

Episode 1: Jori Warren. Looking for the Wow

Welcome to the very first Audio On Visual podcast. My name is Jay Bigam and I'm your host. Audio On Visual is a podcast that hopes to bring you into the artist's studio be it a large commercial studio space or an extra bedroom in a condo to help you get to those struggles triumphs and day to day lives of people creating visual art. Initially the artists featured will be from my circle of friends and acquaintances which are mostly Edmonton and Alberta based but I do have quite a few folks I know through social media spread out all over the world so I hope to feature some of them through the magic of the Skype interview at some point in the future. The artists you hear will for the most part be people you've probably never heard of though you may be familiar with some of their work. This isn't a podcast that will be featuring famous artists rather it is focused on those artists that live and work right beside you.

Our First guest is Edmonton based painter Jori Warren. I sat down on a cold and sunny April Monday morning and recorded our first interview so let's get right to it.

J: So what's what's your background..your art background?

JW: I don't have an arts background so to speak as a visual artist but I do have a artistic background. My whole life I've been artistic My mother was artistic. In the interior design kind of way and gardening kind of way and I. I my first job was IKEA. I was head of their art department. And it was straight out of display college I went and I took display window displays. And so my first job as an eighteen year old was doing room settings for a huge company and I got to travel around the whole world doing new room settings and then I was their sign writer for ten years and. Doing all of the signs for the company it's called a fast style so you have to write really fast and do all the the cool banners for the store and then. I worked myself out of a job they the computer age came they used my handwriting as a template for all of Canadian stores and the made a program computer program and so anybody can type it in my banner would come out in my writing is still up there today

J: so if you've been in an IKEA store in Canada, you'll see..

JW: see my work.

J: That's a fantastic story.

JW: That's the story that's doing that and then I was a freelancer for years doing wind of this place and then from there I became a company came and offered me a job doing special event props so I became a prop master for. Years eleven years and I did corporate events in Western Canada

J: what actually is a corporate prop?

JW: corporate props the stage decore for behind the Junos the hundreds of center pieces for. A corporate company to come in and they do their annual events and I would do hundreds of center pieces are stage decore. I did. Events for Jasper Park Lodge I did actually three rooms settings change overs for the year two thousand. So that was a big millennium moment and I had a crew of. Tons of people there and we had to switch it over do the big events and then we switched it over for the next day for the. The people with hangovers to have their breakfast pretty funny. That taught me scale. Because. And that's what I love the most i'm very organized very detail oriented so from learning doing room settings that are monstrous interesting things also to to start drawing I drew for the client a person would say I want to Mardi Gras theme and they so I would sit down and we'd brainstorm. With my client and come up with drawings

J: Did you have some.. Did you have any drawing background as a kid

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JW: never I just drew as a kid I always was into art but anyway I did a lot of drawings for this for these clients because visually they couldn't figure out what they wanted until you would start drawing and getting some so right on the spot I would draw it and I would come up with ideas. That are huge and big and bold and that would fit in a Shaw Conference or the Butterdome. big big props and then I would have to go and they would they would like it and want it and then I'd have to build it which was the best part because I love the brainstorming and the coming up the ideas and I love the creation of the product

J: so you actually did a lot of the construction yourself?

JW: I did it all myself and so here's an example of you know I would draw something and then I would actually have to make it. but these are fifteen sixteen feet across made out of Styrofoam that would hang on top of the Butterdome so a lot of very cool products were made for many years I actually made a mountain of a Styrofoam that was taller than my garage and spray painted it outside to make it look like a mountain

I met some wonderful people very creative. But I also had to be. Have it all done on site I didn't have a Home Depot open at two in the morning I had to have already finished and done and plan a B. In A C. So I was very very dedicated that way and had it.

J:Meticulous

JW: meticulous You have to be and I think that's where my art. Is I'm so drawn into the detail part of my pieces

J: I can see that for sure.

JW: I like the scale and the color and the impact even a smaller piece has great impact. And that's I think how I. Learned how to do stage decore that has to look good from forty feet away. As far as the as the front ten feet away from you know the front row as well as the back row group have to really enjoy that that stage. So I think that's what it was a great learning experience huge learning experience and then. I did that for fifteen sixteen you know eleven twelve years or so. And my knowledge of sign writing had to come in because I doing signs for special events was eighty percent of the job as well.

And did another really cool project as I did they were doing. The application for the Seville games.

J; The Olympic games?

JW: yeah and I and I did a project they were they were promoted they were hoping to promote Western the Western events I did hundreds of Western events and I had to send a display that would be flat sent to Seville Spain and they had to build it. With just a server or someone to build it

J: so your IKEA experience..

JW: my flat box IKEA experience paid off I made a whole room decore out of foam core and they. Came together and it made a great backdrop for their presentation in Seville Spain and it was all Western and. And but the whole process of it I made all this Western products out of foam core and I first did it cut it out all in white and then I thought oh this is a cool of all just white western ended up I did a whole white western event for J.P.L. so and then I painted it an off it went to Seville Spain

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So you had to be creative and innovative and smart and you had to know how to hang a product from the ceiling and the riggers who were hanging it they had to they loved it when you could hang it off of one rig versus seven. So I learnt a lot and it was a wonderful experience but a hard labor and hard on your back hard hours hard hours you know and. But all my neighbors got flowers all the time because I'd bring home hundreds of flowers in every neighborhood used to get flowers in the middle of the night at their deck.

While I was working there my partner had an accident at the shop. He was putting air in a tire and he blew his hand off. And my mom. Got cancer the same few months so while he was recuperating they were deciding or not if he was going to get to keep his hand he blew off the whole wrist but they didn't know if he would keep his hand so I shut down my business and took care of my mom while she was here going through the first of many cancers and taking care of him and so I wouldn't...go crazy it was either drinking or painting so I picked up a brush.

And I never picked up a brush before other than painting props I was never an artist that made paintings or a visual artist. So. In the middle of the night while they were resting I would start painting and I started small and I had that background of drawing for my clients and so that's the first time I picked up a brush seven years ago.

J: so what were you painting at the time and painting with, what were your subjects, those kinds of things

JW: cool. I painted just for myself. To make me feel better because I was going through such a rough time I would pay things that made me feel good... was flowers and fruit but mostly flowers actually and it was just for me I was just trying not to go crazy and not to get sucked in the the hardships of the day so I started painting flowers and pretty things and they were easy. And then a few of the guys that I knew kept saying can you paint something other than flowers because I'd like to buy something so I started painting some cars and then it just everybody kept asking for different subject matter so I found anything I painted I could paint. I could pretty well paint anything that I wanted to paint.

So from there I just started picking a subject matter that I liked. From that I started noticing people were actually buying pieces first my friends out of loyalty. and family as making a dollar of helping save our house and you know we're both self-employed so. Thankfully for them. I started selling a few pieces here and there. And I found it was something I wanted to do.

So I started really painting now it's going to be a job and I pull my background as self-employed person who's worked hard and puts many hours in OK I'm going to do it I'm going to do it right and I'm going to make it a living and I'm going to paint every day and I'm going to do it as much as I can and learn as much as I can and just. Started. So that was kind of how it started

J: so the discipline of being self employed is really helped you with your art practice

JW: Yes Yeah I don't think you can. Become a full time artist unless you put the hours in. I believe. If you want to make a living and do it I don't want to make a huge amount of money that's not my goal never has been never will be my goal is to. Paint for me first. Paint for my bills secondary. And now I just want to keep painting. You know

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J: Well tell us a little bit about. How you would describe what kind of art you make.

JW: I been wrestling with that because I think it's contemporary realism.

J: OK but what exactly does that mean if you can't doesn't say it not define it.

JW: It's pretty words. I love taking a small item that I liked a bowl of cherries and showcasing the prettiness of it in the boldness of the color of it but large and impactful and and. It's showing it in a different way a plain ordinary bowl of cherries or a license plate or ...so that's where I think my direction is going to

J: what what have you been working on recently.

JW: A while ago... I have always I have a list of paintings in my head of that I want to paint a very very long list as I. I think every artist probably does. And I always thought coins. Would be a fabulous subject matter they're beautiful so I painted a painting full of Canadian coins and I put my mom's name in them or I put special dates in them. I found out there was some history that is very interesting about coins.. what are expensive coins or what are....

J: The collectors

JW: collectors like yeah so I learned a great deal and I love the process of painting these coins and while I was doing that your mind wanders a lot and I thought oh my gosh I'd like to paint our currency so I said I did two paintings. I first started with the Canadian currency and I wanted to add up to one hundred fifty dollars because of our Canadian... of our birthday our birthday. we turned a hundred fifty years last year and painting now I loved our history of our money I was so interested after I was done about what's behind our money and how they created it and why and and some of the images are phenomenal images on our money and. And I love the idea of. Representing Canada and honoring the artists who have painted our currency the banknotes are so interesting

J: well I think that's what a lot of people don't realize is the banknotes are works of art in themselves

JW: absolutely completely works of art and there are stories behind every single one and from that I did another a second painting and it adds up to 1867 the year we became Canada so I actually still have another whole list. Long list of more bank notes I want to do some full full bank notes and. Some details of some interesting bank notes in another series and I'm even thinking they're doing a... contact Canadian Tire because they're... the Canadian Bank Note Company actually prints Canadian Tire money or did and. I found out a friend of mine brought forensic counterfeit officer. And she came in to see my work and she told me some history of the Canadian Tire money and she told me the history of our money on the counterfeiting end she said I was right on and I was doing great and...

J: and didn't arrest you

JW: Nope . Actually asked if I'd like to do a couple seminars for the graduating class and bring some pieces in I thought it was great so I'm going to do that the next like I actually do some more in the series for my Canadian banknote series and currency series and

J: well one of the pieces that you did is right behind you

JW: right yeah that's the Canada 150 one.

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J: And I'll put a photo of that up on the video and the website as well there's some people can see but. People listening won't be able to tell how incredibly detailed these pieces are I mean they look as real as a real bank note

JW: when I. Was deciding or not if I wanted to be a professional artist or a full time artist. The painting that changed my view. Said OK that's going to can do it I can become an artist and I want to be an artist was my cherry painting. It's the first one that I got a lot of recognition for and a lot of people going wow thats... and from that. From the comments that I got of people walking into a room and seeing it for the first time that's the moment I decided I wanted to be an artist. that moment when some... the reveal for the moment somebody walks into a space and sees a painting and you're standing on a ways away. It's no greater joy than hearing somebody say wow. To your piece it's such an inspirational moment. That's why I paint that moment to see somebody go wow or or come up to a painting of my money and go...

"I remember that I remember having that dollar bill" and talking to their son saying we had these when we were younger and. You don't have that anymore you know you've seen a coin or you know but we had dollar bills

J: or the two dollar bill

JW: they had two dollar bills they don't... they've never seen one and I've seen moms and dads kneel down and look at my painting describing it to a child. That's the coolest thing I've ever seen. That is taking up an item that we see everyday cherries are a coin or a banknote. And going wow that' seeing something in a different light that's the whole idea of what I want to do in the next few years I want that wow moment I want people to turn a corner and see a piece going wow that's. Bigger bold or vibrant or large or that's Jori's. That's you know that's my goal.

J: It's a good goal for sure and you're well on your way to that for sure

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JW: the other. Part of being an artist is trying to sell work I have some very big original pieces but in the beginning they they wouldn't... I couldn't sell big stuff you know artists have a hard time selling some work so. As an artist I also wanted to have my work available for anyone. To purchase or to have. So I created a line of some of my stuff called Junior Joriginals then little by little print but I didn't want to just plain print I wanted a true limited edition print. To have so a young person can buy their first painting through a limited edition print numbered print and so I created these little versions of... Limited edition prints.

And then I also tried my marketing background so you putting that into effect I started doing clothing and pillows and some products that reflect some of my pieces. Limited edition prints as the one you see behind me that's actually a print canvas print from canvas prints to paper prints to the little Junior Joriginals that are were my bed bread and butter for. For the last couple years I've been showing my work now for a few years to friends and family but I've been.. I I came out as artist three years ago and my first big event was a Night of Artists in St. Albert in 2016 and that was the first time I showed my work publicly. Scared.. Yes I didn't know if anyone would like it yes but the artists at that event rally around the new people and they were all. So supportive and then the event came and I had people coming up to my booth going Wow And it wasn't just the interior designers that were liking my work at the house builders that I knew that my work would be in but it was the public so. That was my

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first public... and public outing I guess and then from there I started doing a few art walks and putting a tent up and showing my work and I wanted to have my work available to everyone so I created these little Junior Joriginals and they're small limited edition prints. That anyone can afford to have because when I was young I couldn't afford art and I really wanted to.

I remember walking into a gallery and I was very intimidated. Because I didn't have any money growing up and I always wanted to have some kind of art but I couldn't afford it so that's why I came up with these little prints so after doing a couple years now of a few art walks. Some of my work has been recognized now by a gallery here. In the city Can I say the name

J: Absolutely

JW: OK. I was approached by Andrew Udell who has now taken over his dad's gallery Douglas Udell and starting it in a new kind of direction a new youthful contemporary.. bringing in some new pieces as well as the amazing work that his dad has brought in over the years. And they asked if I would bring in a few pieces and I am now very thankful in happy to be in Udell Exhibition gallery on 124 Street in Edmonton

when I got into the gallery I sent a letter to you 4 of my best friends thanking them for believing in me and I just wanted to thank all these guys saying you know if it wasn't for you guys I would have given up being an artist. And it was so important to have such support by your friends. That I really would have given up many times but. It was because of her and them I didn't and she sent a quick note saying one day you'll thank yourself for never given up. And that was the day i got into the gallery for the first time she sent me that.

J: In your first. Show...

JW: Yeah I was featured as their feature our artist in their own invitation and I was thrilled and from that i actually sold a huge piece to a collector in Vancouver. So it's a it's a career changing opportunity. I'm thrilled and excited to see what it's going to happen in the next few years I just want to paint. I don't have enough hours in the day and I just want to. Go crazy and paint from for the next few years and go from there.

J: so what shows do you have coming up

JW: Udell Exhibition just producef their spring show it's a group show and I was lucky enough to have a few pieces in that and. I believe the Spring 124 Street Art Walk is April 14th & 15th. And that I think there's 8 galleries open and they'll have hundreds of viewers to see more work. In the next year they will be doing a few other shows open shows think they're called. And then they're there now representing me so my stuff is on their website and and they'll be showing my work any new work that I bring in and they're anxious every time I start something they can't wait to have it in so I'm there very supportive and very encouraging and and. Like she said I can't wait to see what Jori does in the next few next little. Im very very very fortunate.

J: Do you have anything else coming up the summer

JW: I do. This summer I am I was approcaded by VASA gallery in St. Albert and I'm doing my first solo show and a solo show for an artist is a big deal and I'm very happy to do... It's Rock'n August and it's a car event for car enthusiasts for the month of August in St Albert and I'm doing a my first solo show. For VASA gallery in.... And I'm doing cars it's called The Journey and I am showing cars in a different light... my version. License plates some very cool cars some parts of cars. And the

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whole life of a car the journey of our relationship with our vehicles or our transportation because I'm not going to limit myself.

Because way back when when I first started few years ago the guys kept asking for other than flower paintings so I did some cars and they were so generous and commissioning me to do their cars I'm actually bringing the cars and their paintings to this show so I'm having a little car show as well as a thank you to to the fellows who pushed me into painting a car. I think that would be a real creative way to have an art show with my background as a event person I wanted to combine both a little car show into an art show so I think it's going to be a hoot and I think it's going to be fun and I like that kind of. Making art show at an event.

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JW: Twenty three years ago I walked into a gallery and I'm noting to say where. And I was young and I you know not a rich person so I want to walk to and and I was just a just a young person thinking I wonder if I could be an artist when I was twenty..because I really did want to do that and I walked into a gallery and I was so. Put off. By the snobbery of the gallery setting. They were intimidating they were. I walked in there and I left feeling I will never be an artist I'll never ever be in that art world I hate that our world they were horrible they treated me like. Horribly. And I walked out thinking. Screw that I'll think of something else to do and that's why I went into display and. And I had a turn around now because I refused to be it walked into a gallery for twenty five years and never walked into a gallery not once. And believe it or not my artwork walked into a gallery before I did

J: that's awesome

JW: yeah and now I'm in a gallery but with a different type of.

J: It's a different attitude

JW: a different attitude in a different aura even you know and and that's why I'm now in a gallery and it really is I refused to walk into a gallery in any gallery worldwide I walked in and I've been all over the world traveling stuff but I wouldn't walk into a gallery. I'd look in the window but no

J: I think it's interesting you actually are represented by a gallery before you've had your first solo show

JW: yeah yeah. And

J: pretty amazing

JW: yeah yeah oh OK I just no I don't know I didn't I don't know all the gal.. I don't know the art world

J: I don't either so that's it's pretty amazing actually.

JW: That's cool the hey. Go figure I'm very proud to be in one of the best galleries in Western Canada

J: with 50 year history

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JW: that's well known. I'm thrilled and honored and they they treat you like gold you know they're there and they're so enthusiastic I just love that you know you know it's also it's a good ...

J: and it tosses that old gallery fear out

JW: yeah there's still some out there that

J: yes that's true

JW: I had a little chit chat on Facebook about that.

J: Let's talk about social media

JW: because it wasn't social media back then yeah

J: and even 7 years ago when you started it was really nothing

JW: absolutely I'd only had a phone for three or four years and never had you know because of social media artists now have websites we now have blogs and we can show our artwork to many people via Facebook and Twitter and Instagram and it's an amazing marketing tool for artists for upcoming artists for established artists. And I'm learning that there's a great marketing tools out there. That we can use ourselves. And to get more visual out there are more people out there are going to hear about us. I love social media and I was.. I had never done social media until I wanted to showcase my work

J: that's how we met actually

JW: that's exactly how we met and

J: we met when I organized the auction I think wasn't it

JW: It was Ft. McMurray wildfire disaster and you asked artists to showcase a piece of their artwork and donate it to the wildfire fund and from that you have thousands of people looking at your website in the auction and from that we are just generated money and a buzz. That I was thrilled to have every year artists are inundated by Non-profits and asking for donations and as an artist I do one event per year in my Art from the Heart fundraiser I do my own and that way I choose my own for personal reasons and that one I was very thrilled to donate a piece it sold well. And the money went to format I was thrilled

J: Yeah well I was.. it was a great experience I think we raised almost nineteen thousand dollars in dollars with matching funds from the government that was donated to the Rd Cross and the best part about for me aside from raising that money was I got to meet a whole bunch of new artists including yourself so

JW: and now we're friends Yeah it turned out great as a social media is a blessing can be a very big blessing for an artist.

J: It's a very lonely business and the social media I think helps

JW: absolutely have people ask do you paint with music on and noise and absolutely not for mine I have a lot of noise in my you know...demons and hearing you know people their voices saying oh no

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you're not a good artist and that's my quality quiet time it's when I create the best when there's no noise

J: So a meditation

JW: it's absolutely a meditation it's what got me through people's hurt and cancers and all that and absolutely it is full circle for sure

J: I think that probably does and I think that ended on a really great note so thank story for you know the podcast and we wish you luck with everything you do

JW: Jay thank you again for your side to. Advocate for artists starting artists and established artists in every artist and I really appreciate anything you do in anything you ask for I'm there all the time also a great friend thank you very much thanks.

N: Thanks to Jori Warren for sitting down for our first episode. Audio On Visual is recorded produced and hosted by me Jay Bigam. The Audio On Visual theme music is called Good Day by Kim Lincoln. For more information on Jori or to hear all or episodes visit AudioonVisual.ca, follow us on Twitter at [AudioOnVisual](https://twitter.com/AudioOnVisual) and visit facebook.com/audioonvisual.

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