

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH  
ARTIST  
HUGO MORO  
October 13, 2020  
Host: Bryan Smith

Hugo Moro (00:00):

The joy is to create the vision, and you have to do all that tedious work to create the vision. That's what joy is going to be.

Bryan Smith (00:12):

Brian Smith here and welcome to the DreamPath podcast, where I get inside the heads of talented creatives from all over the world. My goal is to demystify and humanize the creative process and make it accessible to everyone. Now, let's jump in.

Bryan Smith (00:30):

Hugo Moro's on the show. Hugo is a Seattle based Cuban-American artist who got his start in the art world in New York city in the 1970s, where he attended the Pratt Institute and the Fashion Institute of Technology. Hugo would go on to obtain his master's of fine arts at Florida International University in Miami, where he also served as an adjunct professor with collections in Miami, Oklahoma City, Napa Valley, Havana, New York, London, Denmark, and Seattle. Hugo has clearly made a splash internationally, but he's also worked in many capacities in the art world: a graphic designer and art director and an art dealer. But his current gig is studio artist at Project 106 Artist Studios at Pioneer Square in Seattle. How cool is that?

Bryan Smith (01:16):

This is where he creates an eclectic and diverse body of work, including public installations for the city of Seattle, mixed media on panels, mixed media on chromogenic print, found objects on panels, and even burned chairs on walls, which he talks about during the interview. Hugo was one of those artists that mastered the fundamentals of what laypeople might think of as art. For example, some of his graphite drawings are almost photorealistic, but the majority of Hugo's work is not as straightforward or accessible as a photo realistic drawing. When you look at Hugo's body of work, you realize this is a guy who isn't concerned with mass appeal or even commercial success. He's far more interested in creating something unique that springs from his soul without an agenda, and without chasing anything beyond the goal of perhaps evoking emotions or questions.

Bryan Smith (02:07):

I met Hugo through a mutual friend, Jenny Thomas. Earlier this year she sent me a link to his website, which I've included in the show notes. After looking at his work, I knew I had to hear his story. Artists like Hugo fascinate me, because they have a particular type of creative courage that I've always admired, and that's the courage to dive into a world that is not clearly defined, has no concrete rules, no clear path to success, and is riddled with challenges along the way. Which probably causes most aspiring artists to quit long before they're able to make a living in

the art world. So, without further ado, let's jump into my conversation with Seattle-based artist Hugo Moro. Thank you for making time for me, Hugo. I really appreciate it.

Hugo Moro (02:50):

I appreciate being invited, Bryan.

Bryan Smith (02:52):

You know, we have a common connection. How I found you was through a common friend, Jenny. How do you know Jenny Thomas?

Hugo Moro (03:00):

I know Jenny through common friends. We meet regularly and that's how I met her and her partner Bea. So, I think since we arrived in Seattle six years ago we've met her pretty quickly, pretty soon after that. And she lives in the neighborhood.

Bryan Smith (03:19):

Do you live in your studio or is that just your workspace?

Hugo Moro (03:23):

No, I live on Queen Anne and I have a studio space on Pioneer Square. So, now I'm home.

Bryan Smith (03:32):

I looked at your studio space online and the street view of it looks really cool, but it looks dedicated just to artists.

Hugo Moro (03:41):

Yeah. That's a whole area in pioneer square. There's a- I think it's called the TK building, it was established before I got here. It's live/work spaces for artists. And then For Culture, which is a local facility that handles grants that derive from certain taxes that are implemented, I think for hotels. So, they take those taxes and funnel them to artists or cultural activities, cultural facilities in the city. So anyway, that's where culture in my studio- It's right below that, or was right below that.

Hugo Moro (04:25):

Through the crisis, the COVID crisis, it became really difficult to access the studio. And so I just recently informed my landlord that I was going to be leaving at the end of September, and I'm waiting to hear about a studio space in Georgetown. So right now I'm working from home best that I can. And a couple of- One project I'm doing is pretty dear too, it's a photography storytelling project. So that's kind of was adapted to be done from home this year. That's been going on for 12 years, in person, throughout the world. And this year when they chose Seattle as the host city, they had to adapt it to do it online. So we're dealing with all of these constant changes.

Bryan Smith (05:18):

What are your concerns, from a business standpoint and creatively, that COVID brings to the table for you as an artist?

Hugo Moro (05:28):

Yeah. I rely on projects funded through the office of arts and culture and through grants that are facilitated through our culture. So, the one project that I had, that's been put on hold. It's a temporary installation, public installation project that's been not put on hold, but it's been pushed back. So, I don't know when I'm scheduled to do that. And so the funds that are going to be coming in from, that are now in play. I don't know when they're going to be coming in. I have a couple of solo exhibits next year, which have also been delayed and the time of them is also in play. So, my production for the shows has been also delayed.

Hugo Moro (06:19):

So this, of this uncertainty, I'm sure I'll have time to pull them together once I get the dates. But although those are not necessarily- Well, one of them is it's funded through a grant. So I won't have access to the second part of the grant until the exhibition has manifested, so that's another. And then paying for storage space, being between studios, costs of moving, and all of those things- Or sort of dealing with it as they come on a daily basis, like figuring out when to pack the studio and move it, waiting for the possibility of having the other studio become available. And how do I juggle putting it in storage, and then taking it back out of storage? So we're all kind of dealing with that level of uncertainty.

Bryan Smith (07:17):

So, the office of arts and culture, is that what you called it?

Hugo Moro (07:22):

Yeah.

Bryan Smith (07:22):

Is that a city entity or a state entity?

Hugo Moro (07:25):

It's a Seattle entity.

Bryan Smith (07:27):

Okay. So, I would imagine that the city of Seattle has a pretty big interest in making sure that it's sort of considered an arts hub, and that's why they're providing grants to artists to kind of keep them in the city and keep them creating. Is that one of the reasons why you see artists gravitating toward metropolitan areas like Seattle and Miami and New York?

Hugo Moro (07:51):

Yeah. I definitely- Personally, I've moved here from Miami and I think that here in Seattle these funds are much easier to access. I think I'm more proactive here in Seattle. So, I can say that those funds aren't always available in Miami, but here they definitely are. And yes, they

definitely are available, because the city wants to foster artists living in the city. And I think that the mindset of the city is to engage artists more in a cultural worker kind of format, rather than- I'd say rather than one of the elements that I see more clearly here in Seattle is how the artists can engage in the community as a cultural worker. And so, the model that I'm understanding as I see it here in Seattle, is that a lot of these grants are geared to bring artists and art to communities that have less access to culture on a daily basis. So, I find that really interesting and rewarding to be able to make work that gets shown that way rather than a gallery, which is fine too, but it seems to have a larger purpose when you're putting it out in the public arena.

Bryan Smith (09:28):

So in terms of the business of art, the business of art to me and to, I think, a lot of folks is a little opaque and hard to understand. Because when, for instance, when I walk into a gallery, just as a lay person- I'm not an artist, but when I walk into a gallery, I don't see a lot of transactions occurring. And I don't see what's happening. There's not a cash register. And I don't know how long those painting sit or those pieces of art sit and how much they go for. And it seems to be a really tough business, just a tough way to survive. Can you tell us more about just the business of art and what the challenges are and what the benefits are frankly too of having that different modality of surviving?

Hugo Moro (10:22):

My first exposure to the art world was back in the eighties, in the East Village when there were a lot of galleries coming. Every storefront that was available, but a lot of low rent back then was being turned into a gallery. At night I started to do something with a partner. And I have no business acumen at all, this partner of mine was more aggressive. So basically, it was let's put on a show kind of thing. So later on, probably in 2005, I don't know... 20 years later, I became more involved in the art scene in Miami. And I got close to the gallerist and saw a little bit of what a gallerist does. And I mean, very social, very business, like I would imagine any other business. It's very aggressive and you have your clientele and you follow up, and you're constantly contacting the press to promote. And it's a heavy duty, PR heavy business.

Bryan Smith (11:38):

It sounds like a hustle.

Hugo Moro (11:40):

It's a hustle. It's definitely a hustle and you're hustling art and some galleries- Some of the people, the gallerists that I became familiar with, really loved art. And were doing contemporary, local artists, giving people opportunities, students out of college and artists from- In Miami, especially artists that were coming out of Cuba. So, it was a good market. I could see that. And generally the galleries really were ethical then and treated the artists fairly, as far as I could tell, and gave them a lot of opportunity. And that's one source of exposure and income for artists. It's difficult to have a gallery represent you. They want a certain reliability. As far as product and myself. I don't make art that way.

Hugo Moro (12:37):

My art varies a lot. It's not for the wall kind of art. It's not for above the couch kind of stuff that you buy to decorate your apartment, although it could be. It could be. I don't want to say my art is difficult because a lot of the artists say that and it sounds kinda weird. But yeah, burnt chairs hanging up there with burnt chairs on your wall, it's not something that everybody is going to go for. So that's something that the gallery wants and some galleries specialize in selling burnt chairs. I mean, they're that much interested in art that's risky or challenging.

Bryan Smith (13:20):  
Very specific.

Hugo Moro (13:21):  
Yeah. Yeah, so that's just one aspect. I mean, a lot of artists are educators. A lot of artists are educators and their main income comes from being art educators. A lot of artists have other side jobs, not necessarily having anything to do with art. Some industries that require a certain amount of creativity, some of us, I think, graphic design for many years. But then you have grants that are available and you have to be a good grant writer or be somehow versed in grant writing so you can apply for that residency too. They have stipends and selling work out of the studio. So, the sources of income are- You have to be very creative on that.

Bryan Smith (14:16):  
Yeah, I've noticed that you've done it all. You were adjunct professor, you were working at a gallery, you were doing graphic design. I mean, it sounds like you've done pretty much every form of income generation within the art world you've been in it.

Hugo Moro (14:34):  
Well, yeah. I mean, when I came to United States when I was 12 and I kind of had this fantasy of what an artist was.

Bryan Smith (14:45):  
At the age of 12?

Hugo Moro (14:47):  
Yeah, I think. Well, maybe not at 12. I think when Picasso turned 90, maybe in '72, Life magazine put him on the cover. And I think that I had been exposed to some art before, Egyptian art was my thing, so I would go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and be totally awe-struck by all of that beauty. But I really didn't know about the art world. And then I think it was right around when that Picasso Life cover came out, that- And it might've been- A lot of different things might have made- Run at that time. He was Spanish and it rang a lot of bells for me and I thought: Oh, that's something. And I think I was already being sort of like admired, because of my drawings in middle school and so I wanted to be an artist. But I think also the- I had no construct of how an artist made money.

Hugo Moro (15:55):

I didn't really access mentorship or counselors, I was not into following a lot of instructions, let's just say. So the idea, I didn't really, wasn't able to integrate a lot of sort of logical ways to make money doing art, how to proceed. So, I kind of gave up. I went to Pratt Institute, I didn't- I wanted to do theater art, I wanted to do fashion design. And I just thought: You know what? Somebody offered me a job doing graphic design, I think one of my mentors sort of led me in that direction. And so I did a lot of production art, art graphic design, for many years in different industries. And I work in advertising and then I did work in publishing and did a lot of work in educational publishing. And then when I moved to Miami, I decided to go back to school 'cause I hadn't finished my bachelor's degree back then. So, I went back, got a bachelor's, then decided that I really needed to know more about contemporary art. And I went ahead and went for the master's degree. And in between all those things, owning a gallery in the lower East Side, being back in school, doing a lot of TA work, teaching assistant work, and took care of the gallery curating shows. No, not curating really. It was more like being a preparator, designing the shows.

Bryan Smith (17:23):

So, let's go back a little bit. So age 12, this would have been early sixties, roughly?

Hugo Moro (17:29):

Age 12 was... '66.

Bryan Smith (17:32):

'66, okay. So, mid sixties, you move to a completely different country and you wind up in New York city, which is- I don't know that I could think of a more art-centered, crazy place grow up. How big of a culture shock was that to move from Cuba- Was it Havana, Cuba?

Hugo Moro (17:55):

No, we lived in a small town in the center of the Island. It'd be like 20,000/30,000 people. I don't think- I'm going to say a lot of these things that kind of sound a little, sort of formulaic. I don't think I belonged there. I remember being very interested in film at an early age, a lot of reading... One of my aunts lived in the States since the mid fifties. So, I knew that there was another world. And so when we landed in New York, I don't know that I felt a lot different than some 17-year-old American kid ending up in New York, going to college. I think there was- Not knowing the language there was that kind of practical discomfort, but I just kind of think- I remember being at this new, cool place I was going to live in...

Bryan Smith (18:59):

And you went right to art school didn't you? Weren't you in a school for the arts right away?

Hugo Moro (19:04):

Well, I went to a regular grade school. I was a couple of years back, so it was in the fifth grade and sixth grade and public school. And I went to junior high school, middle school, and that's when art teachers- Specialized art teachers and art classes, and the teachers started complimenting me, my drawing ability. And I picked up English pretty fast and I was very good

at reading. So, I got moved along pretty quickly. But after being here three years in school, I got some kind of residency scholarship. Like the Brooklyn museum, my teacher Hope Irvine in the seventh grade, she's still around. I'm trying to track her. She really started talking about public art very early and was the first person I heard talking about public art from studio artists.

Hugo Moro (20:00):

And she hooked up with Joe's Lights. Joe's Lights were the people that used to do the light shows at the Fillmore East. So I was like 15/16 and I was hanging out with these Joe's Lights guys on some basement on houses, and being backstage at the Fillmore East, watching these people do these slide shows. So that world is just kinda like- Walked into that world, but wasn't really in it. I was kind of in the periphery and then started working. And I did go to the high school of art design, I applied for high school and went to the high school of art and design. That's when the trouble started, because I liked nightclubbing a lot more than I liked going to school. And so, I applied to Pratt Institute, I got into Pratt Institute, but by then... What is it called it? The die was cast. I was not gonna go down that path.

Bryan Smith (20:57):

What path is the Pratt Institute?

Hugo Moro (20:59):

Well, the Pratt Institute path would have been getting a BFA in some sort of art discipline, fashion design or theater arts, and joining that industry as a full-fledged college graduate and following whatever path those people follow in those industries. I wanted to just make money and pay my rent and party. So that's what I did. And during those years, that's when I got into the East Village art scene, and that was a lot more- We're all kids, so there wasn't any sort of hierarchy. It was just all kids, in our twenties, putting up galleries. And some of us were very savvy and, and were able to promote some really good artists. And now they have- They're still very successful in middle aged and older.

Bryan Smith (21:55):

You ever cross paths with Andy Warhol?

Hugo Moro (21:57):

Yeah, I did. When I had our gallery on 11th street, there was an artist named Lady McCrady and she was British, and we met her and really liked her and gave her a show and she was good friends with Andy. And so Andy came to the opening and I only remember having a little conversation with him with... Alligators came up for some reason. I don't know why. So yeah. Yeah, those people, weren't hard to cross paths with, it was all very- Everything was happening below 14th street, so it's not a big area.

Bryan Smith (22:35):

So, you said you got interested in film and what- Why do you think you never really went in that path? I mean you were in the heart of a city that, I guess, offered that as a possibility for you, but what- How did you end up where you are now versus in a more film-oriented world?

Hugo Moro (22:52):

Well, I mean, listen, I think when I sort of dismissed the idea of culture shock -just a couple of minutes ago- I think I still have culture shock and I think it takes the form of feeling still- At some levels feeling less than, feeling like an alien, feeling like an outsider. So, even though I did have access to those ideas then, I didn't feel like I belong in those places. I was very insecure. So, part of the of the whole acting out with not being resistant to following instructions, it's maybe that I even- That I didn't know the concept, what it meant to- I kept hearing people talk about mentors and I used to think that that was something that white kids have, not something that a Latin kid would have access to.

Bryan Smith (23:53):

Do you think that your, your sense of not belonging stems from your socioeconomic background, the fact that you're Cuban, you were born in Cuba and spent the first 12 years of your life there. I mean, where do you track that sense of not belonging and how do you think that it has influenced your art?

Hugo Moro (24:14):

I mean, definitely socioeconomic being a Cuban immigrant, although we were considered political refugees, which is a little higher up; privileged immigrants, just because we can be used as a commodified into the American antisocialist agenda. Which gave me a little bit- That knowledge gave me some sense of belonging and power, and knowing that I have been exposed to socialism and knew the rationale behind it and knew that that was not happening here. And so, I've always been very sort of wanting to be kind of bougie, but also having that socialist mindset of what's fair and socially just, right? But that didn't fit quite right. Or I didn't know that I could verbalize it. So the question was what kept me... So yeah, so being Cuba was kind of here or there. Being gay was an issue, there was a lot of- Even though I was very verbal about it and very out from an early age, there's always that sort of internalized phobia that affected how comfortable I felt around other people.

Bryan Smith (25:37):

Yeah.

Hugo Moro (25:38):

There was all that shame attached to it. Or was in the seventies, even though it was...

Bryan Smith (25:44):

Well, it's still to this day. I mean, I think it's still a battle to be accepted and to be- I mean, just the battle for equality is still happening, but yeah. To be gay, a Cuban immigrant, or refugee, but I would imagine you felt some sense of being fortunate to land in New York city where your identity is being accepted, more in New York city than it would in probably any other city in the country at that time.

Hugo Moro (26:15):

Yeah. I think that I was coming out right around the time of Stonewall. I think I really- That was kind of like my last push out the door. I read something in the paper about the riots in downtown and there were homosexuals. And I think until that point, I didn't really know how large a community there was. So I don't know that I even thought about what was going on beyond New York, but I was very comfortable in New York, I think to the degree that a 16 year old can be grateful. I was grateful.

Bryan Smith (26:55):

I don't know that they're that self-aware but yeah, possibly. 16-year-olds.

Hugo Moro (26:59):

Yeah. I don't know. Later on I... And I do, I am very grateful

Bryan Smith (27:06):

In hindsight, yeah.

Bryan Smith (27:09):

As you may have noticed, there are great resources and advice mentioned in all our episodes and for many of them, we actually collect all of these resources for you in one easy place: our newsletter! You can go to [dreampathpod.com/newsletter](http://dreampathpod.com/newsletter) to join. It's not fancy, just an email about each week's episode, featured artists and resources to help you on your journey. Now, back to the interview.

Bryan Smith (27:34):

So, it's interesting that you bring up this issue of socialism in Cuba and Cuban immigrants being used to, I guess, carry out this anti-socialist narrative. And the reason that it's interesting to me is that I have some Cuban friends and I know that I do a lot of reading- I'm kind of into politics and it's driving me nuts, the political culture that we're in right now. But it's odd for me to see Cuban Americans as political conservatives. And it seems to be more so with Cuban Americans than with other immigrants from other countries, that they tend to lean more conservative. Is it the anti-socialism aspect of it that you think drives them to that political party? Or what do you think that is all about? I've looked at your Facebook page, so I know where you stand politically, and I know you're not in that category. But I'm sure that you have friends that are from Cuba and family, and so you have a better sense of it than I do.

Hugo Moro (28:38):

Well, I have ideas that I'm sure other people share with me, working to make money generation after generation, and creating some sort of business or industry is a fine thing. And that was taken from many, many Cuban families. And so there's a level of PTSD involved in that. I mean, I think that there's no question about it. I think that that capitalism really lulls you into stupidity by telling you that you're going to be a millionaire tomorrow; you too can be a millionaire. And I think Cubans, of all social strata in Cuba, bought into that, because we were a colony of the United States. So, the idea of letting the rich get richer, because tomorrow I'm going to be one

of them. I think it's one of these ongoing problems with our society, right? And so that's been going on forever.

Bryan Smith (29:46):

Yeah, the false narrative.

Hugo Moro (29:48):

Right. Right, and so they come here, the Cubans I mean, with a shared PTSD that even though they didn't lose millions, somebody they knew through the paper lost millions and it wasn't right. I mean, on some level, these people work for these things and whether they share them or not, it was their property. So it was a very sudden change. And even 1950s, the early people that are sort of upper middle class that came in the early sixties, they were traumatized. And they had the young children, those children were traumatized and their grandchildren were traumatized, and you still have a lot of that. And you have a lot of family loyalty where younger Cubans, less and less, but younger Cubans have that knee jerk reaction to socialism, because they're being loyal to their parents and grandparents. And it's very confusing. I mean, I think we're- I'm not a philosopher in sociology or something like that, but it's very complicated to unravel all this stuff and put it in a place where it has some sort of logical order of why things are the way they are. But greed I think it's the main factor.

Bryan Smith (31:19):

Yeah. But I'd like to go back to this concept of not feeling a sense of belonging somewhere and how that may have influenced your art. And I'm going to go out on a limb here and speculate that lack of sense of belonging, or a feeling of not belonging, may have influenced your choices of mediums. Because you say maybe your art is not as accessible, because it's- You can't hang it on a wall. Or if you do it wouldn't be easy to hang a burnt chair on a wall. But you know, I'm looking at just the variety of mediums that you use and it isn't the type of art that you would see on amazon.com. Like: Oh, I need some art to decorate my house. I mean, you're making some choices that are not commercial choices, clearly. These are installations that you're putting in on fences and benches. You're creating panels that have multimedia on the panels. It's hard to define them. Do you think that somehow your lack of sense of belonging has driven you to those mediums? If that's a word or media choices?

Hugo Moro (32:31):

Yeah, it has to. I think that craft, whether it's like being very proficient and drawing or painting, that's what I was being taught at a school early on. And there wasn't a lot of exposure to contemporary art in the seventies in school. At that point there was- I remember a kid coming back from college to talk to us in high school and telling us, "Oh yeah, you gotta go to this school, 'cause they teach you how to make money." I think he used that term, he used, "How to do things." And if you go to Pratt Institute they'll have you throw an egg off the roof and go down and talk about it. And this was in the mid seventies, so it was like: Oh, really throwing an egg off the roof?

Hugo Moro (33:30):

I couldn't put two and two together, and I was somewhat aware of what contemporary artists were doing then, but mostly really I was in love with fashion then. So, I really wasn't aware of what was going on in contemporary art, but already then there was a whole bunch of people doing very controversial, against the grain kind of art that had nothing to do with- I mean, there were political statements and actions that people were doing then that I was not really aware of when. I went back to school and I was 45 I already knew about these people historically, but I really had no connection to contemporary art in 2003, I guess, is when I went back to school. And that's one of the reasons why I went back, was to get really familiar in depth with what the art world was all about.

Hugo Moro (34:25):

But as far as rebelling against technique- And rebelling is kind of like a self serving kind of work. I'm really very lazy, and so it takes a certain love for technique and endurance. And I'm very good, I mean, I can do photo realist graphite drawings until my back gives out. And I will do it if I need something to say, if I need to say something in that medium. Because medium means something, 'cause everything means something, and I can use those symbols to add to the work. But as a form of rebellion over evolution, because I don't want to follow the sort of demand, let's say of the art market to produce something that's reliable for the gallerist or for the consumer. I want a Moro because he's reliable. I'm doing this to mainly make a political statement, it's like: Yeah, let's just do it as off the grid as possible, let's try and- Which in itself becomes a technique too, but it's one that I like more, how to be irreverent. And how to be irreverent in sort of coded ways, I liked that a lot.

Bryan Smith (36:01):

Yeah. I notice that your graphite drawings are, I mean, some of the drawings are true photo realism. I mean, they're just striking how photo realistic they are. And I think what it does for me just as a lay person, 'cause I'm not- I've studied art in college a little bit, but I'm not an artist and I don't know that world. But as a lay person, when I see drawings like that on your website, I'm like: Okay, this guy knows- He knows how to draw. He has the fundamentals of a good artist. Like you show that drawing to anybody, they're like, "Yeah, that's great art right there," to a lay person.

Bryan Smith (36:38):

So you have that foundation that allows you to venture into these areas, which are completely unconventional, like the jacket that you made. Which is probably, I would imagine, a homage to your love for fashion when you were younger. But that jacket is just, it's ornate, it's beautiful, and it looks like a one off, like this is not something that you do. This is not quintessential Hugo Moro. This is just something that you, on a whim, decided to pursue and you're able to do it because you have the core fundamentals that allow you to kind of stray and go on these frolics and detours comfortably. That's my perception anyway.

Hugo Moro (37:21):

Yeah, I mean, that's right. I mean, I don't think- I mean, it works that way for me and that's my story. I- There are people making fantastic art that don't have that initial academic origins or

background, and that's my- That's just the path that I happened to take. And no, I wish I- The thought was that sort of sense of self-empowerment or freedom didn't really manifest itself in me until like 15 years ago. That's when I started to really get familiar with what being an artist is today, that there are no limits unless you put them on yourself. And I liked that.

Bryan Smith (38:16):

So, if you were going to be speaking to a high school class, high school art class, and these are graduating seniors and they want to be an artist, what advice would you give to them in terms of art school, where to live? And when I say art school, I mean, yes or no.

Hugo Moro (38:34):

Right.

Bryan Smith (38:34):

Where to live, how to find a community, how to find your tribe, how to find your voice and your medium?

Hugo Moro (38:42):

Well, when I came back to school, that one thing that I tell people when I'm facilitating some art activity is: This teacher that I had Aramis O'Reilly, a Cuban man of color in Miami, who had just gotten out of graduate school. The age must have been in his late thirties, early forties. And it's something that he said, and I was already in my forties and I heard it, he said, "You're already an artist, you're not here to become an artist. You're already an artist." And so that is something that I would say to those seniors.

Hugo Moro (39:27):

I've also heard something, that I can't attribute it to anybody right now, but it's like, "If you want to be an artist, don't do art, just go out and do whatever." Which is kind of a little hippy dippy or sort of existential or whatever, right? But it's- It kind of makes sense in a way. It's: Don't sort of put your nose to the grindstone with this endeavor to achieve this thing. Just chill and kind of try different things, because it's wide open. It's just totally wide open.

Bryan Smith (40:09):

Well, it makes sense. I mean- I interviewed a screenwriter who recently passed away. Her name is Bettina Giolis, and one of her memorable quotes from our interview was that there's a story logic to life. And she's sort of a biographical screenwriter. So she wrote the screenplay for McFarland USA, with Kevin Costner, and all of these biographical movies, Bessie starring Queen Latifa. So what she's really interested in is the story logic of life, and the things that make sense from a story standpoint in life, to be able to put them on paper. And according to story logic, according to Bettina, whatever you chase runs away from you and whatever you run away from pursues you. So the best approach in life is to be, and to not get too wrapped up in chasing something or running away from something, just be. And it sounds like what you're- The advice that you got from that teacher and that you're giving to this hypothetical class of high school

students, is to not chase something too hard, because at that point you are no longer an artist. You're a pursuer of something, you're a pursuer of a concept of art. Is that a fair statement?

Hugo Moro (41:26):

Yeah. Makes a lot of sense. I mean, that resonates with me even today. There's a lot of times when, in your daily sort of thoughts, you kind of see yourself pursuing achievements. I mean, that's just part of life. There are not- On every element, every situation has a part of it. But when it becomes- When that's in the forefront, then it doesn't feel right. It doesn't feel good, because the joy- And I'm not saying, "Oh, I'm in the studio making plastic flowers, that's so wonderful." But the joy is to create the vision, and you have to do all that tedious work to create division, but that's where the joy is going to be.

Hugo Moro (42:25):

Yeah, if you get recognition and somebody goes, "Whatever..." Like this. This is pretty special for me. This is a big pat on the back for my ego. It's like: Wow. But I just came out of the sky. When I find myself- I still find myself grinding my wheels about what I'm going to get out of it. That doesn't feel good, because that's kind of comparing myself to a situation where I wouldn't get anything out of it. And then I'm comparing.

Bryan Smith (43:01):

Yeah. I think we all do that. I mean, the choices that we make can be transactional or they can be organically just flowing from a different place, a place that's just...

Hugo Moro (43:14):

Right.

Bryan Smith (43:14):

This is working. I wanted to talk to you, you were open to share your story with me, and whatever synergies flow from that, great. And I think that's just something that we all struggle with, because it's hard not to compare yourself. And I do it with other podcasters. I look at their show art and I look at their guests and: How did they get that interview? And: Look at my download numbers. And it's- But if you just do- If you approach it from the standpoint that, I love talking to and connecting to people who are working in the art world, and it's like, if all I get out of this is just this conversation and it doesn't even make its way into the podcast universe, it's still a gift. So, that's a good conversation. Now, what are, as an artist who is doing this full time, all in, what are the parts of your day, week or month that really bother you? And you could you- If you had a choice, they would not be part of your day, week, or month. And conversely, what are the things that you most take joy in doing?

Hugo Moro (44:25):

So, when we moved to Seattle, we were very fortunate to buy into a co-op, a building that had a lot of deferred maintenance and the only way that I could see moving it forward so that my, our investment wouldn't suffer, was to get on the board and control everything. And so that's been in my life for the last five years, dealing with a huge project. Well, for me, 22 unit apartment

building that needs all new siding and new windows to have some really disagreeable- And by that, I don't mean disagreeable in a sort of personal way. I mean, they don't agree with me, neighbors. And so that has been a totally painful experience. I mean...

Bryan Smith (45:21):  
It sounds like it.

Hugo Moro (45:22):  
I got used to having that in my life. The thing that I love about it at the same time, it's that we are in the most beautiful spot that I've ever lived in, overlooking Elliot Bay. It's like paradise.

Bryan Smith (45:38):  
That's a great neighborhood, too.

Hugo Moro (45:40):  
Great neighborhood. It's right adjacent to Kenner Park, and we have a puppy, so that's all the good stuff that comes with these five years of pain. And we have a great garden, and that'd been abandoned, and we're revitalizing the whole garden. So, that is the joy in my life. That is really where I get my pleasure. And then the artistic work, the artists manifesting these ideas that are- When I get a piece and I can look, sit back and look at it and go, "Oh shit, that's good. That has some really good qualities to it." And then a colleague comes by and tells me something about it, where she acknowledges what I'm hoping other people see. It's like that kind of makes my world stop a little bit.

Bryan Smith (46:34):  
Right.

Hugo Moro (46:37):  
That's a high. And you can be high all the time.

Bryan Smith (46:40):  
The high you're referring to is sort of the confirmation of, you've made something that you were excited about, but when you see someone else confirm that it is indeed special, that's the high?

Hugo Moro (46:53):  
Yeah.

Bryan Smith (46:53):  
So the last question I have for you is, what projects are you currently working on and are excited about that listeners can look forward to seeing, maybe in the next six months to a year?

Hugo Moro (47:07):  
Okay, this is where I show you my book. Well, yeah, I've been really fortunate the last... Since we moved to Seattle, I mean, I'm so grateful to Seattle and art culture here. The way that the

government, the local government supports the arts. And so, out of that, I have a solo show coming up, a method gallery where I am creating a garden out of plastic bottles; single-use plastic bottles, a very lush- Well, the visual, the projection is that it's going to be extremely lush, sort of like The Wizard of Oz when it goes color, environment, immersive that you go in and walk into and be sort of seduced by how beautiful it is. While it's made actually of single-use plastic that is a horrible pollutant. And I've been working on these chairs that I am manipulating to create some sort of ideas of conversation or communications.

Hugo Moro (48:22):

And so that is going to be a solo show at the 4Culture gallery sometime next year. The city is building, I guess the department of infrastructure facilities, they're building a tunnel along from Fremont to Ballard and out to the water to channel stormwater, they're building a 20-foot tunnel- A 24-foot surf conference top, and for that they have a grant. They have given grants to about a dozen artists to do temporary art installations on the fencing around the construction sites. And mine is going to be over in Ballard by where Fred Meyer's is. There's already an artist there. And it's a very elegant installation that they've already put up. And I think mine is going to go up after that one comes down. I'm also working on a project through the Gates Foundation, it's the project that has been done worldwide now.

Hugo Moro (49:29):

And it's longterm AIDS survivors, or HIV positive individuals. The project is called Storytellers for Change that is through positive eyes, and it is through the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation. And Seattle is going to be housed at the Gates foundation. Some exhibition hall that they have over there. So, I'm working with 12 Seattle individuals who are HIV positive, and we're doing storytelling. We're developing these seven to nine minute presentations talking about what our experiences have been. And also- And that's going to be married with photography, and we're being facilitated with the photography with a couple of really good photographers, one gentleman from South Africa. Anyway, they're just wonderful people, the whole group of them, and we're doing the whole thing. I think I touched on it earlier. We're doing the whole thing through Zoom where they would have, they used to have intensive weekend workshops. Now we're doing it over three months on Zoom. So, that's challenging, based on going slow we're depending on media to move the project along. So, I have quite a full plate.

Bryan Smith (50:56):

Yeah, well, it's a lot of exciting projects going on and coming up this year and next year, if you could send me any links you have to those projects, I'll put them in your show notes when your episode launches. And listeners who are interested in Hugo's work can go to his website, which is hmoro, M-O-R-O dot M-E, that's M as in Mary, E. And I'll put that website in the show notes. Hugo, thank you so much for sharing your story with me and spending so much time talking about your journey. It's been fascinating.

Hugo Moro (51:33):

Well, I feel very honored.

Bryan Smith (51:36):

Hey, thank you for listening and I hope you enjoy today's episode. If so, I have a favorite ask. Can you go to wherever you listen to podcasts and leave me a review? Your feedback is what keeps this podcast going. You can also check us out on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook with the handle at dream path pod, and as always go find your dream path.