

Ep #182: The Shards That Comprise the Whole



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With Your Host

Leah Badertscher

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I love to talk about a body of work as much as the next person. And so many people have dreams of creating their masterpiece, which I am passionate about supporting and pursuing. And today, I want to talk about the importance of allowing ourselves fragments and shards.

And the power of using fragments and shards – I believe it was Goethe said, manifestations of our creative process... those are my words. Goethe said, “The whole is always presence-ing in its parts.” So, for us to allow ourselves this orientation to our own creativity and our process and our art and our life as well where we are not always trying to create the opus, not always thinking of our entire body of work, also allowing creativity to take place in ways that are smaller but also, in their own respect, completely whole manifestations of our own creativity.

I wanted to offer you this idea about creating in fragments, shards, slivers. I wanted to present this idea of the possibility of the parts of what you create being a very vital and also complete reflection of the whole. Because I think it is a healing, transformative, and empowering alternative to other paradigms of creativity that would have us believing that, if we're not long suffering and completing grand opuses and also always productive, that somehow we aren't real artists, that we're not the real deal, or that we will never achieve our creative dreams that way.

This episode, by the way, is very meta because all podcast episodes for me are shards or fragments of the greater work I'm doing. And I do hope this episode on using shards, fragments, slivers as tools in your own creative work helps bring an energy of magic, aliveness, effortless effort, joy, love the kind of grounding humility that tenacious artists need, to live the life you're meant to live, and to be the artist that you're meant to be.

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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 to another episode of *The Art School Podcast*. So, I am just freshly returned from a wonderful – albeit too short – trip to New York City. And many things to say about that.

However, in keeping with the meta theme of this episode and upcoming episodes, I want to offer you what I think is a beautiful shard and fragment that can really mirror back to you a grand new world of possibility in terms of your relationship to your creativity, your relationship to process, and to really the paradox of using this tool of fragments, of shards, as a way to access your greatest most vast self-concept and work.

So, the idea for the episode has been percolating for a while. And I have wanted to do something on this ever since a few years ago. It was early on in the podcast. I have a big backlog of podcast ideas and this is one of them, where I was reading about how so many of Emily Dickinson's poems, that there are Dickinson's scholars who have collected what they call fragments.

And there are a collection of her poems – I don't know if you could even call all of them poems. They call them fragments – where she had written things down on the back of envelopes and on torn, crumpled sheets of paper. And that these had been collected and stored as the treasures that they rightly are and should be.

And I loved this story because it also pokes holes in the myth that art is just born. We all know that Michelangelo's David did not just step out of the block of marble, but that everything that wasn't David was chipped away. Also, interestingly, in fragments and splinters. So, it is a process.

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And here is the first point I want to offer you – so, we’re already starting the coach with me, we’re already starting the point where I want you to lean in and really work with me, coach with me – for you to examine, perhaps, any previously unexamined places in your mind around your ideas of what your creative process should be or has to be.

I know I’ve found great traction and healing and liberation in my own work, and then accessing that for my clients, when we realize the places where we have unconsciously assumed ideas about how our work gets made, where we have unconsciously taken on ideas of what our process should look like.

And one of those ideas that I think we just absorb is that it should be complete and neat and tidy and orderly and linear from the beginning, that anything that is just a shard or a fragment can never possibly amount to anything. But again, as I mentioned in the Goethe quote that I’ve referenced – and I’m paraphrasing – that the wholeness of the universe is always present in its parts.

Einstein said, “If we study nature, we will understand so much more about the cosmos,” this idea that all of the universe, all of life is manifesting in its different parts. And so too with the creative force that moves through us and manifests in even the smallest of places.

I’ve been playing with this in my own work. I’ve mentioned in podcasts probably months ago – I’ve been doing this for over a year now, just doing a lot of smaller studies.

And in the past several weeks I’ve found the need, the impulse, the intuition to even go smaller, like tearing sheets of paper and using torn sheets of earlier paintings and then playing with them. And I didn’t even connect it

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actually to Emily Dickinson's fragments until I was thinking about this episode. I'm like, "Oh, there is something there."

The other genesis, the other inspiration for this episode was that earlier this week, when I was at Laura Belgray's Shrimp Club mastermind retreat in New York City, she had, as one of her wonderful guest speakers, a woman by the name of Terri Trespicio. And she has a wonderful book out called *Unfollow Your Passion*.

But one of my favorite takeaways from that day and from her workshop was this very idea; not needing to always create and present and share your entire work, your entire body of thought, everything you know, valuing the fragment, the shard, valuing the slice, the one story, the one lesson.

I have worked with enough incredibly creative people at this point to know that when someone tells me they have a block or they just don't know what to write, they can't get themselves to write, that 95% of the time, what's actually going on is that there is so much to write, so much to paint, so much to create that their brain is already anticipating the impossibility of delivering and flowing through on all of that. So, it has shut them down so they can't even begin.

I've been there myself too and I know the particular feeling in my mind, in my body, in my energy, my central nervous system when this happens. And so, this beautiful practice of just narrowing, giving yourself a gentle, kind, constraint of one beautiful shard, one beautiful fragment. And I offer this story of Emily Dickinson too in anticipation of that part of your brain that will be like, "But that's no good. That will never amount to anything..." well, you have a beautiful counter example for that.

And it is a very healing process. It is one of those ways where you can put a crack in that dam, inner dam, if you have one, that is blocking the free

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flow of your creative expression and the soul of what wants to happen through you.

I mean, just listen to the way that Vault, which is Slate's new history blog, described Emily Dickinson's little scraps of paper, "These scraps of paper carrying shards of poems and prose give us glimpses of Emily Dickinson's creative process during the latter years of her life."

And Emily Dickinson's own editor, Millicent Todd Bingham, described Dickinson's manuscripts in this way, "A jumble of words on odds and ends of paper, some of it crumpled or torn. There are pink scraps, blue and yellow scraps, all written in pencil and all in the late handwriting. The strokes are sometimes faint and the lines often overlap so that the words overtake one another as if written in the dark."

That in itself, that description of the creative process of a great poet is very poetic. And I wanted to share that and also Slate's description to offer you an energy of the kind of orientation you can take to your own work, including the process of creating your work and including the fragments as you create it.

There's a reverence in this orientation. There's an assumption of sanctity. There is an assumption of the dignity and integrity of oneself as an artist, and as a creative. And that is a far cry from the energy of scarcity and a need to prove and a need to have permission that is often a hallmark of that long-suffering paradigm.

Also, I will let you in on a secret – nothing I intend to keep secret. I'm obviously sharing it now. But if I have what I think are special gifts or superpowers as a coach, here's something that is not a trick, not a gimmick, and to me, more sacred than simply calling it a skill. And it's not actually just unique to me. It's something that you can do too.

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I know that part of my efficacy and X-factor as a coach is that I know of this truth, that the whole presence is in its parts.” So, whenever a client speaks, whenever they share their work, whenever they share their thought process, I am completely aware and present in acknowledging that that is the whole and the holy presenting through them.

And even if it’s a sentence, even if it’s a word, even if it’s one page from their manuscript, even if it’s one piece of their work, I am aware of the presence of the whole in that part.

So, it might look like a shard or a fragment or an insignificant nothing, a crumpled piece of paper that others would dismiss. But I know that’s the genius, that’s that inner genie, that’s the genius creative spirit within them communicating in this way.

And just because it is in a constrained therefore limited format, whether it be a thought, even a quote unquote limiting thought, whether it be in just one piece of their work and that work has not had the opportunity to be nurtured and developed yet to its full potential, I am present for the whole and that holy. And because I am, it speaks louder and louder and gives more fragments and more shards and reflects more clearly and brilliantly.

I have the orientation and expectation of dignity and integrity and the real deal coming through every person. And then, that is what’s there. And then, they feel it. And then, the more they really feel it and see it mirrored by me, then the more they have to give that’s in that same vein and in that same energy.

And I’m telling you this not because you’re a coach. Some of you maybe are. Probably many of you are that are listening. I’m also telling you this because this is the orientation and the knowing and expectation you can

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have for yourself. This is the orientation you can take to your own work and to your own process.

So, now, a full and proper coach with me. 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. Coach with me. Don't just consume information. Be a capital-C Creator. Take this information, contemplate it, think about it, integrate it, and then apply it in your own life in order to create true and lasting transformation.

I want to invite you to contemplate this idea of using fragments and shards in your own creative work. Maybe you want to use it literally. Maybe you want to take a page, a torn page – sorry – a scrap out of Emily Dickinson's book, tear off small sheets of paper, give yourself that kind of creative constraint, whether you're a writer or maybe you do it as a painter. Maybe you borrow what I shared I've been doing, taking pieces of painting works on either canvas or paper and then cutting or tearing smaller shreds of them and then using that as both a prompt and a container.

There are so many ways you can play with this literally. Maybe you think you're going to write a scene but you write only what's on the table in that particular scene. And play with that. It's such an inroad into that idea that Albert Einstein talks about, "Creativity is intelligence having fun." It is a fun and playful approach.

You can then collect these. Just do a series without thinking about it. No overthinking, just doing, flowing, playing. And then, look back intentionally rewiring and reconditioning yourself to be someone who has the orientation of knowing, you are going to see a whole, a wholeness presence-ing in these small parts. You're going to start to see patterns emerge, things that you like, things that you don't like, things – this is one of my favorites – that are so surprising and unexpected you realize only after the fact they were

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there all along, that a part of you knew they were there all along, but you weren't intentionally, consciously, rationally doing it.

You can apply this concept of working with fragments and shards in a metaphorical sense in your own self-coaching. If you are looking for ways to move beyond blocks, to dissolve blocks but in a way that is healing and kind, play with this. Play with maybe, where are you overwhelmed because you're trying to create too much and your brain, our creative spirit is just having indigestion? Where instead can you make the smallest, most beautiful offering and know that yes, indeed, that is the whole presence-ing in its parts.

A common question that I get from people that are new to my work is a question about next steps, "I just need to know my next steps." Next steps, next steps, next steps, and there's an urgency to it.

And when it is that kind of question, in the context of that kind of urgent energy, I know what's actually going on is that they're not actually wanting a next step. They're believing that's not going to be enough. They're wanting the whole picture, the whole plan.

And so, already setting themselves up for inner frustration, disappointment, and then also feeling like they can't be helped because here they are asking for next steps and no one can give them a next step. When really, what's going on is a fear rooted in this scarce energy that the next step won't be enough, that they are abandoned. That in that next step, God is not there, that the universe is going to fall out from underneath them, that the bridge won't actually appear.

So, I wanted to offer that as well in case you're experiencing any similar sort of urgency. Because then what it turns into too is the brain spinning in, "I need next steps. I don't know next steps. There's no path forward for me.

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I'm stuck here. I should just stay here. I really want out. I'm stuck here. I just stay here because there are no next steps and nobody can help me."

It is so helpful to just understand, if that's you, it's okay. It's not your fault. It happens to so many people. It's a very common phenomenon. And to know what's actually happening is that I'm afraid. I am afraid that the next step will not be enough. I am afraid there will not be support. I am afraid that if I don't have the security and guarantee of the whole picture, then I have nothing. And why even begin?

So, just know that and see that, and see if you can't begin to, just a little bit, lean into, even play around the edges at the beginning, of this idea of what it would be like to allow yourself the kindness and mystical energy, the magic of creating in fragments, and allowing the whole and the holy to be reflected back to you.

Thank you so much for listening to another episode of *The Art School Podcast*. And thank you too to those of you that have been reaching out and letting me know that you're listening, who have been tagging me on Instagram. And if we're not connected yet on Instagram, I would love that. My handle is @leahcb1, and then also just the messages that I get when you reply to newsletters.

And I wanted to give a special shoutout this week and a thank you in response to a very beautiful email I received from Rebecca Nadler. I hope I'm pronouncing your last name right. I thought about messaging you first to ask for a correct pronunciation. But I also wanted this to be a bit of a surprise.

And she wrote that she's been listening to the podcast daily, some of the episodes three times as they're mind-blowing. I also wanted to give

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Rebecca a shoutout for another reason, because I also happen to know she is a very gifted jewelry artist.

I have been following her and her work ever since a dear friend and client of mine gifted the most beautiful earrings of hers to me. She said she thought I would love her work, and she was 100% right, nailed it with that. I love all sorts of jewelry and, for me, she hits all of these sweet spots including her use of color on metals.

I haven't seen anything like it. It's so original. It's so unique. It really is the kind of jewelry that is every bit as much beautiful jewelry as it is an exquisite piece of art. And it's the kind of jewelry too that no one else will have and everybody will ask you, "Who is that? Where did you get that?"

So, I highly recommend following her. She's on Instagram. We'll have the handle in my show notes. And also, I love that someone is out there making the beautiful work they're making while listening to the podcast, so that means while connected to all of you.

So, I wanted to offer that too. Just think of that, to think of all the creative people that you're connected to that you haven't met yet, but it's always such a magical moment when Art School listeners and Art School clients get to meet, and entertain that perhaps that is in your future. And perhaps sooner than later.

I didn't mean that as a segue, I promise. But that's another one of those things of intuition works better through you. But it is a good segue into sharing that applications are open for the Art School Mastermind. And if you are looking to be in a room with kindred spirits and also this next Art School Mastermind too, we are also having an in-person retreat because, oh my God, I had just that amazing experience of being in person with people just this last week.

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And there is nothing like it. There is being in the room, being in the container, being in the program. And then, there is connecting in person. And it is such magic and such a blessing. I'm going to talk more on that in coming weeks, on what my New York experience was like, including just an epic day with one of my Art School Masterminders, so many beautiful takeaways. But for today, this beautiful fragment and also the invitation to join us.

You can submit an application online, either by going to the link in the show notes or by visiting my website, www.leahcb.com and going to the Mastermind link. And, as always, with any questions about the Art School or coaching, you can send us an email, and that address is support@leahcb.com.

So, to close today, I wanted to give you a fragment, but also a really big bonus and insight, a really big coach with me, and also a secret not-so-secret of why what I do and how I do it, why it works. And that is the physical, the physiological, the experiential part of this approach to shards and fragments and being present for the presence-ing of the whole.

One method – you could call it a hack. I don't particularly like that word. But one method, one approach, if you're having trouble bringing a sense of deep settled trust and reverence to your own work, if you're having trouble leaving behind old patterns and body conditions of survival mode and scarcity and fear and urgency and feeling small and cramped, one thing to practice is a way of being, like a feeling in your body of when you are in admiration, true presence, and appreciation of someone else's shard or fragment of genius.

I mean, think of someone you admire. Maybe it's an artist. Maybe it's a leader, a writer, just someone you know, and how you will hang on their every word. And if they give you three words, you'll hang on that.

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Think of the napkins that Matisse or Picasso scribbled on and that are now worth big bucks and are treasured, really. It's that treasuring energy that is not only in our brain, but is in our whole body.

So, this is like marrying mindfulness and magic. Think of those places where you treasure, where you are present and appreciating and knowing someone else's magic, someone else's creative genius, someone else's wisdom. And if they give you a sentence, you're going to savor and revel in the genius and beauty of that sentence. If they tore off a piece of their painting, you would cherish that torn piece of painting.

And then, feel what that feels like in your body. Does it feel open? Does it feel closed? When you are reveling in the beauty and the enjoyment of, let's say, your favorite song or a piece of music, are you tense? Or does something in you relax to take it in?

Practice and notice those ways of being. Again, this is a fragment of mindfulness meets magic meets learning how to condition yourself to turn this towards yourself. But again, a fragment, a shard is enough. Practice this. Practice it towards other people. And practice this same sort of orientation, not only in your brain and in your thoughts, but also in your body, in your spirit, practice that, turning that towards your own fragments, towards your own whole and holiness reflected in those small and sacred pieces.

Have a beautiful week, everyone and I look forward to talking with you next time.