

Ep #190: What Your Subconscious is Trying to Tell You with Kelly Darke



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Leah Badertscher

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Kelly: I do a daily visual journal. I started it when my kids were little and I did not have time, I wasn't finding the time to make art, which was killing me. And that's another thing I learned about myself. I literally need to make art for my own physical, mental health. If I'm not, it's devastating.

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That was a clip from my recent conversation with Kelly Darke. Kelly Darke is a professional artist, registered art therapist, certified K-12 art teacher, wife, mother of two, and Kelly is one of our beloved Art School alum.

A big part of the Art School mission is to create a paradigm of thriving, flourishing artists. And we do that by creating this container, this sacred container, this safe and also challenging supportive space where people can share what they're going through. They can share their triumphs. They can share their struggles. And they can also do this in the context of an elevated conversation and energy, where we are moving one another forward, cocreating this paradigm of increased impact, generosity, authentic embodiment of our creative potential, and affluence

It's very powerful to be surrounded by a community of creatives who are holding big visions for their lives and for one another, who are working to not only dream big, but realize those dreams and on their own terms, in a way that is authentic and true to them. And Kelly is a beautiful embodiment of that.

She is a true renaissance woman, and the fact that she has this art therapy background, the background as an artist, as a teacher, and just being who she fundamentally is as a person, I thought, what better way for you to glean some insights of your own.

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It's one thing for me to teach. It's another thing to hear it through the eyes of another, particularly someone who is so well versed in areas of art, of psychology, of being a working and living artist. I'm delighted to share this conversation with you. I hope you are ready to take lots of notes because we both get animated and excited. So, do enjoy.

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 to another episode of *The Art School Podcast*, coming to you on another beautiful summer afternoon in Michigan. I am going to record this and then take the kids to the pool, come home, do some packing.

We are headed to Iowa for maybe a week, I can work remotely, so we have some flexibility there, and spend some time on my parents' farm, see my siblings and their families, and just soak up that Iowa mysticism and magic. It is particularly strong in the summer and I've got a thing for Iowa in June and in the summertime. So, I'm looking forward to that, and so excited to bring you this conversation with Kelly.

As I mentioned in the intro, I get animated, she gets animated. It is fun. It's a delicious conversation and this is also another reason I love having Art Schoolers on to talk, because we start organically. That's how I love to start. I want it to, as much as possible, mimic some of the exchanges and interactions we have in Art School.

Obviously, it's not exactly the same because I'm not coaching and there aren't many other people there as well. But you get a taste of the magic

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and Kelly shares so many stories and insights that I do hope you have pen and paper ready. Also, later on, I go on a rant about obliterating professional paradigms and, quote unquote boxes of success that really just box you in, hem you in and keep you small, suffocate your magic, kill your soul. This is not the way to be successful as an artist, by the way. So, I hope you enjoy that.

Kelly Darke is a professional artist, registered art therapist, certified K-12 art teacher, wife, and mother of two. She has over a decade of experience in art therapy working with adults and children with various cognitive and emotional needs. She has presented at local and national conferences on the use of art therapy with transgender youth and published articles on the benefits of art therapy for various populations.

Kelly and her colleague Shannon Scott-Miller coauthored the book *Art Therapy with Transgender and Gender Expansive Children and Teenagers*. Sidenote, I know Kelly and Shannon were also recently invited to the Dallas Museum of Art to speak on this topic and present their book.

Kelly is passionate about self-care and self-awareness as a tool to improve overall wellbeing. With this in mind, she developed Art and Mindfulness, virtual art-therapy based sessions that include creative exercises, designed to develop self-awareness, and facilitate personal growth. The experience is a combination of art therapy, neuroscience, coaching, and self-compassion.

Art and mindfulness is a powerful process that engages personal creativity and takes advantage of neuroplasticity to make positive changes in participants' thoughts and behaviors. Kelly Darke earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts as well as a Masters of Education from Wayne State University in Detroit. She creates art daily from her home studio in Southeast Michigan.

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So, as you can see, or hear in this case, Kelly knows that of which she speaks. And then she also brings such genuine, sincere, expansive heart and soul to this work. We're going to slide right in. I start midstream in a conversation I start recording because what she was saying was just too good. So, I'll just let you slide right into this conversation with Kelly Darke.

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Kelly: Those things, like yeah, self-care, and listening to yourself, listening to those clues that things are not aligned and be okay with it. Emotions that come up are all information for you and they're not good or bad. They're just information. And if you can figure out what you're trying to tell yourself, basically, then it's going to be helpful to get you in the right direction.

Leah: Yeah, I think that's amazing because our brain speaks in symbols, and art therapy is an opportunity for your unconscious or not-so-conscious parts of you that don't communicate in perfect syntax and language. I mean, I'm a big believer in practicing art journaling, like capturing symbols and working with the symbols and that works on your psyche in ways – and color, obviously, all of those ways that – we are so much more complex than just being reduced to cognitive thought. And at the same time, the neuroscience you had mentioned before, using this as a way to rewire the brain because, like playfulness, in this therapeutic state, that's an ideal brain state for rewiring, for making change.

Kelly: And you brought up art journaling. I'm not sure if those are the words you just used. But I do a daily visual journal. I started it when my kids were little and I did not have time, I wasn't finding the time to make art, which was killing me. And that's another thing I learned about myself. I literally need to make art for my own physical, mental health. If I'm not, it's devastating.

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So, I decided, I started making – it's funny because I have stacks of them here – daily visual journal, postcard size, so collage, scribbles, doodling, anything on one side. And then, on the back, writing the date and a self-reflection.

So, sometimes, like, this was whatever scraps I had, I'm just going to pull things out of my little collage kit. And then, on the back it talks about the – so then, I'll write down the self-reflection, what does this mean? What am I looking at? Why did I do this? Why did I combine these things together? And then thinking about what it means.

So, on the back of this one specifically, I wrote that the image reminds me of my thoughts, jumbled, nervousness, sometimes chaotic, but always beautiful. And then it says it's really the way I function and I will embrace it now.

Leah: Oh, Kelly, I love that. I love that.

Kelly: I was almost going to cry because I'm like, I don't remember writing this, but I'm like, I thought that about myself that day. That actually makes me feel pretty good.

Leah: You should feel amazing about that. Can we start there? Can I include that?

Kelly: Yeah...

Leah: Maybe we'll find a way to link up that visual so that they have that visual to go with that story there too. Because what you just said about, this has to be part of the conversation, I literally need to make art every day otherwise it's devastating for my – I think you said my mental, emotional, physical health.

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Kelly: Yeah.

Leah: Yeah, can we start there with not mincing our words, like that's what's going on?

Kelly: Yes.

Leah: It's a powerful statement and true.

Kelly: It is very true. It is very true and I think it's something that I didn't know how important it was until it got to the point of being devastating, and then realizing that I have, like – this is who I am. I need to do this. And it's okay. And it's also important that I take care of my mental health because everybody should. Everybody should. We need to. And if I can recognize that about myself and I have that thing that I know is helpful, then of course I'm going to do that. I should do that.

Leah: Well, and we can elaborate more on this conversation because I know some listeners will be artists and will be, like, vigorously shaking their head in agreement, like, "I know that, I know that if I'm not making my art, whatever the medium is, that I am not well."

And you could try to substitute other things, whether it be therapy or shopping or drinking or eating or, like, whatever. But it's like, if you make your art, then things are right again. It is just that line from the gnostic gospel of Thomas, if you bring out that which is within you, it will save you. And if you don't, it will destroy you.

Kelly: That is so true. That's good.

Leah: That resonated with me so much when I first read that. And then there were times over my artistic career, my coaching career, where I felt

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kind of some shame in sharing that because I had some feedback from others that, well, you shouldn't make people feel bad about not bringing out that which is within you.

But I think already, from what you've said, there's a different orientation, and it's one of deep self-care. It's an act of love, an act of self-love to bring out that which is within you.

Kelly: Yes, absolutely. And self-love I think it may be that one thing that I was lacking because I didn't understand really what it meant. And the more that I practice this and the more that I'm honest with myself, the more I realize that self-love has been lacking, but through my art was a way that I could really connect with myself and be completely honest because it's my art.

Leah: Well, that example you just shared of that visual diary, visual journal entry and what you wrote on the back, when people are a little bit lost with, self-love, okay, but what does it look like? How do I do it? I think what you're describing and what we were talking about beforehand too, practicing art this way, having this kind of art practice available to you is a way to practice self-love and deep self-care.

Because, if you love someone, what do you do? You spend time in loving relationship with them. You get to know them. You have the orientation, like you're seeing them in their best light. You're approaching it seeing them in their best light and you're with an orientation that there is dignity in that person, that there is wisdom to come through it.

And that's what I saw and heard in that entry that you shared, is that you are being with yourself in a present, loving way, and listening, and listening with an ear and watching the art that came through too with an eye towards

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“Oh, really?” like someone who loves someone would, like really, I’m delighted to know about you, I can see why you’d feel that way.

And I think that – so, an art practice can give you an opportunity to encounter parts of yourself and give you a method of languaging with parts of yourself, through visual means, through color. So, I’d love to hear more about your take on it, your own personal experience and your experience working with students and others.

Kelly: So, I love what you were just saying, how having an art practice can help with the self-love and the self-care and the idea that one thing that’s so great about art therapy is because it’s visual, so we might not have words for certain things, we might not have the right way to express it. Also, as adults, we’re very good with language and avoiding and hiding things that we may need to talk about that we might want to do. Like you said earlier, can we just not mince words? Because that’s what we do as adults, like we’re going to get it right and we’re going to say everything so that you really can’t figure out how I’m really doing. Like, it’s a secret. I know how my mental health is, I know how things are, but if I can say things in a nice, elegant way, nobody else is going to pick up on it.

However, if I make artwork and it comes out in the artwork and I’ve done other things where I step back and look at it and I’m like, “Oh, my gosh, I cannot believe that’s showing up in this image.” One, very specifically, and it’s this painting behind me in its earliest stage, when I stepped back to look at it, it like there was a face screaming, like yelling. And I’m like, “Yeah, I’m really stressed out. I need to keep painting and process through it,” and that’s what I did.

But the fact that I was – this goes for clients as well. You don’t always know what is going on. You don’t always know the subconscious is subconscious, right. And as you work through the art, you can look at it –

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you didn't intend it, but you look at it and you're like, "Oh my gosh, this is showing me, right here in my face, I'm looking at my anxiety. I'm looking at my grief," whatever it is that you're seeing in your artwork, it's really reflecting back to you what's already within you. You're pulling that out.

Leah: Yes, I mean, that is elegantly stated from experience. It's the truth. You stated that so beautifully, how we are able to hide, obfuscate with layers of language and sophistication, what's really going on beneath. And I think from others, and sometimes from ourselves too, plenty of layers of, "No, I'm fine, I'm fine" And I talk about, it's where you can feel the energy is all neck up, or even nose up, and it's all the energy is high and, and high being tight, because it's the fear of dropping down to whatever's down there in the basement and in the heart, and that that can come through, through the symbols, but through color choice.

And something I want to touch on is for people who are like, "Well, shoot, I would love to have an art practice, but I can't draw. I can't make anything realistic." I know you are very much an advocate and a believer, as am I, that this is accessible to everyone. You don't need to be like a highly technical draftsman or even be able to draw a good stick figure in order to have this really work wonders and offer its medicine in your own life.

Kelly: Yeah, absolutely you don't need any art skills whatsoever. And I have an art therapy intern right now who really said it perfectly the other day. She's like, as an artist, it can be even harder to do the art therapy because maybe you have those technical skills and you know how to do certain things. So, you're trying to make up for those things, and without having the training or the anticipation of what it's supposed to look like, if you don't have any preconceived ideas, then you just let it out and stuff will come out.

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You don't need any skills as an artist. Some of these that I just showed you, I'm like, they're scribbles, you know. It's scribbling. It's little symbols and it's repeating things and it's allowing your subconscious. It's just allowing yourself to make connections with the colors and with the shapes and all of it.

And some of the sessions that I do, I'll have a template for people to start with because sometimes that's also helpful. If you have a piece of paper, you know, and a pencil, start with this part of the drawing and then we'll go from there. But I mean, as far as the way that I do the art and mindfulness sessions, there's nothing that's like – we're never drawing a figure, self-portraits, nothing that needs to be realistic because really it's the process of putting things down on paper the way that you see it.

Leah: And too, some of the ones that you showed me reminded me of some of the art journals I have too that are collage. And I think that can be a way to – because you can rip out images that grab your attention positively or negatively and start there and just trust, don't overthink, just trust and it is mind-blowing what comes up when you start to, I call it, cut shit out ad paste it down. So dang therapeutic.

And then also, the information that comes back to you is stunning, is how precise the unconscious is in getting its point across and how it's like a laser in cutting through layers of fog and just layers of armor that your sophisticated mind has laid down so you don't know or see the truth about you. But it will come at you through images that you thought you were choosing willy-nilly and you thought, "Oh this is kindergarten time. Crayons, paste, nothing's serious going on here." But then, you see it right back there.

And it can be – like I said, it's stunning. I'm making it sound a little terrifying, but really, it's a revelatory and it's exciting because you're like, that is in

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me? Even the painting behind you where you saw the face screaming and you're like, "I guess I'm a little stressed."

And at the same time, I always find there's a sense of sublime awe, at like, "Oh, there is depth to me and there is a wisdom in me that's communicating through me. And I didn't have to think hard about it. I didn't have to extract something from myself or craft something. But wisdom welled up and came through."

Kelly: Yes, absolutely, talking about the collage, cutting shit up, because the idea of finding something – and I'll tell this to people if we do collage or something else, I'm always trying to remind people, don't judge it and don't analyze any of it. We're just going to go through the process and then you'll see what happens.

It is a little like, "It's magic. Just wait for it. It's going to happen." And people are, like, blown away by what comes up because they're like, "Oh my gosh, I've been dealing with this thing and here it is right in front of my face now," and they didn't know it. Or they didn't know it was bothering them. It's all of those things, it's the subconscious. It's all within you and just waiting to come out. And I love that you said you don't have to extract it because so much of this stuff, as in life, that we're trying to grow and do, it can feel like extracting. It can feel like it's in here, it's so hard to get it out and how do I get it out, and then trying to ease into it.

You're always saying things like, what's that other way of doing things? It can be easy. And with the artwork sometimes, it sneaks up on you. You're just doing something and then there it is. It happens to fall into place.

Leah: Yes, it's like a practice in unlearning and being in a state where you can flow. I call it the self-organizing intelligence, which is to me like the capital C Creativity that flows through us. And that is a place to practice a

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state of – to me, when I started doing this, I felt dumb. I was like, I had to – my brain was like, you’re just being, you’re not thinking hard enough, you’re just being dumb, or like a simpleton or a fool. But really, things at that time that then were helpful to me were thinking about the archetype of the fool, actually being a figure, character of a lot of wisdom in many of art’s traditions, including Shakespeare. Shakespeare used the fool as the character that would be the only person speaking truth, the only person cutting – and I felt like that fool was the only one the comes up, the truth that comes from the unconscious or subconscious, even though all the really smart sophisticated ones, you can’t trust them.

And I also think the two are a conditioned way of thinking about intelligences that weren’t acquired from the outside in or that we didn’t have to get a degree for. It’s like a paradigm of shunning organic, innate, intuitive, natural intelligence.

Kelly: Absolutely, yes, and that happens all the time. And no wonder there’s so many of us that are like, “I can’t do that. I didn’t get a degree in that, so I must not know as much as that person, or I haven’t studied it long enough.”

And I’ve been doing art therapy for 12, 13 years or something, and I still do that because I say like a lot and I use my hands a lot, and it’s art, you know. And I’m like, isn’t this fun and playful? And I feel like somehow that’s not professional... that word...

But I felt like that, somehow, the way I do things isn’t the right, quote unquote way, the right way to do it, because it’s not the way other people have done it, it’s not the way that I’ve seen it modeled. And yet, the more I allow myself to go there, to like – how are you describing it? Something like, instead of being up here, like being afraid to go down to be deep in ourselves, once I allow myself to do that and be okay with it, so much

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happens. And it's so much better than trying to force a way that isn't my way.

Leah: Right, trying to imitate an outside authority. And maybe that authority, they are delivering their own original medicine, or maybe they're imitating another authority that came before them and all of the thinking is footnoted. But then it's like letting ourselves trust ourselves to come back to that which comes up through us, and reclaiming that sense of agency and trusting our voice.

I was thinking of the story Joseph Campbell told about – one afternoon he said he was working with a 45-year-old man who had just gotten out of a Ph.D. program and he said was highly educated and struggling to have his own thoughts. And he said later that night, he was struck by watching a baseball player who was in his early 20s being interviewed. And he said the inner authority that came through this young man who was a baseball player, just the unfiltered spirit, that sense of agency versus someone who had spent their life trying to acquire it by acquiring, becoming an expert in someone else's authority.

And when we were talking before we started recording about, you know, I asked you, what are some things that are really important to you that you want to make sure we talk about? And you were saying this is a form of self-care, and then you shared the story, for yourself, if you don't do it, it's devastating.

And I feel like the thread between the trust of your own inner intelligence or the intelligence that might be not our own but we have access to by being a channel with this kind of art practice, that these kinds of art practices can help with that trust, which also to me feels like – I know it's not a typical definition of self-care, but it also to me feels like a very caring way of being.

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But for you, what's the essence of art therapy and art journaling that feels like self-care to you?

Kelly: I think a lot of it is about truth. Like, you're talking about getting to the truth of things. And it's unfiltered. The first thing about art making is like, for me, it's something I've always gravitated towards, as far as I can remember. I would take things, cut up my mom's old clothes, make things with like fabric and yarn and string. And I think some of that was the tactile nature of it and the soothing tactileness.

So, that was part is soothing. And it's just something that I've always innately done as an artist, as a human, like that was my thing. And the more I learned about psychology and brain and behavior, it's a very, very safe and intimate thing that I can do for myself, with myself, there's no judgment. Sometimes, there's no judgment because I don't know what I'm doing yet, in the sense of I'm making an abstract painting or, you know, stitching, abstract stitching.

And I don't have a preconceived idea of what it's going to be, and I'm so comfortable making art that I don't need anybody's approval or judgment about it. You know, I'm no longer in a place where I'm like, do you like this? Do you think this is good? I don't really care, you know.

I don't care if you like my work or not because that's not what I'm going for. I'm not going for that kind of thing with it. So, the therapeutic part is that it is telling me something. The process itself is relaxing and then the visual that comes from it is telling me something. And it's always something about myself because I'm creating it.

It's hard to say that it's – I'm not sure where it's coming from necessarily, but it's something that I need to think about and I need to look at and I need to process. So, as I'm making the artwork, I'm basically telling myself

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something, and then it's my job to interpret it and figure out what I'm telling myself. And then, where do I take that? What do I need to do with that?

And sometimes, that message I get is that I'm in the right place and I'm doing the right thing and this is good. And sometimes, it's, "Look at this area over here, or investigate this thing over here, why are you so stressed? Pay attention." So, maybe that's it, you know, the artwork is really telling me to pay attention.

Leah: Well, I've got the chills because I think that pay attention is one of the central – I don't want to say a principle because it's just more one of the central healing properties that art offers is that you pay attention to life. You have to be present and you have to pay attention.

And I remember, when I was in law school, feeling like I wanted to be an artist and wanted to be a writer and I was writing in my journal one day and I wrote, "I think maybe I just want to be an artist and a writer so I have an excuse to pay attention to life." And I thought, no one should need an excuse.

But I think that also points to, like, why we all can be creatives and artists, like when we pay attention to our life, paying attention is healing. It's always healing.

Kelly: It is. It's always healing. And you know, that just reminded me of something I was saying today. The idea of being heard is equal to being loved. When somebody is heard, when you feel like you're listened to, it can have the equivalent feeling of being loved.

And what you're saying as far as listening and paying attention, you're paying attention to yourself. And then there's that self-love again.

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Leah: Oh my gosh, yes, that's truth right there. And too, I wonder for you, I know for me, the kind of coaching that we do, for me, it's an excuse to pay attention to others, actually and to hear and see others. And I think that all, like, modalities and methods of coaching and therapy aside, like, at its core, really being present with someone else and in such a way that you're deep listening and you're deep looking and you're deep sensing until you're like, "Oh, there you are. I see you. I get you. I hear you. Come on out." That, to me, that's like a magic that never gets old.

Kelly: And it's amazing and it is a magic. And the other thing that it's doing is mirroring that right back to the person. So, you, through your coaching and through the therapy, when you're listening deeply and you see someone, you can then hold up that mirror and be like, "Look what I can see in you." So, then the other person receiving it can be like, "You saw that and I can now take it. Now I can accept that."

Sometimes, it can be hard for us to see ourselves, to see that truth because we're so adept at hiding through language that when it's pulled out in a different way, then we can see it.

Leah: Yes, and I have to think that's got to be part of the powerful dynamic, for you doing the work you do in art therapy, because you talked about helping guide people, facilitating this space where you're like, no judgment here, we're not judging.

That alone, being invited into a frame of being where you suspend judgment, like as adults, we're like, wait, what? The wheels are going to come off. Our world's going to come flying apart. And particularly, it's art, isn't it supposed to look good? Aren't I supposed to gain approval here?

But it's about, like, what you can learn and what you are learning, being in a space where you're safe, there isn't judgment, and also it's safe but also

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there's vulnerability there. There's risk in allowing yourself to be seen and known, including by yourself. And I think that also, because there is that vulnerability and risk, then there is also courage and there is also growth.

Kelly: Yes, I was thinking that as you were saying that. I was like, all of what you're saying leads to growth. Because it does. Being vulnerable, I remember thinking that's the worst word ever on Earth. I remember thinking, who ever wants to be vulnerable? Because then you get hurt. Terrible.

And the more that I practice it – and it's through the art therapy to be honest, it's through providing art therapy for other people and listening and being in a place that I can just listen and observe and be there. And it is vulnerable.

And I guess I'm thinking of the art and mindfulness sessions that we do and, when we do them, I'll share what came up for me because I'm doing this right alongside everyone. I'm also doing the task that I just asked you to do. And then I will share what came up for me.

And when I started doing that and being vulnerable, it helped me do a better job. It helped me listen more to everyone else. And also created a safer place. It was safer for everyone else to be vulnerable and know that they're not going to be judged. It's like we're all supporting each other and then it gets really powerful. Now I think vulnerable is okay.

Leah: I think it's perfect that you shared that story too and your own process and that movement from that's terrible to it's powerful. Because I know for a lot of people, it's like, "Oh no, it's just way too much more on the terrible side for me right now." But to hear someone that's been there and has moved over to, "Oh, it is really powerful," and something about those group dynamics too, something about the communal effect of healing and

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hearing more and more about how healing only happens in community, like that we're so interconnected, that's how it has to happen.

And so, it is having spaces where people can skillfully but also messily, awkwardly, humanly – because I don't want to say skillfully and have people think it's always perfect, you have to be perfect and no one's feelings ever get hurt. It's not that. It's learning how to human together, out in the open, yeah.

So, I want to ask you too about – because we've talked about what you can learn from what emerges, what messages and symbols, insights emerge from when you're done and you see what you've created. And then, there's also something you alluded to and I want to take it deeper, about just the process of the doing, the effect and the therapy, like relaxing, yes, so good for your central nervous system, so good for your psyche or soul, like the tactileness.

I remember when I took an oil painting class I audited years ago. It was the first one I'd ever done and I was still feeling kind of traumatized by law school and all that. And then, we had to make our own frames, so we used the power tools in the basement of the art program, and stretch our own canvasses. I felt like I was somehow putting pieces of myself back together. I felt so – I mean, using power tools, so good. But when I nailed it, my canvass onto the wall, and using paint, there's no rational explanation for why that felt healing or reordering to me. I just felt a sense of rightness returning again and felt more like myself again.

So, I wondered if you could speak from your experience, both as an artist and then also as a therapist, speak to that part of just the doing process?

Kelly: Yeah, I do think that creating something from nothing is incredibly powerful and empowering. So, like, that alone is what you're describing,

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something right coming together, because you're creating something from nothing. It's amazing. But there's been studies that show how creating art lowers your cortisol, which is the stress hormone.

So, it lowers cortisol. It lowers blood pressure. It improves your cognitive abilities. It improves memory. It is integrating our brain, our whole system. And studies are showing that.

So, I feel like of course then, if we are allowing ourselves to make things and just be in the materials and feeling the materials and how they're moving, it's like play as well. Little kids need to get outside and play. We need our vision for our eyes. We need to look far into the distance, not just at a screen in front of us. That's how young children's eyes develop, because they're out playing and they see these things.

So, it's all – I just think it's so completely natural and human to make art. And so, when we come back to it, whether that art is building something with power tools or painting on canvass, it is all part of integrating our psyche, you know, what we're doing.

And there's so much information out there, like research showing that it benefits our mental health and our physical health. Not just that's a pretty picture, but no, it's rewiring your brain. This is a good thing.

Leah: Yes, for health. And you've used the word integration a couple of times, and integrating, and that is such a – I want to pull that word out because to take things that feel disordered or fragmented and to bring them back into a whole is whole making, the Latin root of healing is whole, and it's to bring an order back.

And I know anecdotally, that's just personally what it feels like to me, is like bringing myself and integrating too, in integrity of one piece, of one whole.

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And I think in a world – so, we're increasingly like things fight for our attention and we can feel so spun out by this tragedy, social media, and it can feel so fragmented and so disordered that having something that restores a sense of wholeness and centeredness brings you back to your center is, I mean, like a godsend.

And like you said, the research bears it out. I mean, you can see fMRI scans. The brain, when you use the word integrating, it does actually unify brain function. The brain works more coherently, which is then like a happier, healthier brain.

Kelly: Yes, all of that. And it's, yeah, just the fact that it's all been shown, like research is showing us.

Leah: Yes, and you also touch on something else so important that I want to talk about; play. Because we were talking earlier before we officially started recording too, about really the power of the play state. And I heard this phrase on Andrew Huberman's podcast, the Huberman Lab. He's a neurobiologist, an ophthalmologist at Stanford. And he had a podcast on play and he used the phrase, "Play is the portal to neuroplasticity."

Kelly: I love that. That is awesome.

Leah: Isn't that incredible?

Kelly: And making art is playing. There are so many times when I'm with a group of people, especially adults, and they are, like, hesitant, like crayons, markers, what are we doing? I'm like, think about kindergarten. Do you remember when you could just have the art materials and you would play with what you had? And everyone nods, like yes I remember that. I'm like, wasn't it fun? Yes, it was. Like, why did we stop? We shouldn't ever stop doing that and having fun and making art.

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Leah: Yes, and I think what I want to offer too for all my really serious listeners who are also a little sad because they're like, "I don't know how to play. I can't play. I could try to color, but that wouldn't be fun for me." Keep going. There is something available, and I think sometimes, to make the commitment, the decision that there is a portal to play for you as well, at whatever stage you're at.

And sometimes, it's playing with it, being curious long enough until you're like, okay, now this I can really get down with. And I think the combination that you offer, Kelly, with your insights from neuroscience and your therapeutic background, the psychology, and then also as an artist, you can meet people who are sophisticated adults and challenge them enough, in a way, challenge their psyche, challenge their brain also, you know, engage that unconscious in a way where that is fun, that is delicious, I think even to the most jaded intellectual grownup.

Kelly: And sometimes, they find the most magic in it. Because they can be so resistant, and then I'm like, don't judge it. Don't censor it. Just see what happens. And then they're, like, surprised and amazed. It's like, I didn't think you were telling the truth, I don't know, they didn't know. They don't know what's going to happen. And then magic happens.

Leah: And it's very fun. It's like one of those places where you are delighted to be wrong.

Kelly: So much fun, right? Yes, I love that, delighted to be wrong. I know someone who – so earlier you were saying too about, you know, being an artist, and people might think doing these tasks, I'm not an artist, I don't know how to draw people or whatever.

I have a friend who will do these exercises and everything is with words. She's like, I don't draw, I don't want to do that. So, she'll use words for a lot

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of it. And it's still the same benefit. Like, she still gets the same thing because the way we're doing it and not judging and not censoring and just playing with the words, playing with the ideas that come up, and then magic, again.

Leah: Yeah, you know, and as we're talking too and I can feel between this conversation, the playful energy coming in, like, we've been calling it DELIGHTMENT, like all caps, DELIGHTMENT is in the room when humans are having fun together and playing with this mystery that is us, where we're like, yeah, we're fully functioning, most part adults. And also, playing with the edges of our understanding of things, open for surprise, open for all caps DELIGHTMENT, to come into the room.

Just when you think you've got yourself and life figured out, whoosh, in comes DELIGHTMENT and is like, I know you even better than you knew yourself, isn't that fun? mic drop. And that, as an adult, is an amazing experience.

Kelly: It is. It really is because we don't get a whole lot of that. We were saying earlier about we're supposed to go through the motions. We go to school. We get a job and we do this thing and we choose and then we do it. Then, where's the excitement, where's the DELIGHTMENT? Where's the play left?

We need to do that. We need to cultivate that kind of attitude and play and just embracing change, which is super difficult. But I think, if you make it playful, then change is easier.

Leah: Yes, you know, and it's a function of being alive and I think too, when you are back in a place where you're like, what's that feeling? Oh, that's being alive. That's aliveness. That's like fully aliveness.

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I have a client who is like amazing. She's a doctor and she also loves time in Costa Rica surfing. And she has started to do art. She let on that she's been doing some art during COVID and then we're like, "Out with it." And now we're all about, we're on her, like do the art, do the art, and she's like, "Oh my gosh, I feel so alive when I'm making art. I feel like it when I'm surfing in Costa Rica." And she wrote in all caps and it makes me cry thinking about it, "I JUST FEEL ALIVE."

Kelly: Chills. Honestly, like, why else are we here?

Leah: Yes.

Kelly: To really feel alive.

Leah: Yeah, I mean, that's self-care and that's self-love, to do something for yourself where you're like, self-care and self-love is giving yourself a sense of being alive, fully alive, while you are.

Kelly: Yes, and allowing. Like you said, allowing yourself to feel that.

Leah: Yeah, and you know, I wanted to ask you too because – so, Kelly is a renaissance woman, like a woman of many talents. And she's also a writer. And she's also written a book. And I also get to interview you during Pride Month. I love the synchronicity of the alignment of how this is working out, this opportunity to have this conversation with you and the timing of it.

So, could you share about your book and this other passion you have and the gifts that you are sharing with the world in this area, and also where you're going tomorrow?

Kelly: So, the book is Art Therapy with Transgender and Gender Expansive Children and Teenagers. So, a very specific title. And it's actually a great

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book for everybody. You don't have to be an art therapist. But if you know a child, if you know a person in your life, which we all are, people, you'll learn something.

And it was written with my friend Shannon Scott-Miller, who is also an art therapist. And we've known each other for 16 years, I think. And the book is a huge passion. We both have kids who fall outside of that gender binary of male female. So, the gender expansive, just you look at someone or they're just not exactly how we expect.

So, we're always expecting this is how boys are, this is how girls are. Gender reveal parties, boy or girl, what are we really talking about here? But the idea that we are all human and treating each other like humans, with respect and different ideas, we all deserve that kind of respect and compassion. So, tomorrow, we are doing a talk at the Dallas Museum of Art about exploring and understanding gender.

So, basically we'll be educating people about the fact that kids who are transgender, adults who are transgender are regular people and their gender just does not align exactly the way maybe you thought it did when they were born.

But really, the idea of kind of getting rid of – well, not kind of, but getting rid of the stigma, getting rid of your own personal biases. And it's not necessarily like you are trying to be biased. But when we are in a society or a family that this is how things are, this is your normal, right?

If you have only known people that are very typical male or female, that's what you know. And when you see something that does not align with what you have always known, then what happens to our brain?

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Our brain is looking for patterns. So, if we see something that doesn't fit a pattern, it can be scary. It can alert us to something that we don't know – you know, think of evolution. You see something moving in the distance, is it a tiger? I don't know. Is it safe or not safe?

So, our brains have to kind of figure it out quickly, so our brains try to take short cuts. We do the same thing with gender. If we see somebody with long hair, what's our first thought? If we see someone wearing a dress, what's our first thought about their gender?

And so, our whole talk is basically like you can't make those assumptions and everybody has an experience of gender. We all have our own experience of what our gender is like. And I'm not going to be exactly the same as you, even if I identify, like, I'm female and my gender has always been like that, so I don't have long hair, I don't wear makeup, I don't fit that typical thing.

So, it's kind of like we're all just people, you know what I mean? I don't know how else to – to me, sometimes, I'm like, how do you not get it? How do you not get this, that the people you see on the street are just regular people? I don't understand.

Leah: Yeah, you know, and as you were speaking, I was thinking like earlier, our conversation too, how we started talking about, our language can be so sophisticated, our intellects can be so sophisticated that we can hide things from ourselves because language is also like a pattern and it's a linear pattern.

And you have the words male and female. What if there's a life experience that doesn't fit into what we collectively have grown to assume is a pattern, you know? The word male represents a symbol for something we

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collectively understand is that. The word female is a symbol for a thing that we collectively understand is that.

So, if we're limited by our language and it's language that we perpetuate and our conversations are constrained by the language that we have, and yet it's actually not addressing what life really is, I think there's a dissonance within us and a dissonance within society and a lot of pain.

To me, it's making like divine intuitive sense that you would be an art therapist who also deals with a spectrum of color, a spectrum of possibilities, of shapes and symbols, things that come up from the unconscious that don't fit into our normal, rational understanding of things, that that kind of expansiveness and being that kind of expansive person you are, of course, a perfect messenger.

Kelly: And that's so interesting because it's not something I ever – and again, you're doing that coaching thing where you're holding up that mirror of, see, I can see this about you. And it's not like just the way our trajectory goes in our life. Like, it's not something I had ever really noticed about myself. But when I think about how I accept everybody and I always have.

And so, I guess it does make a lot of sense and the idea of being accepting or expansive, like you said. And part of it too is I'm one of five siblings and I always felt a little different. I'm not like my sister, so much. I'm more like my brother. And I have three brothers, so one of them.

I don't know, but always the idea that I felt a little bit different and then I'm like, oh, it's because I'm an artist. Because everybody else, they're lawyers. And so, I don't know, I guess I've always had this openness to people who feel a little different. And then finding artwork for myself that has always been my therapy.

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In the beginning, it felt like it feels good to make art and it makes me feel better. And like I said earlier, if I'm not making art, it's devastating. It's bad. And then to move into art therapy and be creating a community, I can make this space for people and I can totally hold that space and be okay with it. Whatever you bring, it's okay.

And talking to people who have, like, especially kids who are transgender, gender expansive, and they've been going through however many years feeling like something is not right. I don't know what it is, this is not who I am, something is so wrong. And we need to just be able to listen to them and talk to them and say, like, there's nothing wrong with you. I totally see who you are, and let's help you get there and feel better about yourself. And just that idea that when people have opinions of you and say things about you, it's not about you. It's about them.

Leah: Right.

Kelly: And to try to get that across to people. I'm not even sure if that answers your question.

Leah: It does. Oh my gosh, Kelly, I want to just goad you on to keep talking. And I'm just beyond grateful that there are humans like you and who yes, maybe you were born into the world being this expansive and accepting, and too, I've had the opportunity to work with you in Art Schools and watch you interact. And I just see you as being a spirit that continuously, if there's a choice to be made, you choose towards kindness and truth at the same time. And kindness, and truth, and love.

And what does that say? Oh my gosh, she just showed me this incredible tattoo on her arm. It's all colorful and it says truth. Yes.

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Kelly: And that's where this... and that's the whole idea of learning about myself and growing and using the artwork and being vulnerable, and truth.

Leah: Yes, and I, again, want to highlight. This is maybe obvious to you and I hear, but just to underscore, some people sometimes I think are afraid, well if I speak my truth, someone's going to be hurt. And yet, here you are being an example of the inclusivity that we can be in community, honoring one another's truth, loving one another in our truths.

We can be with ourselves, like, that's what you're doing in art therapy, when you're facilitating art therapy, when someone is doing art therapy, you are being with your truth in a nonjudgmental way. You're being with who you are, giving yourself a chance to know who you really are, even sometimes, truths are sometimes hard, but when it really is the truth, there's a relief that comes with it.

Kelly: Yes, there is. And it's like, finally accepting who you are. For me, this is my truth and thinking of the way I am, like the first thing I had read to you. Chaotic thoughts. Like, it's still beautiful. This is who I am and I need to embrace that and love myself. And the amount of growth that I have gotten from that, the amount that I have personally grown over the past few years is amazing. And it is because I'm being vulnerable, and finding my truth, and accepting that, and practicing self-love and self-care.

Leah: I just want to affirm that because I have had the honor of getting to know you over the last couple years and see you grow through this way of truth. Honoring your own truth and the self-love, and it is stunning. And the more you do that, it's like the more your natural essence and gifts pour out to others.

Kelly: And that's something that I did not - there's this barrier. It's invisible, you can't see it, you don't even know what's there until you get to that point

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of breaking through the barrier and seeing yourself and loving yourself. And then all that happens, and I feel like so many things, like you said, over the years, because since 2019 I think is when we first met.

Some of the things that I struggled with and why I laughed earlier about the word professional, because to me, I'm like, I'm supposed to be this vision and I can't. There's something wrong with me. And to be able to accept myself the way that I am, the way that I do things, the way that I talk and present things as being a great way of doing things.

I'm like, I can't do this any other way. Now I can do it confidently. So now I'm like, oh, you know what's professional is being who I am and not lying. Not trying to pretend to do things differently.

Leah: Being in integrity. You are in your truth.

Kelly: There it is, yeah.

Leah: I love that sort of full circle story about professionalism too. I know that will resonate with so many people because I'm sure you've heard me in Art School coach other people on that too. How many times professionalism or the vision that's held up of success in a certain area, whether you're a writer or a therapist coach, a painter, it's like you come in as an artist and a creative and you're like, I feel the magic.

Like, I feel something, like I'm in it, and it's magical. And then you go to try to be a "professional" about it, and it's like, you have to both - somehow you're not smart enough to be professional and yet you feel like you have to dumb yourself down and lose your magic and lose your genius and lose your edge in order to be professional and succeed.

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And so, it's instead like, I mean, sometimes you got to blow that idea up. You just have to blow up the idea of professional and retain your own sense of integrity. This is the direction I'm headed. I am going to be successful. And this is what's in integrity for me and I am building my own paradigm of professionalism. One that is big enough to include the magic.

Instead of trying to fit ourselves into a professional box, professional should just be like, a channel for us to flow our genius to the people, and not something that we become a servant to, or we have to check our gifts at the door, we have to check our neurodiversity at the door, we have to check our gender diversity at the door. Shouldn't have to check any of those magical properties at the door.

Instead, it's like using the tool - we were having a conversation with a writer too, talking about, okay, yes, get the craft of writing. The craft of writing to then help you build the channel to flow the genius. But again, the craft is the servant of the genius and not, again, abandoning the gift. Not abandoning the truth to go back to your tattoo.

Kelly: Yeah, it's so interesting. If we were all the same, it would be so boring. And yet, we all try to as part of community because we're humans, we're social people, we're social creatures, and we need community and we need people. But without the diversity, that would be so boring. And I think if we all really embraced our gifts and magic, it would be so much fun.

Leah: Oh, yes.

Kelly: So much more fun.

Leah: So much more fun. And you know what happens when you're having fun? You're prolific. And when you're having fun, you have energy. And when you have energy, you have energy to animate the actions that it

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takes to create success too, to create just a pragmatic making money, fulfilling, all of that. When you're feeling alive, you have energy to do that.

Kelly: And you know what another thing, the whole feeling alive, and then that kind of brings about the practical stuff. Then you're making money, and then you're "successful" and you're professional doing your thing. But if you are forcing it and trying to be something else, it's not working that way.

And so of course, I'm only going to be as successful as I can be if I'm myself. Because doing it another way, that's not making art. That's going to devastate me, it's going to be awful, I'm not going to like it. So if I can do it this way and I found too, the people that - private clients and also people that join the art and mindfulness things, they get me.

So now, of course this makes sense. If I just be myself, then I'm attracting people who get it. And I know you know this too as far as you could hear the same message 100 times, but somebody says it a certain way and you're like, "Oh, I get it." So we need everybody.

Leah: We do. We need all the voices and all their different tones and color and tenor. What you just said too reminds me of a story you were sharing a little bit earlier, but I don't think we recorded that about - I think it would be really inspiring for some people to hear those times when you thought, "This isn't working, this job isn't working," how that actually ended up being a sign not that anything was going wrong, but more of these guide rails that were pointing you back into a direction of keep seeking, trust that instinct.

Kelly: Yeah. So I think I was talking about when - so teaching, when I was a kid, I always wanted to be a teacher. And I wanted to be a doctor. And I was already an artist, so teaching made sense. I was going to be a teacher and I was in one program, I was traveling to different schools, and I didn't really like that. It gets really overwhelming for me.

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So overwhelming that I'm like, how can I not do this? This seems like the perfect job to be a teacher, and it was killing me. It was literally killing me. I couldn't do it. I'm like, I'm going to go work at Starbucks because I can't do this job, which feels like such a failure.

Because it's not that I couldn't teach. I loved the students. It was just something about the atmosphere and the way it was working was so not aligned with the way my brain works. And then at one point, I was working at a school, teaching ceramics, and it was just that one class and it was teaching ceramics.

I'm like, I could do this. It felt comfortable. Not a lot of growth, which I realize now, but it was comfortable and it was fun and I could do this and I could practice it and get better at teaching the ceramic lessons. But that school closed. So I'm like, okay, so now shifting gears again.

And I think throughout this whole time, even when I was teaching, I was still doing art therapy, either private practice, a few clients here and there, but also with the Henry Ford Health, I've been doing art therapy for the past three - I think since 2019.

And we would do things in person, and then Covid shut everything down. So at the time, I was doing art therapy in schools, and I was not enjoying it. So I was teaching art, that was killing me. And art therapy in schools, didn't like it. That was killing me. I'm like, why?

All these things that I'm working towards and I just, for whatever reason, I can't do it. And then Covid shut everything down. So I started offering - doing these art and mindfulness things online to people that I knew in a Facebook group or something, or friends of mine. Let's do this because I need to do something and this is the one thing that I know how to do.

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This is something I can give to people who are feeling awful right now, especially in the beginning of the pandemic, nobody knows what's going on, and it was awful. It was terrible. And then we started doing it with Henry Ford Health. That program, I was doing art therapy in person maybe once a month. And then they were like, can we do this online? I'm like, yes, we can do this.

So we've been doing it every week online for the past two and a half years, and it has been the best job I've ever had. Working online, I'm like, who would have known? This wasn't even a job when I was a kid. There's no job of you're going to do art therapy on the internet. What's the internet? I'm not that old. Maybe I am.

Leah: I am.

Kelly: I'm like, wait, I am, I don't know. I remember like, we didn't even have - oh gosh, the computer I had to use in high school to write my papers, whatever. But just that idea that now I'm finding something that is so good for the way that my brain works. I would not have found it without the universe just kind of shutting things down left and right. And it was pointing me in this direction.

So first of all, listening to myself, to my body, to my brain. You're getting completely overwhelmed in this area over here, it's not in alignment, so you need to go over here. And maybe I just didn't listen to myself very well. So I was getting these shoves. Like you need to go now. And then now it works. I've found something that I really thrive doing. And it's a combination of all the things I've already been doing, but online, just a little different.

Leah: Well, and I know we were talking before about acknowledging and being in awe of whatever is guiding us. The fact that as a child, you wanted to be a doctor, didn't want to deal with blood, but you were interested in the

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brain. So you were like, brain doctor, psychology, somebody that studies behavior and the brain, and oh, I'm an artist, and oh, a teacher.

And all of those lines converging and then you're like, oh, what, art therapy? Art therapy is a thing? And then the way that neuroscience just boomed and being able to do it online, it's like when you look back, you can trace the threads of something all along. We were saying it makes it seem inevitable.

And I think it can be so powerful to pause in those times in our life when we look back and see that. Feel that sense of inevitability. Isn't that like we have no free will, but then there's also this other sense of I'm known, I'm guided, something in me is knowing and guiding me, even so much so that sometimes it absolutely shuts the things down that I keep saying yes to, they're killing me.

Kelly: Right. And now because I can look back and see those threads and see the connection, now when things are feeling crappy or not great, I'm like, hold on, it's easy. Just let things play out and see where it goes. I have a better time pausing and listening to myself so I don't get crushed. But just like, knowing that it doesn't have to be hard. So I can remind myself of that. I'm like, wait, it doesn't have to be hard. So if I'm making it difficult, stop.

Leah: It might be worth looking at.

Kelly: Yes, exactly.

Leah: Yeah. And trusting yourself too that what comes naturally to you, that's okay. You can actually be really successful that way.

Kelly: Yeah. And that's something - and I know a lot of people do this where if you're really good at something and it comes really naturally, you

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dismiss it. Like, that's so easy. It's not great. Doesn't mean other people won't benefit from that.

Leah: Right. That's most likely the place where they are going to benefit too. We all benefit from the sun being the sun and not trying for it to be the moon, or a tree, or a cat, or whatever. There's such beauty in that.

Kelly: Again, diversity. We need that.

Leah: Well Kelly, thank you so much for joining me today. I also, selfishly, it's like, yay, I get to catch up.

Kelly: I know, I was so excited. Thank you so much for inviting me on because I was like, I get to talk to Leah, this is so exciting.

Leah: Well, and also, there's that synchronicity too where I felt like you kind of answered a call I put out into the universe because I didn't mention it yet on this episode, mindfulness for me was a game-changer. Really a lifesaver when I graduated law school and I was like, I feel broken.

I feel broken and like I still have so much to give, but that I can't muster the strength to go out in the world. And then I saw this mindfulness-based stress reduction program, Jon Kabat-Zinn's kind of flagship program that was around University of Iowa hospitals and clinics.

And there was a phrase in there that said something about life is going to be life with its pain and difficulties and challenges, but also beautiful things. But it can be different when you have skills and access to a grace to navigate it. And I was like, alright, yeah.

And I almost didn't sign up because I think it was \$485, and as a newly graduated - my husband was still in grad school, I had part-time jobs, but I

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didn't have my legal job yet. I was like, I can't afford that. But something in me just pushed me over the line and I signed up, and I think, "Oh my god, that was a fork in the road, turning point."

And mindfulness really helped me navigate the beginning stages of becoming an artist. Being aware of what I was cultivating, how I was cultivating my mind and spirit as I was creating art, how I was creating my mind and spirit as I was creating art.

And so I'd been thinking, I was telling Kelly this earlier in an email that this last year, how to bring in more mindfulness and hands-on art things into the Art School, into the Art School community, and then Kelly reached out that she was offering this art and mindfulness program. And I was like, no way. I don't even have to teach it, she's teaching it.

Kelly: The universe.

Leah: Yeah. I mean, you tell me. You're not just offering it only to Art School. It's open to other people, correct?

Kelly: Yeah, absolutely.

Leah: Can you speak a little bit about the format?

Kelly: Yes. So every once in a while I'm going to do one that's more intensive where it's more than one session a week. But right now, the base I guess of the way I'm doing it, so the art and mindfulness classes are once a week and they're set for an hour. And for the first portion, let's say first 10 minutes, I would talk about the intention that we're going to focus on.

And then for 15 minutes we work quietly all together. So I also work on the same art task and intention, and I turn my camera so people can see what

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I'm working on. And then after the 15 minutes we come back and we share what we've worked on and have a discussion about the process and what came up for us.

And it's so amazing, and part of the working online, which I think is really nice is that you can't see what everybody else is doing. So there's no judgment, there's no like, "What are you doing? What are you doing? Yours looks better than mine," which is something that we do as people.

So then we can come back and really be in that safe place and share what has come up and what we've gained from it, and do the self-reflection portion, which then leads to the growth. So people will work on it for 15 minutes, not the longest - it's usually not enough time to finish necessarily what you're working on, but it's enough time to really get into it and really get it started and see what comes up.

That's where that magic happens. And people will look at it and be like, "Oh my gosh, I cannot believe that this is what I just drew, or what came up for me." Then we can all share and everybody benefits from each other's stories. Like you were saying, the whole idea of group therapy and healing in community, and that's what's happening in that part of it.

And the thing is it's a different session, it's a different intention each week. So the best benefit is when you can do multiple. So the way I've set it up for the summer, it is like, in August it'll be take whichever classes you want all through August. And then there's one that's like, you need to sign up for the whole thing.

Because it's work that you want to be able to maintain that habit and that self-care hour, you want to maintain the momentum of it, and it builds. So just like the mindfulness, if you meditate 10 minutes every day, it's amazing. The changes and the growth that happens is really amazing. So

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same thing with this. I feel like if you can put in the time and be open to it and make it every week for a while...

Leah: Yeah. It is like going to a spiritual gym. And I think too, if we could do some sort of biological measures, I know you would see, and they will someday be able to have more economical ways of doing these kind of tests. Measuring blood values when your cortisol changes. But I think too, measuring how the brain changes.

It is a rewiring and it is a changing of your body. It's the idea that it's just relaxing. Yeah, it's relaxing, but that is changing you. And to continue that change is like building a muscle, is like building the skill of going to the gym and repeating it, letting those new pathways be formed, old ones pruned away. It does compound.

Kelly: Yes. And I think that's what's so powerful about mindfulness and doing these things on a regular basis. It compounds. I've noticed it for myself. After two and a half years of doing this, I'm like, oh my gosh, I am in such a better place emotionally, it's kind of awesome.

Leah: It's very awesome.

Kelly: I don't know how else to say it.

Leah: Very awesome. You know too, I think the fact groups - because I know some people, and I've been there too, I can be an introvert, and yet still I'm a big believer in the power of group and community for this kind of work. Because it is like a workout class or CrossFit. You do more in a group, the group energy, the rising tide lifts all ships, and too, I think sometimes you get too - I don't want to say ride on the coattails of other people's growth, but there are times when you get to experience other people's growth, and you're like, oh.

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You see it in a way where you're not in the emotion of it, and you see something in yourself similar, and you can grow faster. There's something about the group dynamic that can really be a catalyst for faster growth.

Kelly: Yes, it absolutely can. And like you said, the riding on the coattails, and it's like, I know what you're getting at. It's not like riding on the coattails, but you are feeling it. You feel it. When the entire group - and it's online, so you don't even - we're not in the same room feeling the energy, but it comes through for sure.

But when everyone is sharing and if I share something vulnerable that made me feel amazing, like this was so great, and this is how I felt, that makes you feel really good. Because you're feeling how I'm feeling. And then we all start talking about those great things and I've gotten off calls before like, honestly, I never wanted to do group therapy before because I don't want to be in a group of people.

Talk about being in introvert. This is why things will work for you when you're ready for them. You can't force change. You can't force growth. So it's got to be - you've got to be willing to work at it, I guess.

Leah: The other image that came to me was when I used to ride bikes and you would draft when you're in a big group, like birds draft off each other in a flock and you take turns. Whoever is cutting the wind at the front, taking the brunt of being - cutting through the resistance of the wind, people behind them, you benefit from that group effect, that flock effect.

Kelly: Yeah, and everybody is benefiting from it. You definitely feel that energy. And it helps you grow and it helps you change. It's all good. The groups are so good.

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Leah: I agree. I think groups of artists who are also healers, who also want to live these intentional lives, we're down for that. They are some of the badassest corners of the universe you can play in, in my opinion.

Kelly: Absolutely.

Leah: Because often, who is having more fun than we are? I don't think anybody could possibly be having more - I'm sure they are in their respective groups, but I'm pretty sure we're having the most fun. Well, it has been such a delight to get to see you and talk with you and I also, last thing, I cannot let you go without also telling people to go check out your art.

And I don't know if you have any - because I know, again, you're a renaissance woman, you're a multimedia artist. And some of the art that Kelly was working on when she was in the Art School in particular, which I just - I'd just never seen anything like it. I just love it so much with the embroidery and with the fabric stitched in. And that piece that you did, I want to say the title was Inner Landscape or Inner Terrain? Is that right?

Kelly: Inner Landscape Topography. I really like a topography view, like from above.

Leah: Yes. So I love that piece too.

Kelly: I love the way it came together because it was during the Art School and I think it took me a long time. I had been working on it for such a long time. And then during the Art School I'm like, oh, it's finished. It just all flowed out and it came to me and I'm like, oh, now I see all these things that were in my head, all these thoughts and all these ideas, and the way that we navigate our own psyche. So it's pretty cool.

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Leah: It's so good. It's wildly stunning. Do you have a picture of that? Could we link a picture?

Kelly: I do have a picture. So there's a picture of it on my website. It's sold so I don't have the actual piece anymore.

Leah: Good for you. That's what we like to hear in the Art School, sold.

Kelly: Yes. So it's on my website, which is my name, KellyDarke.com. so that's where my art lives.

Leah: Okay. And is that also where people can sign up for the art and mindfulness? Or will that be a different link?

Kelly: That is a different website. So that is on MindfulArtCenter.com.

Leah: Okay. And all of these things, we will have links in the show notes as well. So people don't have to be listening while they're driving and texting, or writing into their phone. Don't do that, people. Drive carefully. Check out the show notes when you arrive safely at your destination. Well, thank you so much Kelly. Thank you for the work that you do and for being here today.

Kelly: Thank you so much really. It was awesome. Thank you.

Leah: You're welcome.

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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. And so since you got to listen to a conversation to this point, in today's

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coach with me, I want you to think back through that conversation, look at your notes if you took any, and affirm for yourself, what were your top three takeaways?

Because it's one thing just to listen and hear someone's story, but when we stop and make ourselves, mine, our own experience of listening, for what mattered most to us, what is speaking most to us right now, that's when that integration really happens. That's when information becomes transformational.

So again, what were your top three takeaways from this conversation? Just by affirming those things, you are already engaging the process of neuroplasticity. You're already rewiring your mind for new possibilities, for expansion, for evolution, and for growth.

So again, take a moment. Think about where you most want to grow your life, your creativity, your art business, your process, your relationships, whatever it is for you. Hold that in your mind and then think back, what are the top three things that we discussed that you can use to move the needle in your life?

Thank you for listening to another episode of *The Art School Podcast*. If you have enjoyed this podcast, if these episodes have been useful and meaningful to you, I would love to hear about it. It's also so helpful for the growth of this podcast.

If you can share, if you can subscribe, if you can go to iTunes and leave a review. And this week too, I wanted to say I love reading the countries from which everyone is tuning in and listening. So I just wanted to give a shout-out to a few of those locations.

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So a hello to listeners in Finland, Vietnam, Pakistan, Belgium, Greece, Spain, New Zealand, Australia, got our friends in Canada, of course the United States, and there's more. So thank you to everyone tuning in from around the world.

I love having you as part of this broader Art School community. And if you would like to take this work deeper, we are now open for enrollment for the Art School Mastermind. The first session for the next cohort kicks off mid-July and you can find the link to the application in the show notes, or by going to www.leahcb.com and going to the Work With Me link.

Scroll down and you'll see the link to the mastermind page. There you can learn more about the mastermind, you can apply, and as always, please send us any questions by email to support@leahcb.com.

In closing today, I want to bookend with a sentiment that I alluded to when I included the clip that I did at the intro. When Kelly talks about how making art being not just something fun or interesting or cool, it is all that, relaxing, but a prerogative for a creative soul, a prerogative that has such powerful benefits for one's entire wellbeing, and not doing it can be quite devastating.

I've seen so many artists, and I've done this myself. Talk myself out of the need for creativity being anything other than a need. Being like air, life just works so much better when I'm being creative. And I can see that for my clients as well.

So to move to a place where in order to create a paradigm of thriving creatives, we have to make creativity a non-negotiable and do it in a way that is truly nourishing our souls. Moving closer and closer into alignment with an expression that is true for us, and I know this is ongoing work and a work in process.

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But to hold that as the vision, as the vision of where we're heading. I know I've gotten "feedback" in the past, people don't like it when I quote this line from The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas that says, "When you bring out that which is within you, it will save you. If you do not, it will destroy you."

But I don't want to mince words because that has been my experience, and for most of the clients who are drawn to working with me, that is their experience too. I don't take it lightly when someone comes to me with a call, with a call that's coming from within the house, it's coming from within the inner house, within the soul.

I do not think that that is then just a preference or a hobby. I listen deeply. I listen at a soul-to-soul level, and I know for myself too, when I'm not being creative, the consequences are devastating. And perhaps I really never would have known what non-devastating would be because I think a lot of times we normalize certain tendencies, behaviors in a way, coping mechanisms, because we've never really touched what's available for us and what's available when we are truly, fully healthy, when we are giving ourselves the creativity and the conversation with creativity.

For me, that means a conversation with that level of spirit, with that level of my soul being in communion with the world, and with something greater than me. And once you allow yourself that though and you know that, you don't want to go back. You know it is truly devastating. It isn't just a preference.

And so could it be too small to start with art journaling, a daily art visual practice? Or written practice? No. Honor the tiny steps. Honor the baby steps. They are not so baby after all because it's a radical act of love. It is revolutionary to do something to insist on making your creativity non-negotiable when a voice within you and voices without you say, "That

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doesn't add up, that will never add up, that won't make a difference, what's the point in that?"

But when you answer the call of your creativity, no matter how small the step, you are answered in return 1000 times over and it is always adding up. Adding up to a deep, rich, nourished, fully alive life. To an awakened spirit. To someone who is in love with their life again. That is always worth it. Have a beautiful week everyone and I look forward to talking with you next time.