but the space because I've been in homes where it's like, Oh my God, it's like a a rabbit Warren of rooms. There's no flow. Or the rooms are like you know. You go ranch houses, you know, everybody's all stuck on mid century architecture and stuff. It's like, dude, if you go stretch and Yaw and you could touch the ceiling. I mean, that's like oppressive to me, you know? But just like.

James L Murdock

I got 11 foot ceilings in my house.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. And I told him. I said, you know, the, the the sense. Of space is like he's like a natural born sculptor and he doesn't even know it, you know, and it's really important cause at school museum, if I don't remember the sculpture, sculpture teacher. He broke us up into into two teams and gave us a bunch of cardboard, flat sheets of cardboard and tape and he said OK, this is the deal you have to create a sculpture design 3 dimensional design and you have to build it. And you have to. There's a there's a race that we're going to run and you gotta go down the hallways of the school and Museum of Fine Arts. And the trick is design, build and run, because you're going to be times run down through this course with that piece of sculpture of yours, but with the intent that when you switch your sculpture with the, you know, the A-Team is going to switch with the B theme and vice versa, that you're going to totally screw them up and they can't get down. And it was like the most incredible lesson about space consciousness. That I will ever experience because you really have to be aware. OK, we got a right hand turn, you know, to go into a stairwell hall and then you got to. Go down. How? How? Do you? It can't be bigger than this because it has to tumble. It has to go through the doors. That's the tumble and and twist at the same time. It was so phenomenal and.

James L Murdock

Yeah, that's the design engineering implementation thing right there, definitely. But I you know. I don't know where we'll wind up with the handmaid thing. I mean, I I just don't know. I mean, Cindy was a hand Weaver for. She hung in there a long time. And she made beautiful clothes, beautiful clothing, blankets, all kinds of stuff. But eventually, people stop supporting it. You know, it's too easy to go for.

Ron Fortier

Off off the rack.

James L Murdock

Off the rack. Cheap thing and but you know with the clothing. I bet almost everything that she's made, all those



people still have that clothing. It's it's something. It's something special. They still have it. They wear it on special occasions, that kind of.

Speaker

Oh yeah.

James L Murdock

Thing. So I don't know. I don't know. And I wish you were more young kids.

Ron Fortier

Well, let me tell you.

James L Murdock

Into it. Maybe it will swing around. I mean, the the pendulum swings one way and then the other, but. We know everybody knows now, like how hard it is just to get a Carpenter or an electrician or a plumber, you know and.

Ron Fortier

Well, there's a there's a whole lot of thing right there, and I don't mean to be rude to electricians, plumbers and carpenters, but nearly anyone. Can learn, you know, any intelligent person can learn how to be one. There's a huge difference. I have seen electricians who had this incredible design sense. And it's not just. It's not just. You know how things flow from the power source and you know, spreads throughout the house kind of design. I'm talking the aesthetics, I mean, of of the of the the conduits being put in how boxes are placed. Some people are just sloppy beyond belief and other guys are just like exquisite and and what they do and it just because you're a plumber.

James L Murdock

Oh yeah.

Ron Fortier

And because the pipes are going to be. Where they are doesn't mean. That you do have asked.

James L Murdock

Plumbers have always been one of those guys. I keep a close eye on those suckers.

Ron Fortier

Right, right.

James L Murdock

We call them. Beavers, you know, the carpenters put all the wood up, the plumbers come in. They start.

Speaker

Do it all out.

James L Murdock

Yeah, I was like, wait a minute. You know, I don't know. I pulled the the drill right out of the hand and said give me that. I'm going to sharpen that. Oh, it's sharp enough. No, it is. And that's kind of ripping make a horrible, horrible mess, you know, I'm.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. And the coverage as well.



James L Murdock

Lucky I've been lucky. To work with some great great people over the years and so.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, I mean, I. I've seen front porches on people's houses. I mean, why would you do that on a front? Porch. That's. The part everybody sees and you're looking at the spacing of the, of the, of the spindles of of the ballisters because it's either. No sense of aesthetics 1 spindle more would have made that rhythm go a lot better or. Or it's just like just. Bad, bad, bad, bad stuff, you know? And and. So they are.

James L Murdock

My thing is.

Ron Fortier

His art education is a mechanical design.

James L Murdock

Always bad. My thing is always about quality. And yeah, that's something I realized more now that I'm older. Is like, yeah, you know, I got a. Good conscience IB. Above and beyond what people were paying me that they would get the quality and everything that I did and why? Because this planet is just filled with freaking junk. Ohh yeah. With junk, yeah. If your only motivation, which is you know, I know it was Cape Cod building, you know that I really I when I went away then they got the building. Home down there and prior to that it was, you know, a recession going on in the building, but then it just exploded and but so it was all focused on money. Bang these houses out. We're doing one a day as quick as we can go. It's like bang, Bang Bang bang.

Ron Fortier

It's tiger Ticky, tacky, ticky, tacky.

Speaker

**** that I.

James L Murdock

Don't want to do. That and so. No. We made a conscious choice and we got away with it so far that we were going to be less money focused and we've been able to do that because we grow a lot of our own food. We do a lot of things in a different way because yeah, I the wages were awful here in Maine. And when we came here. And we just said, yeah, well, we're going to get by with less money. And you know what we've never lacked for anything. And we've actually had a very rich, very rich life. It's all there. It's all there without embracing the consumerism, going to a job. My daughter would call a soul sucking job that you hate just.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah.

James L Murdock

Make money and why you know you get hold. You die. It's like, you know, screw that.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. No, I I remember when I was in food service. The Cape Cod Labor Day that.

James L Murdock

Yeah, that was Cape Cod. That was so.



Ron Fortier

Was it? It's like. Somebody just shutting off all the lights and pulled the shades down and you know.

Speaker

Yep, yeah.

Ron Fortier

The old the old rule of thumb was.

James L Murdock

I grew up with. That I grew up with, that it was awful.

Ron Fortier

You go to unemployment, you file your claim, and then you would go to a used bookstore, buy as many secondhand books as you could possibly afford, because that's what you gonna do all winter long. You're just. Gonna hunker down and read. And then I remember the year where the. McDonald's what the heck was it? It's just have to weigh him. I I guess it was like newer McDonald's at that time. And it's now hiring. It's like now hiring. This is like September 27th. This is something, what the heck are they hiring for? And then? So so the the the Cape turned in from a A a nine month. A three month basically economy in the summer into a 12 month economy and all these older people.

James L Murdock

Froze up.

Ron Fortier

What's that? And and all these older people went out there to retire. And you know what happens when every when people want to get away from it all when they get there, they realize. They don't have it all. And I remember people saying things. Like you know how? Dacia gets out here at night. Yeah, it's the country. Ohh. Wow. Did you know this hard water and soft water? Uh, huh.

Speaker

My mother-in-law.

Ron Fortier

What was the other thing it was like?

Speaker

And when my mother-in-law?

James L Murdock

From Rhode Island first came up, you know, family, Cindy's family. My mother-in-law just the whole time went on on on on about how there were no St. lights and we're like, yeah, well, we live in the country.

Speaker

But it's so.

Ron Fortier

Dark you.



James L Murdock

Know it's like. Yeah, it's OK, it's. OK, you know.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Yeah. Ohh you have to travel like 10 miles, so. Ohh like. Well, here's a classic case. OK, carotone.

James L Murdock

But now, now we have that Thomason has this huge we got a Super Walmart, we got a giant Lowe's we. Got all that? Cape Cod, Route 28 development just awful, but it was inevitable. We had a good run there and we put it off and but when the economy?

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah.

James L Murdock

Comes back and it gets more aggressive. Again, they'll be building more crap all along route one.

Ron Fortier

That's unfortunate. Yeah, yeah.

James L Murdock

I mean, there's no stopping in it. It's awful. The towns embrace it. They don't get the they don't get the prize out of it. They don't get.

Ron Fortier

Well, they, they, they, they talk about the tax revenue, but the infrastructure now is so oppressive that they have to it it. It doesn't even out there still.

James L Murdock

No, it's a lot it. It's a lie. That whole big building thing is a lie. And here in our little town of Thomaston. When they were. They took a whole big part of town and route one and rezoned it aggressively and gave tiffs. To Walmart and Lowe's, you know, tax, incremental tax financing. And so I went to the meetings and one meeting I got up and I immediately said you're not going to want to listen to me because I wasn't born here, but I want. To tell you about where I grew up on Cape.

Ron Fortier

You're from away.

James L Murdock

Come from away. You'll always be from awake. So. For my daughter, you know. So anyways, I told him about about Cape Cod, you know not. Very different population wise at that when it growing up as Thomas and was then. You know, and I said you're going to get this stuff. Fine. Keep it in that part of town, but get something out of it. Like, really get something out of it. And they have done that more successfully in other towns. But if you don't ask for it, you won't get it and not, I mean, these these people, they all play hard hardball, I mean. You know I won't mention one of them. Hasn't paid taxes. They'd they'd rather pay court fees than pay their taxes on these new businesses. So. And then next thing you know and and and we knew it, you're going to get you're going to have more police cruisers. You're going to have more cops. More this more that. How you going to pay for that?



Ron Fortier

I mean these natural. Well, I mean the. Other the other the other.

James L Murdock

So our taxes have like, doubled since that crap came in. It hasn't. Been any debt any benefit to me?

Ron Fortier

No plus plus the money that the money has. Been sucked out of. Because Walmart's not invested in the. Town Walmart's it's going to Arkansas.

James L Murdock

How are you? All right. I'll do all the great little hardware stores. All the great little stores. They're all gone or most of just you hanging in there. They're all gone. And they were much, far, far better, you know.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah. I mean, it's weird.

James L Murdock

I don't know where. That will end. We're we're going to. The whole country and the whole world, we're going through terrible time and hopefully we'll adjust somehow to it, but come back to handmade stuff. That's all I got to. Say is.

Ron Fortier

Well, don't forget we had the whole. Morris movement. You know the the. Yeah, the backlash to the, to the industrial revolution. Everything goes in cycles, you know. Let me go back way to the very beginning. You're talking about boat building. Yeah, Thomas. And also built a lot of. The Easton rigged wood trawlers for the fishing.

James L Murdock

Yes, I actually worked on one of them out of hyenas. Keep code on the scallop per. It was a puzzle. Wallace Yard, I.

Ron Fortier

Believe the Wallace yard.

James L Murdock

I believe that's the name.

Ron Fortier

Yeah. Because I mean, I I always think of my stepfather.

James L Murdock

And it was. Huge wooden eastern rig trawler and it was built like in the late. 50s this was. 1985 I did one trip on it. And I loved the. Boat. But I was scared to death. I thought sure I was going. To get murdered in my sleep. You know, 13 guys, crew and pretty rough crowd, you know, but I I was like, yeah, I'll try. They're supposed to make great money. And I didn't make. Great money, I.

Ron Fortier

Allan Guthrie.



James L Murdock

Figured out if I could do carpentry 100 hours a week and sleep my beautiful woman, you know, and make a lot of money. But, but that was a beautiful boat. It was launched here, and when they found that out because they at some point it came out where you from? I. I was like, well, I'm from Dennis and they called me a hair layer, which I didn't understand. What the hell that was. And and I said, I live in Thomaston, ME and they, oh, that's where the ship was built. So I was like, everybody's body. I was like, everybody's good luck charm after that. You know, it was great. I didn't I. It was a big game changer. You know, because those guys, they're all you know, they're all macho and they're not going to chum up with somebody. And like I say, it was pretty rough crowd. I didn't go. Back because it's. Just it was a lot of drug use that I was not. Into yeah, that was. Morning heavy machines. If you're doing the chain work and the guy who's running the *****. Better be focusing on it or I'm gonna be dead. Or worse, that kind of thing. But I love being out. I love being out to sea. And the Wallace yard? Yeah. They built a lot of big working wooden fishing boats. We got to see the last one launched that was. Early 80s. Here in Thomas and the last week.

Ron Fortier

One one last question, you talking about your family going all the way back? My step, sister step sisters. They're their father's name is Grover. And I did some real looking and they go. They're seafaring family. I think they're from that neck of the woods as well. And you know, sea captains, boat builders, the pirates. The whole 9 yards.

James L Murdock

The pirate thing is alive and well, especially down the peninsula is it's the whole nother world, you.

Ron Fortier

Know well all those. Colds were, you know, just great little places to to abscond with things and people and and such. And it was an economy that the swamp Fox and all that other stuff that. That they talked about going to start wrapping this up pretty soon, but.

James L Murdock

OK.

Ron Fortier

The new work that you're doing, which you know images will will be provided in the in the the. The podcast blog.

Speaker

Uh, right?

Ron Fortier

On on on the website. This seems to also be a. An Asian aesthetic to them. You know, they're they're minimal, they're. It's kind of hard to say, but. This is like an Asian aesthetic, you know. Yeah. Where does that come from?

James L Murdock

I hadn't thought about that until you just said that when you did, I got goosebumps because I've always been fascinated with China and and is, in fact, I have a foreign memory of. I don't know how old I was. 3rd to 4th Grade, I came across this book on the Chinese. One of the Chinese dialects and the alphabet, and I was like it might have been shortly after I learned our alphabet. I was like, it's like I don't get it and it was like.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, Mandarin.



James L Murdock

Ohh, you mean like each of these symbols is not just a letter, it's the whole concept and I believe it or not I got a brush and. Ink and I copied every letter and whatever. I don't know what if it was Cantonese, maybe Cantonese in the alphabet, and I've always wanted to go to China. And so yeah, I just. There's a minimalist thing in the way they certainly in the way they paint the perspective is different. I guess I've always been drawn to that. I have a great amount of respect for that. But I hadn't really thought about it in these paintings, but and my minimal thing is I've had low expectations and I'm like alright, you're not. You can't render with your right hand and you know I have other paintings. Maybe you've seen there's an album portals on Facebook album section. Big round paintings and they're very rendered with the right hand, 4 foot round circles. And I was with the left hand. I was like, Nah, I got no expectations. This is going to be. Really clumsy, in fact, I. Came up with Donnie Beale that he had gone through shoulder surgery and he said yeah, I did that left-handed thing. I he said it's really clumsy and had my head. It's like it's OK. It's going to be really clumsy. Like how can I do this, you know? And it was like, well, what do I got? And usually what you need is right in front of you know, it's like, well, she's like A tag. I could use that in some ways and I got these palette knives. It seemed like every time I picked up a brush I got into trouble. So I had I was going after bigger, broader strokes. And, but then the narrative would come into things and. So yeah, I'm not surprised that the Asian thing and that I've always loved the way they do their landscapes, their mountains and all that. It's.

Ron Fortier

And the other thing too is the skeleton.

James L Murdock

It's a one off thing with a lot of them, especially with the pen and ink stuff and the watercolor. You have one shot at it, so it's a mindset, total mindset.

Ron Fortier

Right, yeah. Going back to the calligraphy, there's only 10 strokes.

James L Murdock

Is there? Yeah. Ohh wow. I didn't know that.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, I believe so. I mean, these tip pressure up tip pressure, down pressure up to tip, you know, so they're using.

James L Murdock

Yeah. Well, I could believe.

Ron Fortier

If you think of the pointedness of the brush they're using every aspect of that. And even the dot, the dot is one of the. Strokes. That's just. Touching the the the you know the the tip of. The brush to the. Paper. So it is. Yeah. And also to the scale of those pieces is 5 by sevens for Pete sakes, they could be 5 by 7 feet. Without any.

James L Murdock

Yeah. Yeah. Cindy comes in every day. She goes, you're going to start doing. These big you know. I'm like, I don't. Know I look at all your big paintings and we got no place for them. It's like I guess so. If I can't do metal, then yeah, I guess so. Because the metal I'm sticking it outside. But yeah, I could see that I get to a point where I can smear with my left hand on a on, you know, a big strike. I got a lot of studies for. Big paintings. If I want to go at them and it would be very striking because when you take that shot and you blow them up and you see them on the computer screen. You immediately think, oh, this is a big painting or something, but it isn't so. So for me it takes the pressure off with the process thing that it's simple. I'm nine out of 10 times they're done start to finish. I



don't go back till I sit here. Until they're done. And then I start another one and it's like, yeah, I didn't get it. That's OK. I'm going to do another one. I don't want to get caught into this, tweak it and tweak it. And we're larger paintings. You work longer, you know, it's ohh. I gotta change that. I'm going to scrape that out. Start over all that. So that's.

Ron Fortier

Right. If you scale up, you scale up the size of your brush. That's it. So they're going to take, they take almost. Approximately the same.

James L Murdock

Well, I'll. I'll be using the drywall or straw or a blade. It's they're mostly different. Putting knives that I use that I spread the paint with. Yeah, I'll get a big grouting notch straw and and all that. I'll go through some pain.

Ron Fortier

A drywall brush. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Yes, yes. Hey, you. You never know. You never know the The thing is, it's like we're all stuck in the same thing. You know how many? More paintings than we stuff under the bed in the attic, in the basement? In the. Barn in the garage.

James L Murdock

Right. I'm looking at your studio. You got a big rack of new. Ones ready to come out of.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, and directly behind it is all of the all of the pieces that you know are waiting to to go to, to go to homes. You know it's like a animal rescue league for paintings over here.

James L Murdock

By the way, looking at that portrait behind you, I don't know if I may have mentioned it to you before and I'll send you a link to it, Robert, Shadeless, Shadeless. Is the painter and he does. He's been doing this series called Americans who tell the truth.

Ron Fortier

Oh, OK, I'd like to.

Speaker

See that?

James L Murdock

I thought it was very similar to what you're doing when you look at history and different things because these incredible portraits of famous people Martin Luther King won and on and other people who are just incredible heroes and heroines throughout history that. You never know. About and then he'll scratch into the wet paint. A quote by them or something. And boy, he just keeps cranking them out. He he he does the traveling show he. Just I don't know if he's been out of the country with it, but he certainly goes. He's been all around the country with these paintings.

Ron Fortier

This this is my wife'll. Great grandfather. He was the youngest child. Of his mom was one of the slaves. One of the little girls who was sold away from their mother from a breeding plant. And he all this conjecture in a family about him passing because he was so fair skinned. And so I told my wife and I told my sister-in-law I was taking a lot of liberties and I've got him half black, almost like Harlequin.



James L Murdock

Yeah, I see that, yeah.

Ron Fortier

Because the title of the piece is. Still 3. If so, regardless if regardless of of of how much white he has in him, his blackness still only makes him 3/5 of a human being. Because that was the the the 3/5 clause and I forgot what the the amendment was of the Constitution. So you know. Like it's crap like that. So it's it's. Heady stuff. It's all. Heady stuff. I'm.

James L Murdock

Glad you're doing it. I I try to keep focus on, especially with these images that present something different to people.

Ron Fortier

That well, your wife, for example, I'd like to. I I'm dying. To meet her and speak with her.

James L Murdock

Ohh yeah, she. She's very thick. I she I've rounded up with her and she may or may not do it. She's struggling with a concussion and so she has trouble sometimes getting overstimulated with the computer and things like that. But you definitely shouldn't. She has this rich.

Ron Fortier

I was talking about in person when, yeah.

James L Murdock

She's half Armenian. And you would love it because she's. Investigated her family Armenian history and it's all about it's all about these women, these women, they're they were incredibly powerful. They they didn't give up, they kept going. They just they all this extraordinary horrible stuff. They went with the. And aside and how they got to this country? And it didn't come through her mother. She had her grandmother, who was one that had escaped, and she had a Arabic tattooed on her forearm because she was enslaved and managed to escape by the Turks. It came through with Cindy. It started coming through with. Dream she literally had a dream where the phone was ringing and she said, hey, this is your yucky moco, which is, I think maybe that's right.

Speaker

One of her aunts.

James L Murdock

I just want you to remember, don't forget about us. And then there was another one where another ancestor came and they showed her this book and they had an actual title on it existed as a book. That you know. So it was kind of like tell our story. And so Cindy investigates that. With a dream imagery of things and it comes out of her and she's very, very productive. She's too worried about if she's a good painter or not. She's, you know, I I actually started formal painting study when I was 13 and I could have been very successful as a Cape Cod. See scaper painter. I was a teenager. I I made my first year's tuition to Swain selling seascapes on the Cape. But so she's always asking me for advice and this and that. And I'm like, I just keep my mouth shut. It's like I'm not gonna do it. Like you know, you're gonna decide. It's everybody has their own thing. If you get into the science of it, stop worrying about that. Just keep it slow.

Ron Fortier

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, totally. I mean.



James L Murdock

And because that's her. And I think we're all. Look, we all need to look at. You know, I finally realized I'm James Murdoch. And Russell said that to me. He said someday you're going to be, you're going to say, oh, I'm, I'm James Murdoch. This is me. And this is what I do because I'm me and we're all different. And and I'm going to this with my daughter right now too, because turns out she's. Now has decided she's an artist and she. Her painting skills beyond Cindy and ours already. She's 23, you know, was no real instruction and same thing. And thank God she's painting with acrylics because I don't know anything about acrylics, so I can't offer her any advice. I've tried to hook her up with people like Steve Remick.

Ron Fortier

Right, right.

James L Murdock

Yeah, but that hasn't worked. But, but you know, I'm anyways I tell her, you know, don't ever go find what it is. That's that you're about, because that's what is truly different. There's no one else in the universe like you, you know, and plug into that and let your art come out of that. And yes, it's. I'm not saying you isolate. You don't look at other stuff. That's always. You know, in enriching to your skill level and to the way you think and see, that's all great stuff, but don't get caught up on it. Go out more after what? What am I about, you know? And so the the ones who got who got the long go. The long distance. And I see it with all the Swain people. That's why I love Facebook, because there's all these artists on there. I love to see the art every day. It's like now the point. It's like I recognize him immediately. It's like, oh, yeah, that's so and so that's so. So that's great and that's that's what I aspire for.

Ron Fortier

Well, I'm not even going to ask you the final question. We're we're we're really close to that time because I don't have to because you. Kind of already. Answer The the unasked question, which is kind of zenith in its own way and but you know the the the other thing is it's weird as it sounds. It's like, you know you say I'm James Murdoch and it's like I'm Ron Fortier.

James L Murdock

It is.

Ron Fortier

And it sounds odd until you really pay attention to what the hell you're. Saying and that's my take away from this conversation. And with that, I I I I, I want to thank you. I'm gonna wrap this up. I'll be right back. This is Ron Fortier with James L Murdoch. We didn't ask him what the L was. That's OK. What, Leonard.

James L Murdock

Right. OK. I mentioned that because that was my manners. Grandfathers then. First name was Leonard night Thomas. OK.

Speaker

So now we.

Ron Fortier

Know. And so that wraps up. Another episode of of the InFocus podcast brought to you by the Artists Index. Dot com, sponsored by Heavenly Spirits Imports and supported and collaborated by the Whaling Museum's Common Ground project and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. So with that in mind, see you next week. Thanks, bye, bye.