

**Ep #80: Crown On, No Hesitation
with Anna Ryan Drew**



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Leah Badertscher

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Ep #80: Crown On, No Hesitation with Anna Ryan Drew

Anna: There was a shift into what was possible.

Leah: Can you say more about that?

Anna: What was possible to rewrite that story, what was possible to really think about my thoughts that were creating that story and how it was really – I use the word contained – but really trying to hold me hostage. Like, all these things that I had believed about myself were only making me smaller. They're only dampening – I wouldn't want to be too much, share too much, be too over the top, be too this, too that. And then, the conversation changed from believing that "maybe I'm too Anna." Maybe that's not like anything that's negative. Maybe all those things that I am that I put into this label or box of the bipolar diagnosis, all of those things needed to be unraveled. And then, I began to unravel them.

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That was a clip from my recent conversation with Anna Ryan Drew. Anna is a contemporary mixed media painter as well as an advocate for mental health and the founder of the Crown Academy. Anna is one of those figures that is larger than life. She has a tsunami-sized energy and creativity that amaze and inspire me and anyone that comes into contact with her.

I know this for a fact up close and personal because Anna is also a veteran member of the Art School community. This conversation ranges from her creative process, creativity in general, her experience in the Art School, her journey after being diagnosed with bipolar disorder as a teenager.

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The common golden thread through all of it though, and the reason I am so excited to share this generous and courageous conversation with you is that Anna, to me, embodies Creativity with a capital C. And that is taking full responsibility for your life and deciding that, no matter what, you create you.

You are listening to *The Art School Podcast*, a show for artists and creatives who want to become the next greatest version of themselves. Learn how to cultivate an extraordinary way of being and take the mystery out of making money, and the struggle out of making art. Here is your host, master certified life coach, artist, and former lawyer, Leah Badertscher.

Hello, everyone. And welcome back. You know what? Right now, it is so beautiful here. I love the medium of the podcast and I also wish I could show you the view out my window. There is a mist, a fog rolling in through the neighbor's field across the way. And the sun is setting. It's been beautiful, the last few days here. A little rainy, but it's really greened things up.

And in between all the greening, there are the trees blossoming, the cherry trees, the crab apples, so these purples and pinks that float in between the green. And there's actually this old dilapidated one-room schoolhouse, redbrick one-room schoolhouse across the road from our farmhouse. And I can see it through my window.

It's just, yeah, a really beautiful moment. And wherever you are, I hope it's beautiful there as well. And I hope you are safe and I hope you are healthy and well and I hope there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel for you, or that you're going strong and adapting well.

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Things here, we finished up the immersion edition of the Art School, which I know I always say this, and it's true; it gets better every time. It was extraordinary. I was so moved. I am so grateful to all of my Art School immersion edition students out there listening to the podcast. Thank you.

You truly took it to the next level. The energy was amazing. It was such, also too, a special time to share during this time of COVID-19. And I had a few messages today even, just privately afterwards, that were very consistent and said something along the lines of, you know, "I expected life to be different because of this time, but because of the Art School, it's different in such a beautiful and deeply meaningful life-changing way."

And I never get tired of hearing those messages. And I also, I want to be able to share with you more voices from actual Art School students so that you don't have to hear about it just through my lens and my words. And so, that is one of the many gifts Anna Ryan Drew brings, of many, many gifts, to these next two episodes.

The woman is a deep font of love and creativity and a very generous courageous spirit. So, I am delighted to share her with you. And we will get to that interview in just a moment. But I do have a couple of other announcements.

If you weren't able to participate in this last immersion edition of the Art School, never fear. There is the fall 2020 coming up. And if that seems too far away, I've got your back there as well because I'm doing a summer workshop series to connect, to bridge the gap between this latest edition and then to carry you through and to start building momentum for the fall.

So, the summer workshop series consists of a 90-minute group workshop call and coaching, and then also this year, because it so went over like

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gangbusters in the immersion edition, we're adding a virtual artist date, which is a 90-minute collective virtual studio date. And it may sound crazy, but I cannot overstate how powerful these virtual artist dates were. So, I'm very excited about the addition of that element this summer.

It was such a powerful space and container for people to – actually, we got so much work done. And over and over again, the remark was, “That was only 90 minutes? It felt like four hours.” Or, “I got more done in 90 minutes than I've been able to get done in the prior four weeks to the Art School.” And we had one every week.

So, the summer workshop series, there will be one a month; June, July, August, and then also an additional virtual artist date every month. And when you enroll in the fall Art School 2020, that whole summer workshop is included. So, you get everything, all the amazingness of the Art School, and then also this added bonus of the summer workshop series.

Also, for those of you that have been waiting to hear news of the Art School Mastermind, it's ready. We're ready to accept applications and we have already begun enrollment. And space is limited and it is by application only. So, you can find the link in the show notes. You can go to my website, www.leahcb.com and you can find links both to enroll in the Art School fall 2020. That's our gold standard signature 12-week program. You can also apply to enroll in the mastermind.

It's an advanced-level fast-moving powerful coaching group for a limited number of creative powerhouses. And it is also now the only way to work with me closely and intimately through the rest of the year. I'm moving my whole one on one practice and shifting to working in the mastermind only.

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That mastermind, that community dynamic is so powerful and that's really where I want to devote my attention, into getting people the most powerful results and the biggest shifts. And that's where I believe I'm going to do that work, that it's going to be an incubator for so many creative breakthroughs, for income-level breakthroughs, for creative careers being taken to the next level. And at the same time, this community of extraordinary individuals, cultivating that extraordinary way of being with those inevitable results.

So, it will be about creating exactly what you desire, but also, who do you want to become? And that you choosing that, you designing that process yourself and breaking away from that permission-based paradigm where you wait to be chosen. And Anna will have words on that too in these next two episodes. So, it ties in so well with that.

The mastermind is a six-month mastermind, it includes the Art School fall 2020, includes all of that. It begins though in August. And also, because I didn't want to leave people hanging between now and August, because I know people are raring to go and want to start working before we officially dive in, the summer workshop series is also included.

And on top of that, the mastermind will have its own additional breakout session and group coaching and virtual artist date to get everyone moving and rolling and start creating momentum before the group officially kicks off this August. So, more details about that can be found at my website.

And the last announcement that I wanted to share with you, another – I have a lot of exciting collaborations and projects going on right now, almost too much to share. So, I'm just choosing a few at a time and I'm going to have to find other ways to share everything that's been going on because things were good before, and I think what must be happening right now is

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all this consistent effort has been compounding and now there is this wind at my back where so much is happening.

And again, this one project that I wanted to share with you, a beautiful project, and I am honored to be a part of it. It's called the Mother Lode project. And it was the brainchild of a brilliant colleague of mine; author and coach Karen Anderson.

She invited myself and 18 other – this is how she phrased it – intentionally emotional powerful and creative humans. And so, what it is, the Mother Lode project is that for each day in June, each of us that are contributing, contribute an essay or video that gets delivered to your inbox and it's our response to this question, "What did your mother teach you specifically about emotion, power, and creativity? And how you take that in use it intentionally in service to what you do, yourself, or are creating in the world."

And then, here's what she writes about why this matters. And I think you will see why her work and my work align so powerfully and why I wanted to make sure that this audience in particular knows about this project and signs up for this free community project.

Why does this matter? She writes, "If women and those who identify as women are to have more of a say in the world, more power in the true sense of the word, and more leadership, more of us need to understand and teach directly and explicitly and by consciously modeling the true nature of emotion, power, and creativity, not the current patriarchal definitions. Emotion, power, and creativity are profoundly and inextricably linked. And yet, we've been taught that emotion is weak, that power is not for us, and that creativity is illusive and mysterious. For millennia, we've been burnt at the stake, literally and metaphorically, when we wield our

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emotions, power, and creativity intentionally. Many women in our maternal lineages suffered mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically as a result of the unexpressed emotion, the unused power, and the untapped creativity within them. The Mother Lode is about changing that dynamic forever.”

And that last line gives me chills every time I read it. That is my work. My work is about changing the dynamics around creativity and power for artists and for women forever. It’s about creating a new paradigm for creativity, for all humans and creativity and power for women as artists and creative humans.

So, I hope you’ll sign up for this project, I can’t wait to receive the essays and the videos from the other contributors because it is an amazing lineup and I’m truly honored and excited to be a part of it. You can join by going to kclanderson.com/motherlode. We’ll have that link in the show notes as well. And, if you follow me on IG, I will be posting links there in addition.

So, onto the conversation with Anna Ryan Drew. I wish you could just meet her. And I think, within a few minutes, you’d wonder who the heck is this, and then, after five minutes, she would need no introduction. She’s the type of person who never meets a stranger.

But here is her bio. A.R. Drew is a contemporary mixed-media painter. Her artwork has exhibited with regional and nationally renowned artists including Robert De Niro Senior, Paul Rothko, Leland Bell, Bob Thompson, and Nancy Swan Drew. Anna also has participated in Art Miami as part of Super Fine and has also created a series of painted capes for New York Fashion Week.

As a child, Anna started painting as soon as she could hold a brush. Her mother, artist Nancy Swan Drew, introduced Anna to her art studio at a

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young age. It was an everyday experience watching her mother create and paint on a variety of media, including the walls of her childhood home, furniture, clothing, an even a bus. Her mother was powerfully creative and Anna was inspired to grow this kind of feminine artistic power.

Anna received her BFA in painting from the University of Michigan and later went on to obtain a masters in social work. She then spent years working in the area of community mental health and art therapy modalities.

In her teenage years, Anna herself was diagnosed as bipolar, and so began her journey through life as an artist and a person living with this diagnosis. Currently, Anna utilizes her artwork to express her views on the current mental health crisis. She creates works of art to highlight her diagnosis of bipolar, and also to engage the viewer in a way that allows them to enter into an empowered and shame-free visual experience.

Anna is also a public speaker and founder of the Crown Academy, a forum of therapeutic coaching tools that help others develop a stronger relationship to their innate value. So, without further ado, I hope you enjoy this conversation with Anna Ryan Drew.

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Anna: I am the master key.

Leah: I am the master key. Choose me. I choose me. Let's start there because I feel like that is a good, like, we don't have to wind up to it. We can dive into the heart of it. Because I keep intuitively thinking of our virtual artist session the other day and you were talking about the contrast between art school 20 years ago and Art School the last two years and the differences. And then it was also in this context of, you know, the master

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key, choosing yourself versus striving to be worthy, to hope that you get noticed and maybe the possibility that you'll be chosen.

Anna: Right, and I think that that is – it's not just 20 years ago. It's the culture of the – art is a small world that only – the art world is some small place that few get to be a part of. It's part of a story that you are making and know you don't have to care what people think of what you're making, but you're making ultimately to be chosen.

And you go to a critique and everyone goes around and says, "I don't know, why did you put that red in the corner? I don't know if I like that." And it's almost laughable to think about that that's actually a lot of what happens still because it is so subjective, and then it flows out into what's subjective to being chosen. It's never really under your own creation of what you want to cultivate. It is up to someone else to choose you, to be discovered.

And I was sitting on the front porch with my mom this week, who is a phenomenal artist, who was my pioneer in terms of her own having babies and making art and having stores on Michigan Avenue and in museums. And so, I said to her, "Well, what do you think about this being chosen?" And she looked at me and she said, "Well, if you really don't need that anymore, I could have really used that when I was 43 because I was constantly hoping that someone would discover me."

And I thought of epigenetics and I thought about the idea that that gets passed on and now I am passing on the idea, filtered through also you and the Art School as a confirmation that I do not have to wait for anyone to choose me. And there's just a lot of power in that.

Leah: Yes.

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Anna: And there's a lot of resolve and then knowing that, that you can't hesitate as much because then it's not somebody else's fault. It's you being accountable for creating what you want to create in the world and whether you want to go Art Basel or whether you want to be on a restaurant wall. You've got to have the resolve to go and do those things.

Leah: I love how you brought in, "Can't hesitate." Because, like, what is implicit in what you're saying too, the resolve is – if you're taking full responsibility, which you have to if you want to truly be creative, like Creative with a capital C, like, "I am creating everything. I am creating everything." Then you're right, that hesitancy is only there if you're like...

Anna: Yeah, and there's no outside authority when you're truly creative. Because, I mean, unless you talk about a higher consciousness or power or god, but there is no authority that will be given to you, to really – you just have to own that

Leah: Right, like, what are you waiting for? Once you know that, once you know there is no external authority other than that connection, if you feel, if you know that connection to god, the universe, a higher power, your highest self, that internal that can occur internally, after that, why would you hesitate?

Anna: Why would you? And it's so, I think, interesting that it's linked to awareness. Because when we're unaware of programming, conditioning, stories, things that culturally are not just even – but mainly, I'm talking about the art school mentality of traditionally going to an art school. If you don't have the awareness to question that type of model, then I don't want to say it's going to leave you on a restaurant wall, but it's going to really be up to you – and the laughable, like, "It is up to everybody else." Because

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you know what, the real show starts when you think that it is up to you. That's where it starts.

And I think all the other things that get you to the point that you're starting to be aware and conscious and mindful of what you offer the world, those things wouldn't happen if you didn't have the other experiences maybe that you had before to get you to that point. And that's why, at our Art School call today, every pin prick into the dam makes an impact to how big and how forceful it's going to flood. And if we could just see the force of it, in all of the small pricks, then we can take relief that we know it's going to flow no matter what. Like, if that's what we would like, that's what we create.

Leah: And I think it's too, it's like, well, you can look back over everything you've tried and rewrite instead of saying, "Oh it hasn't worked yet," be like, "That whole time, something in me, that water behind the dam has been pushing, ready to flow, working on my behalf. Every time I try it again and maybe even stopped halfway, it doesn't matter. That something in me that wants to break free, that creativity that wants to be unleashed, that potential, which is power that wants to flow and be real in the world, that's just a sign of that, everything along the way. And the fact that you're still here and breathing, I think on a day when people don't feel "Inspired", I think you can wake up and be like, "I'm breathing today. Something must want to still happen through me."

Anna: Yeah, and I think all, like you say a lot, all paths lead to Rome. I think that that is true when you think about the pin pricks. And the first time I went to New York with Brian, I adamantly wanted to participate in this fundraiser in New York, because in my head, New York is such an electric place. People say, "If you don't do your art and make it in New York..." there's another story. Not true, but a story. And so, I wanted to do this so badly and I was hustling for this gig, to be in this fundraiser, black tie,

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Upper East Side, beautiful setup. I had my painting there. I was in this heaven of, like, just energy of the city and my art.

And I went and saw this gallery owner and he said, Brian went with me, and he said, “Well, you know, you’ve got to go to all the shows.” And I’m like, “What? What shows?” He’s like, “You’ve got to go to Art Basel, you’ve got to go to New York. You’ve got to go to Scope in Chicago.” And at that point – and I’m still friends with this gentleman – I said, “Okay.” He’s like, “Well, Art New York is in three weeks.” And I look at Brian. Brian looks at me, like, “I know you’re already going, right?” I’d already decided.

But that was in 2016, but in looking at that, then I went to Art Basel and got a booth that, you know, no, did that work out financially for me? No. But, like, every little thing goes to the next release of being creative.

Leah: Yes, and all of those things, those ways you act upon your behalf, and you’re not also transactional with yourself, which is, like, “Well, I’m going to get you this booth at Art Basel, and if it doesn’t work out financially this time, then sorry, honey, gig’s over.” You’re like, “No, I’m in it for the long haul.” And I think what you were saying before about resolve is really important. Then you’re not a fair-weather friend to yourself when you are resolved, when you are committed, when you come from a place of love for yourself and you are like the guardian of your gift and you’re like, “Hey, baby, I’m going to take care of you in this lifetime. We’re going to see what we can do together.” And you don’t toss it the first time just because it wasn’t an immediate instant gratification transaction of Art Basel booth our, cash in. But it does build.

Anna: It builds and it’s like the deep love part is something that is, it is creation. And so, I think that there’s a concept of that self-love that is culturally what we think of as self-love. And then there’s this other level of

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self-love that it actually takes to really be the hero in your journey. Because it is, it's like diving to the deep end and having your ears pop and knowing though that your ears are going to pop and it's going to be this feeling of pressure, but then knowing that you're going to come up and then you're going to have all this new air.

And so, I just think that that is part of what the Art School does for creatives. It is like this pool that is very safe to just dive very deep. And I like to push it out into the vibrations for your audience because it is a love that is, it's like the love that you would long for from your mother, but you give to yourself. It is just like this – and it can sound like cliché and silly, but it is the basis and foundation of real change. That's what I think anyway.

Leah: I love that. I love hearing that. That's my intention. That's the vision.

Anna: Yeah, it is. It's the vision.

Leah: It is the vision. I mean, the vision that it's like, again, those extraordinary results, but that come from a really extraordinary way of living. And I think that extraordinary way of living comes from an extraordinary way of loving...

Anna: And then comes the being, I feel like.

Leah: Then the being, say more about that.

Anna: Yeah, I think it is – I just think about my own experience with the Art School and two years ago, when basically I was, for 20 years, keeping the secret of a bipolar diagnosis because I didn't know how it would be taken and I feared that people would judge what I did or my artwork or who I was or my value by this diagnosis. And I think it was that I was downstairs in my

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office, and I remember that call, just this surge of different energy coming up when I started to talk about that diagnosis. And I was exactly where I should have been when I entered the Art School, and any place in my life, I feel like. But there was a shift into what was possible.

Leah: Can you say more about that?

Anna: What was possible to rewrite that story, what was possible to really think about my thoughts that were creating that story and how it was really – I use the word contained – but really trying to hold me hostage, all these things that I had believed about myself were only making me smaller. They were only dampening – I wouldn't want to be too much, share too much, be too over the top, too this, too that. And then the conversation changed from believing that maybe I'm too Anna, maybe that's not anything that's negative. Maybe all those things that I am that I put into this label or box of the bipolar diagnosis, all those things needed to be unraveled. And then I began to unravel them.

Leah: So, I feel like we started the interview... that was too good I cannot not use everything you just said...

Anna: You can start it there, it's totally fine. I didn't know. I was just over here, can talk for days, like keep this up for 24 hours, get a bottle of booze and we're on point.

Leah: Well, I know, and I hope she doesn't mind that I'm going to just use all of that because that was so good. So, I will say I am so honored and delighted to have with my today Anna Ryan Drew, who is a creative force of nature and a magnificent human being who I not only have the honor of knowing through the Art School as a client, but also as a dear and beloved friend. And Anna, I will say, is one of those – so, I feel like it was a good

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segue, you talking about the realization that your bigness was not an issue, but that a diagnosis, sort of pathologizing your big energy, how much of that diagnosis got mixed up or misconstrued with you taking it personally or spiritually even, and confusing a pathological term for the ginormousness of your spirit.

Because Anna does have one of the biggest spirits and energies and creativities of anyone I've known, met personally, or have ever heard about. So, when people talk about people being larger than life, boom, there she sits. And so, when we were reinforcing this call you were talking about, the Art School call, the two years ago – and I remember having that conversation where you were deciding, “Why do I keep this a secret? Why should this be something I don't talk about? Why shame around it? If intellectually we know about the mental health stigma needs to go and it's not part of the healing process at all and it doesn't facilitate understanding and it doesn't facilitate full living?

And I was like, “Well, then this is going to be astounding because Anna is a huge energy already. And if she's been keeping some of it under wraps, watch out. Did you have any fear of that? Of, “I'm already enormously creative...”

Anna: I'm already extra. It's not that I wasn't extra before. I think that, you know, I think it's the grounding now that I know I'm so extra and that that's not a problem. That's actually a blessing. And that what I have to offer is so much more enriched now because of that awareness.

Leah: And I think too, I totally like extra, I totally get it. And I also think it's, like, you're an example of what's available to people. It's a baseline for you. You're not doing anything extra there's no pretense about it. You were just unabashedly, unapologetically flowing huge energy and it's one too that I

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am so grateful for your presence and contribution in the community because it's contagious. It's an example of what's possible and it's contagious and you also have a reputation within the Art School of, like, you don't let anybody bottle up their energy. And they kind of know that too.

Anna: I've been called the tidal wave sometimes...

Leah: And the tsunami...

Anna: Like the tsunami. Yeah, I see people, I think as you do, with the eyes of their fullness, in the eyes of what they fully can bring, you know. And if I see it's squashed a little bit... I'm not here to join you in your squishiness.

Leah: I'm not going to co-sign that...

Anna: I'm not that friend. You can find another friend for that.

Leah: You want to argue for your limitations? You want to tell me your less than or not good enough, watch out.

Anna: I can't believe she did that, blah, blah blah...

Leah: None of that. So then, can you talk about crown-on, because I feel like that's such a great symbol for the energy that you bring to others. And it's also an important motif in certain series or bodies of work that you've done.

Anna: Yeah, so I'm going to go back a little ways to my initial art school days when I was processing a lot of shame from a new diagnosis with bipolar and also some other things. And I started doing self-portraits. This professor took me in and she said, "Just focus on drawing yourself." And it

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took me out of being critiqued a lot, which was kind of nice. It was just her and I.

So, I started doing myself and then I would do the halo that you'd see in a Catholic church around the head, my head, and a lot of them were titled Oh Ye of Little Faith. And I just had – I was starting to wrestle with some things about faith and what I believed. And then years later, I was still doing the halos on myself in my self-portraits. Then I started – I think, when I started a different level of awareness of what was available to me. I started incorporating the crown in the figure.

And in that, to me, symbolizes an innate divinity, an innate value, worth, which is all internal. But on the things you see that as external with these crowns. And so, cut to when I was in New York after a little Art Schooling – this was the first round of Art School I was in – and I think I was there for Fashion Week. And I was just going to go to some of the shows. And I brought my crown with me that I made, like I made this crown. I have a couple of crowns that I like to rock out when I'm traveling, when it's not my birthday or whatever.

And so, I had the crown and I called Leah from the hotel room and I was like, "Okay, I'm supposed to go to this show. It's like a big fashion show. I don't know if I should wear this crown." And she asked me some question back. And then I was just like, "Well, I think I really want to wear it." And it was like this conversation, I remember exactly where I was in the hotel room and I remember the crown and I can remember crying and I can remember hanging up and then putting the crown on my head and going out into the world, into this New York Fashion – I ended up going to the Jeremy Scott show and meeting all these different people.

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But in that moment, it was like, do you really want to put it on? Do you really want to wear it? And if you do, then put it on. Yeah, you're going to cry, but walk out of the door and own that it's your value, that it's you walking out that door. And I just think that is so cool that that happened like that.

Leah: Yeah, you owning you. And again, it's like that unabashed, unapologetic – so that was a fun night...

Anna: That was a night where, like, "Is this really happening?" I did meet Ashely Longshore and I – I mean, we're not friends. I mean, I would be her friend, but I'm just saying, it was just a nice shake, photo op, and I wasn't even supposed to be at the Jeremy Scott show and there were just all these people there and the energy and the night and I think it does have something to do, I know it does, with the fact that when you show up, you attract things.

Leah: Right, well, I felt like the triumph was the moment you put it on your head and walked out the hotel room. And everything after that was just like gravy, cherry on the top.

Anna: Yes, which is like the exact part of going through any journey. It has to all be gravy too, like all those parts of it, the angst, you know, the elation. We wouldn't know the difference if we didn't have either one.

Leah: Well, and I think it comes back to that – I love that story and it comes back to as well, like, not waiting for anyone to anoint you or give you permission to wear the crown or choose you. But being like, "No, I'm claiming it."

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Anna: Yeah, and I just kept doing that, I just have – and now, I feel like I don't hesitate. I've practiced with diligence becoming her, like the future self. I am more her than I'm not her. So, now it's like, we catch old me being like, "What?" And then I just think it is powerful to step into that and own it and, just, it is. It's something sometimes words won't even describe what it really feels like.

Leah: And I think too, you have taken the work and you've done a lot of the work. You've done the heavy lifting work and you've run with it. Then there gets to be a point too where now, you get to play with kind of advanced concepts, I would say, for coaching. Like the idea that whatever we're creating right now, we're choosing. And that we can choose to create something different. And so, I think things that might have, like, seemed foreign or just asinine even a couple of years ago are just so matter of fact, like the conversation we were just having. You said you were having a conversation with another artist who said – we're recording this during COVID and this artist was saying, "Things are so bad, no artists are making money right now." And that was water of a duck's back for you because your response was...

Anna: "No, I'm making money." And it wasn't because – I wanted to almost, like, I was like, "Wait, don't be propaganda. Don't be, you know, of the culture that says that this can't happen."

Leah: Yeah, but I want to just point out too, like, what didn't happen that can happen, if you haven't done the work, is that you hear another artist that you respect and that is respected in the community. And they offer you a thought, like it's a bad economy, artists aren't making money right now. And where you didn't go was, "Oh god, yeah, she's probably right," or, "Well, I've made money but it's probably a fluke." It takes a strong mindset where it's almost like matter of fact, "Now I can make money. I am making money. I will make money."

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Anna: And that's the commitment. That's the commitment to yourself, to all of the things you see as what your visions are and what my visions are. That's the, like, a marital bond. It is as strong as any other bond that I have to myself, to be loving, to be creative, to have a statement like that happen and be like, "Bitch, no." But you know what I mean. And not in an egocentric way. I think I, and most people listening to this podcast I would think, are all about awareness and being more aware, especially right now. It will move the world if we all love and are more aware.

Leah: Yeah, is moving the world too. It's for sure moving the world. I can feel it. So, I want to tie this to – because you do this in another way; decline the ideas that society and conditioning might offer you as the kind of life that you can have and create. You've done this with your mental health. Talk about the paradigm that has existed for that, and because you are a champion for the paradigm that can and is becoming and will exist for that.

Anna: Yeah, I think that the paradigm that I was first acquainted with that's still out there is that there's a judgment and categorization of humans when they are different. And we call that mental health. And what we, I think, are lacking is any understanding of really the depths of what people, or who they are that have these diagnoses. And I think that's – that's a short part of what I think is the new paradigm.

The new paradigm is that we see people with mental health issues as brilliant people in society. We see them as genius and yes, not able to conform into the judgment of what they would think would be acceptable behavior or it isn't – I just really do not think it is about that. I mean, yes, chemically things happen in our brains. I just had an episode in November after the dream trip of my life with my husband of 20 years to Turks and Caicos. And I was in the hospital five days. I had ECT treatments.

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But I think that that is just a narrow little – it doesn't even explain what or who I am really in that narrow diagnostic way that we tend to just because we need to bill them for their diagnosis and they need to try fill these diagnoses, it's all set up for them to basically fail in society the way it's structured.

So, it comes from the top of that because doctors, we love them. But they also need the system to get paid. So, the system in which they exist and what keeps people like me in a paradigm, a box of limitations, is necessary for them to get paid. So, where I fall in this is that I am the new paradigm. I am having a brilliant life with a diagnosis of mental illness. And I'm not ill.

Leah: Right.

Anna: And so, I think I have a lot of energy. I was born with a lot of energy. My mom said I was five children in one child. Thank god. That's awesome. But it could also be seen, by the mother who was overwhelmed, as their child having ADHD that, "Jeez, will you get them a pill and tell them to shut the F up and go to..." you know. There's a culture that we need to fix people that are exuberant or have too much going on or too much to offer. And then, in some gradations, that is effective for people that are severe on the spectrum. But there are so many people that are not severe on the spectrum that they're being distinguished early because people can't handle their difference.

Leah: And this is, like, you're not saying this from a place of – you are on top of your own healthcare...

Anna: Yes, I take lithium gold standard. If I have an episode, I'm on an anti-psychotic. I have been religious about medical treatment since diagnosis.

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Leah: And you have been participating in a study...

Anna: At the University of Michigan, I am in a study. The thing that has led me to, which is that I don't have any real control, like if tomorrow whatever happens with my brain and I have an episode, I don't have control of that. But I also, what I do have control of is thinking that it's a failure, thinking that I didn't do everything I could to prevent it. And I think that's where society fails because I am not a failure, but yet, we see mental health as a failure.

So, I think that is the part that – and I think community health is wonderful. I think that there are so many people doing work in community mental health in the paradigm that we're in. But I think, because we evolve, because we are evolving, I am evolving. I would hope that that kind of system evolves as well. We can't use that system to explain me.

Leah: And what the other thing that I know we've talked about is making it clear to yourself, and then also anyone listening, that it's not a failure, it's not a personal failure, it's not a moral failure. It's not a spiritual failure. It's not yourself a failure if you have an episode. And then also, we've talked about, I thought that was so profound, was you realizing how much of your precious life force, mental and emotional resources, were directed towards, "Okay, what do I need to do to make sure I don't do anything wrong, so I don't cause an episode."

Anna: Yes, because it was taking up so much mind space to think that I – let me think how to say it – the thought, "I'm a failure if I have an episode," leads to that I am accountable for that episode. So, the truth is, I am not accountable for that episode. My brain chemistry is. My beautiful brain just does not function the way someone else's beautiful brain functions. And I have to get treatment for that.

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But I think the burden, the badge that we carry with the story of, “Well maybe it is true that I’m a failure, why can’t I just figure this out What can’t, if I’m taking all the pills...” But then to be free of that on the other side and to know that there’s nothing to figure out in that way. I have a beautiful rain. The facts are that it misfires and I need treatment sometimes.

Those are the basic truths. The rest of it is fear. And I think that it is fear that, yes, was not all my fear. It’s like a cultural stigma. That’s why I talk about it because it is systematic and it is a stigma. I mean, how many people do you know that would just be like, “Yeah, you know, I’ve got such and such, schizophrenic and this is major depressive.” And people don’t share those kinds of things. In general, they do not, not on purpose. There are some celebrities that now are coming out and saying more things, but in general, communities, best friends don’t usually talk about that kind of stuff.

Leah: So, can you talk about then shame and the relationship to shame perpetuating that old paradigm and the new paradigm?

Anna: Yes, I think that shame – I feel like I maybe didn’t know what shame was until I met you in terms of identifying it. Like, until I was in the Art School, really to identify – because it’s so easy to be like, “Oh that’s sad.” Or, “That was just a bad memory.” But, like, what is really underneath that is that shame. And that’s a master key. Being able to dive into that, that you’re not worthy or that you don’t feel burdened, and then to rewrite shame is to – you have to create something new because you can’t be full of shame and empowered.

So, you have to dig and you have to decide. And when I say commit, I don’t take that lightly. You have to commit, like, on the most cellular level that you are not going to be the victim anymore of it. As bad as it feels, as true

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as it is in your mind at the moment, but some part of you decides. And it's usually the future self, that we don't walk with that anymore.

Leah: And it is that reach. It is so true. I think our past selves have to do so much of the heavy lifting for our future selves, because it's the past self that doesn't know, for instance, what it's like to live without being buried under shame. And so, it's like, what would that even be like? But then, you have to use your imagination, so that creative power available to all of us to be like, what would it be like? Can I imagine what I life would be like where I am not ashamed at all of diagnosis?

You know, we were talking in the Art School today too about how shame being so incompatible with creativity because basically it tells us, creativity needs to dare and it needs to imagine and it needs to try new things. And you can't get everything right ahead of time. You just can't wait for the right – you can't get all your ducks in a row. As creatives, and as women, we're conditioned that, "You make one false move, sister," and it's like then the shame hammer is going to come down. So, shame dampens that creative impulse in men and women. And I think too, you know, we were talking about how that engenders this – shame impedes our ability to trust ourselves...

Anna: Just hesitation, I feel like. That is the – when you wait to do something, even though you have the inspiration or you know it's what needs to be done, I think that's shame too.

Leah: Yeah, saying if this doesn't go well, we're not going to survive this, because you will just have shown everybody...

Anna: Right, and I think that that though, with the diagnosis of bipolar, is like I was thinking that I had control of it if I was having this shame or if I

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spent the time thinking of all the things I was doing to prevent it from happening. But that's not creative. That's still living in the past. Because I like now, right now, we have right now. And so, I think that the shame will also pull us if we're not vigilant. You've got to sometimes pull yourself, be vigilant about it, pull you back to a story that even though you say you don't want it anymore, you're willing to feel it to feel the control, if that makes sense.

Leah: Feel the control of what?

Anna: Like, if you're willing to feel that you have control because of the shame, because it's like if I didn't get enough sleep or if I didn't – the thought comes in, like, "Am I controlling that?" And it's all wrapped up though in shame of a past story that I do – the real story is that I do everything I can to prevent anything from happening to me that would take me away from my family and put me in an inpatient psyche ward because that is just the epitome of where I would never want to be.

Leah: And then we talked about this at different times before because, when I met you, you hadn't had an episode in how many years?

Anna: 10. It was like a gold star. It was like, "10 years. It's been 10 years." And then...

Leah: It's interesting because, like you said, it felt like a gold star, like, "I must be doing everything right."

Anna: And that's the illusion. That's the eclipse or whatever you were talking about. What were you saying today?

Leah: The ellipsis we were talking about...

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Anna: I always do that.

Leah: Well, it hasn't happened in 10 years and it was a thing you didn't want to have happen. And then it happened.

Anna: And then it happened. And then it was really an opportunity for me to make it mean something different, even though it was painful and I didn't enjoy it. But I definitely do think it happened for me. I think that it was a way that I could solidify and become stronger in what I'm talking to you about because it's easy to become separate from something like that.

Leah: And I think too, to me, it gives everything you're saying real teeth because it was not an easy experience. You're not saying, just like resolve. That word means something different to you now. You know the depth of energy that you have to, like, where you have to dig and the heart you grow and where it comes from.

Anna: I can hardly remember. When you have ECT you have short-term memory issues. But I remember it all in Art School. I'm like, "I can't do this, I'm not going to be able to do this, I don't know who I am anymore, this is the worst ever. I can't even believe this happened." Because it just sucks. It's still not – it breaks my heart, but I also know that it's not – I had to solidify that it wasn't a failure when it happens. That had to be solidified in me.

And so, in order to really solidify that, I had to go through it again. And instead of being in the hospital for two weeks, I was in the hospital for five days. I was very persistent, as I am in life. And when I get panicked, I get even more persistent and make a few phone calls to Leah. But it is that, I had figured out, we have a plan. We know what to do with an episode and

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all of the things that go into any plan if someone has a heart attack. It's our plan. But I think that I was definitely on the floor and had to get back up.

Leah: So, anyone out there listening who maybe they know somebody with a diagnosis, maybe they are living with a diagnosis and haven't had an episode in a while, maybe they're on the floor, what would you tell them?

Anna: Well, if you're on the floor, lie on your back. It feels better than on your knees. I would say, it's okay. and even when it's not okay, it's going to be better. At least that's what I tell myself, you know, that I – and the main thing is, I don't have to feel bad about this. And the thoughts that I have, when I'm manic and not in a coherent, I don't have a coherent mind-heart, that's one thing. But when I'm outside of the episode, I can decide that is my power and that is my honor that I can decide what I do with that, what I make it mean about me.

And this last time, I really made it mean that I'm a warrior. The things I have done in my life make me someone who is accomplished. So, I feel like that is why it feels like my purpose to spread this message. Because I was 18 and newly diagnosed and thinking that there was something wrong with me and why was I making all these choices that didn't feel like my own? And I feel like I brought that dragging with me for 20 years.

And at this point, I have to know that pure love will tame the dragon. And maybe there is no dragon. I don't know. But the love I have for myself will be able to be enough for exactly whatever happens to me.

Leah: And I feel like it's, like any truth, it has so many different sides to it and seems like if you're not in the story, there seems like there's parts of the story that would contradict themselves because they're opposites. But they don't. So, for instance, the part where you're a warrior and then you

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also discover these new depths of what it means to love yourself. There's the part where you were like, "This is my dragon to slay," and that felt like the truth for a while, to summon the courage to slay the dragon. And then the next evolution was, "I love the dragon in order to tame the dragon." And then like you're saying, maybe a further evolution is maybe at some point, it's like, maybe there was no dragon. But at each step, it's all been true.

Anna: And I'm just so grateful. Literally, I'm grateful to be alive and to have every single experience that I had, even in all that I resisted. And I resisted a lot I physically did when I was an inpatient, like that was a physical resistance to the health that they were trying to give me that I didn't understand because of my cognition and my brain functioning.

So, I just feel like I don't have anything to resist anymore in that way, that girl, 18. She was very scared. And yeah, I'll be scared again if it happens, but I will know, I'll have my knowing, when I have my cognition, I'll have my knowing and I will trust myself that I am here for a greater purpose and my story and my art and what I have to offer is more important than any pin down I've ever experienced.

Leah: Amen.

Anna: Amen.

Leah: And I think for anyone listening, to know that their life is so much more than if they've experienced anything like that. And their life is so much more than a label too. Because I know, we've talked about even the linguistics, the languaging of, like, "I am bipolar." But we don't say, like, "Well I am the flu. I am cancer." We don't say it. We don't identify with other illnesses. And so just that layer of removing that from it being something that defines you to you then being, "No, I define me."

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Yeah, and I don't think that people have to talk about this. But I'll tell you what; if you're talking about this and you're experiencing it, you are feeding the chain. And that's what I can say from my own experience. If you do not have something like this and if you're hiding it, it's shame.

And so, if it is shame, that's okay. maybe you're not ready to talk about it. maybe you'll think about it in two weeks and maybe want to tell somebody. But I just feel like I don't want people to feel like they need to hide in a space that they're alone because it's just not a fact. It's not true.

Leah: And I think, if anyone is looking just to edify their spirit and for inspiration, but just true fuel for their mind and their spirit, this is one of the things that's wonderful about social media. It's another kind of medium for this new message and this new paradigm building. And you do a beautiful job with that through your Instagram. You are weaving in these messages and just who you are as a person and with your art. And I know that's a source of inspiration and empowerment for so many people already. So we'll, for sure, share that in the show notes. And it's something that you do, it's like another form of expression for you, but you're also a powerhouse. You're intent on pioneering that this changes.

Anna: Yes, I'm very intent and I am a pioneer and I think there are other pioneers out there that might not be talking right now, but they're out there.

Leah: They might be listening...

Anna: They might be listening. And I think it is, if you think it is so much a part, I mean, yes everyone, but it is a part of creativity that the range of exuberance and expansiveness and what we would call mental health, all of those things are under a blanket of creative people throughout history

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that have been seen as different. So, yeah, I'm all in for the pioneers out there, the other makers and creators.

Leah: Yeah, your mind goes places that's not, like – your mind comes up with things that I love, that are so fresh. And it's not pinned down in a way, just the way your brain works. It's not been pinned down in a way that some others seem to – maybe that's available to us all, but I think it's an example of that. And I think that time will tell and science will tell, is there a relationship between minds that don't want to be contained?

Sometimes, I feel like the things you come up with, it's like you went to some edge of the universe and came back from a different galaxy, like where did that come from? But it's, like, right on. It's right on and it's so...

Anna: I think they will figure that out, Leah. And I think that there will be a connection because I just think there is a connection between creative genius and what that mind is available to see. And maybe everyone has that, like you talked about everyone has the potential to be creative. But that it is possible that that mind has been culturally, in a lot of ways, called something else.

Leah: Right, and shame kind of has kept it down.

Anna: But what about those ships, they're rising and...

Leah: A rising tide lifts all ships. I think too, like, calling all pioneers who are listening, and whether or not you call yourself that yet or not, I think too it's like this new paradigm too of, like, you don't have to be the lone wolf pioneer, that it's like so much more fun, and I think so much more powerful to be in a community of pioneering type thinkers and pioneering type

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energy. An going back as well to the, you know, what's an unleashed mind look like?

Because we've talked a lot too about with growth, you know, in the Art School we talk about not just the mindset, the coaching part, but also the energetic uncomfortableness that can come with growth and how actually, how do you create with your mind a bigger safer container for more of your creative energy to come through? Because it might sound like a woo-woo thing to people listening unless you've actually experienced so much energy and it feels like your body or your mind is too small to contain it. but it happens without fail for so many people every time they are up-leveling or about to experience a breakthrough.

Anna: Right, and I think it is that energetic up-leveling that happens. I totally believe that's not woo-woo. Just from my personal opinion. To be born so expansive and like five children in one child and then to be where I am now and figuring out all of that energy and how best level up or evolve to the next part is like expansion. And I think that there is something no doubt real about that.

Leah: Yes, and I think something else that I love about, that we talk about normalizing the extraordinary, like in the Art School. It's like normalizing this big huge creativity where it flows through your art, through your personal life, to your finances. But something about creating that new paradigm is creating the safe space for that up-leveling to occur where you're like, "It is okay here in this community with other humans to be as me as I really am and to drop the false pretense that I'm actually smaller than this."

Anna: Well, the atmosphere changes. You know, when the atmosphere changes literally on Earth, and that's what it feels like to be in a community of women who can say, "You know what? I'm going to write this book and

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I'm going to do it in a year and this is – well I'm not going to do it from a place where I feel desperate or upset or overwhelmed," but to make real statements about what they are trying to garner out of their life and be taken very seriously. And then what? Things happen...

Leah: And then they do it.

Anna: And then it's happening. And you're, like, watching someone on a call and you're like, "Oh my gosh, I can totally see that person at the Grammys. I know I am. I already see that."

Leah: Yeah, even just the last four-week immersion edition, I always expect big things from people...

Anna: That was incredible.

Leah: But with people actually finishing a whole novel and I feel like it's just getting momentum, like the more people – because we had new people this time and we had returning people this time and it's that rising tide has taken on a life of its own. And so, I referenced in the podcast about, okay, this awesome community. And now I'm thinking, it's a movement. So, this is a corner of the universe where the movement is happening. But it's hot here.

Anna: There's a revolution going on, ladies and gentlemen.

Leah: So, what do you think that is? Because you've experienced different kinds of creative communities. So, what do you think it counts for, people being able to unabashedly claim what they're going to do and then not just say it but actually do it, and then not just do it, but actually do it from a place of health and where they feel like a better person and a happier and

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a stronger healthier person because of it and they're not doing it from forcing or exhausting themselves?

Anna: I just had an image of you in front of like a garden or farm, like you're at the front of the farm or garden and you've got this huge array of things behind you, some hoes, some watering cans, and you're just there at the front giving us all these things. And then we go out to the soil. And when we're all together and we have it cultivated, then it just literally, I mean, you see a seed and then it turns into a flower. This is what can happen with people and their ideas and their creativity.

You're at the head of the garden, just giving us the tools. And then I think it's that also you look around and people in the group, there's a variety of more her than not and less her than not, it doesn't matter. All of it is integral to the whole integration of growth. So, I just think it is a goldmine. It is literally a goldmine.

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So, this brings me to the part of the podcast where I want you to do more than just listen. I want you to lean in and really work with me and coach with me. Take this information, implement it into your life, and make it transformational.

So, I've been thinking about, what am I going to do this week for the coach with me segment? And I wanted to do something that honors Anna's spirit and that you can take this conversation with her as inspiration and think about how can I apply a little bit more crown-on and Anna no hesitation allowed energy to my life?

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And so, I want you to think just that. If you allowed yourself to be someone who lives without hesitation, and by that, I don't mean that you're not discerning and that you're not wise. But you know the difference. You know when you're hanging around in the fog of doubt and confusion for too long, and one of the things that I know to be true about Anna's magic is that she has an idea and she implements.

There is such courage in her creativity and I also know, from watching her through the Art School and knowing her as a friend, that it's also a skill. And maybe one that she has honed throughout time, because she has done it over and over again. But I also know that it's one, even if you don't feel so naturally inclined, you can adopt a growth mindset and learn.

So, think about living in creative breakthrough and what that means for you. This is how you do it. You have the idea and then you implement. And then you learn without shame. Because that lesson without the charge of emotion is wisdom, which you can then take as an ally to amplify your creativity going forward.

I want for everyone listening to be able to reach that next level, to ascend to that next level, and to do so with such a deep sense of inner strength. And this is really how you build that muscle. Ask yourself, where am I indulging in hesitation? Because that erodes your trust in yourself. And then ask, how can I cut that out and where instead can I live in creative breakthrough. Have an idea, implement, move forward, create courageously, and have your own back on the other side without shame and with deep pride.

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of *The Art School Podcast*. If you've enjoyed this episode, if this podcast has been useful to you, the best thing you can do to pay it forward is to share the good news. So,

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subscribe, share with friends, share with allies, share with frenemies, share with colleagues. And then also, go to iTunes and leave a review.

I am so grateful for everyone that takes the time to do that and it really does help me reach more people with this work. And when you're ready to take this work deeper, there are those three amazing options going on right now. By enrolling in the Art School fall 2020, you're automatically enrolled in the summer workshop series. You could also apply to join the Art School Mastermind. Both of those applications and enrolments are at my website, www.leahcb.com.

I chose a very special intentional quote to close today's podcast. It's from Brené Brown's book *Rising Strong*. And the reason I chose these words are because these are beautiful powerful words and I wanted to tie it in with Anna's story because her story, who she is, her life, she lives these words. She is an example of these words.

So, for anyone listening who is like, "Yeah, that's nice in theory but how does it apply to life?" I wanted to offer a place where is the intersection of the beautiful inspiring word and also the intersection of this powerful person. Because we all need more stories to have faith in. And I do know Anna's story and life is one that will inspire much creativity and faith and the power of the human spirit.

So, here's the quote from *Rising Strong* by Brené Brown, "The most dangerous stories we make up are the narratives that diminish our inherent worthiness. We must reclaim the truth about our lovability, divinity, and creativity. Have a beautiful week, everyone, and I look forward to talking with you next time.