# **Transcript: Masked Virtual Artist Talk, Cowface**

# Kat: Hi everyone, welcome. I am Kat Redniss. I am here with one of the artists from the Masked exhibition. I'm here with Cowface. Cowface, how are you today?

Cowface: I’m doing great. Thanks for having me.

Kat: Thanks so much for being here. Uhm, Cowface has a piece in the exhibition which currently is in Saint Johnsbury at the St Johnsbury Athenaeum and it will travel this summer to Manchester to the Southern Vermont Arts Center and then it has four more locations after that, which we'll get into the night of the live talk, but, uhm, Cowface has an incredible piece, a painting, which we'll show you. And we're going to learn about Cowface, Cowface’s art and creative process. And just anything Cowface wants to share.

So I'm going to start quickly with a brief verbal description of myself, which is an access feature for folks who can't access the visual information on the screen. So I am Kat. I am a platinum blonde fat femme pale skinned person. Then I have kind of a pink lip on today and my hair is like a shaggy blonde shoulder length hair wearing a white button up shirt and I'm in my sunroom which has black framed windows that are letting in a lot of sunlight and through them. You can kind of see streets and some foliage outside and that's me. I use she/her pronouns and I'm just really excited to be here.

I'm a huge fan of Cowface, so I'm excited to get to do this as much as other folks are excited to see it. I'm like I'm fangirling a little bit so Cowface if you don't mind just say hey, introduce yourself and do a brief verbal description.

Cowface: Absolutely, I'm an artist. They call me Cowface up. Just your average looking white guy. I've got dark hair, dark eyes, a black T shirt here with the state of Vermont on it in my home. And, and yeah, the hair is looking a little long. Pandemic has kind of shifted the haircut priorities, I think for a lot of us. I'm just, yeah, I'm just sitting here in a in a spare room. They've got a painting hanging behind me. Or, well, it's a poster. Sorry I'm watching a house for somebody so I don't know.

Kat: Very cool, no, that's great.

Cowface: I don't know what's behind me. And I use he him pronouns.

Kat: Wonderful, so first let's get started. Can you tell us about Cowface, the name Cowface, you use this as your name as an artist? Tell us a little bit about the origin of Cowface.

Cowface: Well, I suppose, it's a little on brand since you know I'm part of the Masked exhibit. You know, we all wear masks, I think to some degree and, and, and certainly you know Cowface represents the, the, the, the place that I go when I'm engaged in my art. It's actually derived from a yoga pose which is supposed to provide a feeling of being centered, uhm, which is certainly what my art does for me, uhm. It's, you know, as much a muse as it is a coping mechanism for you. You know? Uhm, you know? Just, just the my state of being, you know, I, I certainly, I lived with a lot of mental health issues and that's a big theme that kind of presents itself in my art. And so you know it is as much a centering mechanism as it is, you know, a, an artistic process, and certainly more of a centering mechanism than anything. The art is kind of a byproduct. You know the, the processes is what matters. The art is just kind of the unintended end result.

Kat: Uhm, do you want to talk, could you tell us a little bit about your artistic process? Since you're saying that's kind of the more grounding, more centering part of it.

Cowface: Uhm, it's really not as refined as I would like it to be, but I guess it doesn't really matter. Uhm, it's, it's, you know the, the I, I focus more on what feels good rather than what looks good. In fact, the more I try to steer a piece to make it look how I want it to look the more I find that it is not coming out how I wanted to. So I, I focus more on just like you know how the paint coagulates and rolls off of the brush. The sound that the brush is making when it's scraping the canvas the, the you know the, you know, I try to do a lot of my painting outside you know, so like this the sounds of the birds or, or the, you know, the wind blowing through the trees as I'm sitting out outside and just and just focusing on, on that as, as, as much as possible. Because as long as you continue to take paint from your palette and put it on the canvas, you're going to be fine, you know it, just, just get it on there and judge it afterwards.

Uhm, I uh, I, I find that you know during my painting and I'm sure a lot of people can relate to this or really any artistic process, you, you have a tendency to want to judge the product as it's happening, judge the, the, you know the work before it's even done and, and you know you're telling yourself this isn't very good, this doesn't look how I wanted it to look, this isn't coming out the way I wanted it to, this is stupid. Why am I for doing this?

And I had to just tell myself just to paint, just paint, just get the paint on there and decide afterwards if you like it or not. You know it's, it's kind of like building a house and getting halfway through and deciding that it looks uhm. It's like, well of course it does. You know there's bare studs, you know. Right? And there's no floor, like get it together and then decide afterwards. And that's, that's usually how, how my process, you know kind of guides the art itself. I, I just kind of let whatever happens, happen, start with a shape or something like that in my head and just kind of go from there and just kind of let the let the work create itself.

Kat: That's, I love that, at Inclusive Arts we massively focus on process over product because the process of creation is so powerful, you know and, it and it can be so healing it can be therapeutic, it can be revelatory, it can be all of those things, or it can just be like, I, I love the word you’re using, the grounding. It can be all of those things for so many people. And when you're, you know when everybody is trying to move towards like a really specific product, you know, that's just that's a factory, you know, like if we're all just kind of trying to get to one place like...but if we're exploring that process, and I love that you talk about how your process is this multi-sensory process that you're aware of, like the sounds and the feelings around you and then also the aesthetics as well that are happening about that, which is really cool.

You talked a little bit and this is great because this was going to be one of my questions. You talked about both how Cowface and then your process, uhm, how Cowface is in some ways a mask, so can you talk a little bit about and then after you do this, we'll show your piece that's in Masked. Can you talk a little bit about the theme mask and how it relates to the piece you have in Masked?

Cowface: Uhm, well as I said before, I think you know we all we all kind of wear masks. Uhm, you know I, I, I've stated kind of in an artist statement before that you know Cowface is the, the side of our mouth that we speak out of when we let ourselves tell the truth. I think that you know we all have a, uh, I think a side of ourselves that we try to present to the world and then a side of ourselves that we wish that even we didn't know about. Uhm, and you know, I guess I guess with Cowface what I decided to do was to sort of expose that side that we would prefer the world didn't know about and do it in a way that was cathartic and healing and addressing that side in in a way that sort of helped me reconcile it, uhm, because you know, there's, there's certainly you know a you know a big, a big you know part of that within me that I that I have to kind of grapple with and wrestle with, and that certainly informs you know, a lot of a lot of my mental health. And so you know, dealing that and branding it as something external, you know something that is separate from oneself, but also identifying it as a healing modality, I think, was a big part of, of creating Cowface.

Kat: Uhm, right before we show your first piece, uhm is if somebody asked you like in a sentence how you define your art style, and you don't have to be encumbered by a sentence. If it's three sentences that's fine too, but in like, how would you sum up your artistic style? Because it's so distinctive. Like when I look at I, if I look at a painting by you, I'm like, oh, that's a Cowface painting. How would you define that Cowface style?

Cowface: That's a great question. I mean, I, I, I, would define it as sort of, you know, psychedelic, colorful, and, and, and sort of vibrating. You know, a lot of the, a lot of the, the, it, it's, it's kind of funny to see how, like a lot of the things that I grapple with daily kind of inform my art and like a big part of uhm, you know why, why I focus so much on the sensory aspects of the painting is 'cause I have incredibly bad ADHD that I used to take medication for, but a heart condition actually forced me to stop taking so.

I I focus on like really quick and, and short brushstrokes because the sound is something that I need to hear more of so it's like rather than using long sweeping strokes, I want to hear that scraping noise and so there's a lot of that. Visually, in the painting you can see all those short and quick brushstrokes that kind of contribute to a texture and a look to it that I think is, is unique.

Kat: Perfect I, yeah. Psychedelic, colorful, vibrating. I think that's spot on and I think, I love how you described it and I can hear, like in, in your description I can hear those brush strokes like the against the canvas. And so great, I'm gonna share my screen and we're gonna bring up, we're gonna bring up your, OK all right this is Cowface’s piece. This is “Children Who Look Like Left-handed Cigarettes,” right? That's the full, that's the name. It's, it's a doozy, and an awesome name.

OK, so here we are. So this is your piece that's in Masked. And I'm going to do a brief verbal description if that's OK. So this is a, this is a canvas. The back of the canvas is primarily like a light teal, but there's definitely nuances of maybe some gray and some orange at the center is an abstracted face that's almost skull like, with large cavernous eyes and mouth. Around the face are four kind of blue circular shapes and then at the bottom are blue hands. All of these kind of are abstracted and then there are kind of dark orange lines or, or not straight lines around the face and then through one of the eye sockets, seen through the eye socket and into the mouth is a pill bottle that says, eat one and there's one pill that's shown at the kind of back of the throat.

Can you tell us a little bit about this piece?

Cowface: Uhm, yeah. So this piece was completed shortly after I got out of the hospital. Uhm, I was hospitalized for psychiatric reasons. And didn't feel very good coming out of it. Uhm, felt alone and kind of distraught and kind of misunderstood and just, you know, there's a lot of lot of feelings kind of happening all at once with it, so I decided, you know, take that, put it on the canvas, use it to the best that you can because you, you're sitting with it, so do something about it, it and you know the, the, the the shape that I started with in my head was just something in an eye, you know I, I was imagining something in a eye, but I didn't really know how that would take shape, and so in true form you know, you just start putting the paint on the canvas and seeing where it takes you and deciding based on what's there where to take it next.

And certainly you know having that that hospitalization in the back of my head, sort of, informed the shapes as it was happening. You know the guy the gloved hands you know are reminiscent of, of, you know, sort of the, the blue, the latex or, or rubber gloves that they use in hospitals and you know the, the pill bottle is you know it, you know, I mean, it's in any pill bottle really, but it's certainly, you know, to me was, you know, the, you know, new medication and, and, and everything like that, that, you know, your body always has to get used to and, you know, try to, you know try to bring into the fold.

So it was, it was as much a, you know, sort of coping mechanism that I sort of used to, you know, sort of externalize some of those feelings of, you know, and you know, shame and fear, and you know, just a lot of things you know feeling like, you know, the, the uou know the feeling like your world is just kind of changing and, and that you, you're not changing with it, if that makes sense, yeah. You know, huh?

Kat: I always love to see people respond to this when it's up in the exhibit, and I think it's, it's interesting because it's obviously so personal to you. It's such a specific experience of your, you know, of your lived, your lived experience, but I think there's a piece of it too that's, that's really, and there's a piece that, that's really resonant to other folks, I think, especially in the pandemic right now. And I think that that frustration that like large, gaping mouth of like I, I remember when we were putting this up at the first, at the first venue in Spruce Peak and one of the staff members was like oh wow, that's, that's how I'm feeling right now. You know, like that expression and that. So I think that, it is both so personal and really resonant and, and that's what I love about your work, and that's what's so, you know, art is so amazing in that way that it's interpreted and, and folks you know connect to it or are just it's I think your work is so evocative and I think it just really brings up a lot of emotions for people, and knowing that you put so much of yourself into it and it's so personal, it's so beautiful and I'm so grateful that you share it externally as well and that it goes beyond, you know, your process, which is, is so powerful.

While we're here, I'm going to go through some of your art just because I'm having such a fun time sharing today.

Cowface: Yeah, sure.

Kat: But we'll go through some of your art and then we'll get into some conversations after that. And so we're going to show a few pieces of Cowface’s art, which is just amazing. And you'll see that psychedelic, colorful, vibrating style that resonates through all of all of his pieces.

So this is this is um, what is it? It's what Wicked City it's...

Cowface: Twisted Wicked city.

Kat: Twisted Wicked City, so Twisted Wicked City is. It's a cityscape, but the buildings are coming to you at all different angles and some of them are curved. At the right side is kind of a dark sky with blues and blacks and grays, and then there's multiple skyscrapers against kind of a, a beige or light brown background that curves. But what is so fascinating is at the top. There's so many faces in the work you do, there's, there's often faces and eyes and body parts in it, and so at the top there are two shapes, one which looks expressly like an eye with a blue eye, and then another that has that eye shape and then has more of a brown kind of a geometric shape coming out of it. And the buildings are all different angles. Some are traditional cityscape. You're following it and then others kind of cut across and jab across. So can you tell us a little bit about Twisted Wicked City?

Cowface: Uhm, yeah, so uh, uh, a lot of let me, let me back up here. I, I don't often dream when I sleep and when I when I do, it's usually a bad sign. Like I, you know, if I, if I remember my dreams, it's because they aren't pleasant. Uhm, very rarely do I remember like positive dreams to the extent that I have any at all and, and, uh, a big, you know common, you know, dream that I have that is, you know, not a good dream, is being in a city that I know, but that's different if that makes sense. Like, you know you, you can, you know, like you know, in my head I know that I've been there because you know people around me are calling it a place that I've been to, but everything looks different. Everything changed, everything is different. Buildings aren't where they usually are. There's new buildings there and, and so there's this feeling of like I'm supposed to know where things are because I've been here or this is my hometown or like I've lived here for X amount of years, but I have no idea where anything is. Uhm, and you know, I think it kind of speaks a little bit to that feeling of, you know, that I that I mentioned earlier with, with Children, the feeling of having things change around you and you being either unable or you know incapable of being able to change with it. And you know this feeling of being like kind of lost within a city of chaos. And of course, the, the the sky behind those buildings you know, kind of the yellow sky and the and the the, the dark and kind of stormy sky is kind of, you know that, that, that duality, I think that exists within all of us like this this feeling of turmoil and, and, and, and, and fright and then you know, peace and, and, and, sort of, you know, you know togetherness and uh and, and, and also you know again kind of represents how I how I approach the art you know how I'm feeling versus, you know what I want to be feeling, you know I want to be feeling centered. I want to be feeling, you know happy and, and, and, and you know, energized by the creative process while simultaneously reconciling what's actually going on in my head, you know at the time.

So that was that was kind of the, the, you know the attitude behind the piece going into it.

Kat: And, and it comes across like hearing you talk about. I'm like of course, of course, and, and I think that's again, you know, that's such a specific thing to you. But I think that that sense of familarity is, something that feels like it should be familiar, but feels so distant feel, so unattainable at that moment and that that feeling is intense, you know, that's such an intense feeling. I think that's, that, that chaotic sense making is really present here , uhm and incredible.

OK, let's do a couple more. This is Into the Ether, yeah? Tell us...so Into the Ether is a face. It's a face that is made up of mostly blues and reds, and it is kind of, the neck is coming off the bottom of the piece and then the head, top of the head is going off the top of the, and the mouth of this person with kind of dark teeth that are separate, the mouth is wide open in almost a scream, and the background is a mix of yellow, mostly yellow, with some, looks like some green or some dark blue in it. And the person's eyes are kind of squinted tight as their mouth is open and either screaming or expressing loudly.

And so tell us a little bit about Into the Ether.

Cowface: Uhm yeah. So Into the Ether was uhm, I, I painted that, uhm, kind of when we were in the middle of the pandemic. I think it is. it is certainly you know representative of something that a lot of us were feeling at the time, you know, just like, I don't know how I feel right now, but I, I, I, I need to just scream, like I wanna just scream. And, uh, and, and it was, it was, you know also, you know within that was, you know I, I have, you know, kind of growing up, one of the things that you know was sort of present in my life was I had a, a father who was very much involved in the sort of conspiracy landscape before it was cool. You know what I mean? It was, you know, you know, in the early 2000s being a kid, and, and, and, and living through his, his sort of brush with 911 trutherism, we just kind of, still with him to this day, and no, fluoride is going to melt your brain and that's why the government puts it in the water and, and you know, vaccines are obviously terrible and horrible and we should do everything to avoid them at all costs and you know. Just this this constant fear that, you know, I watched that just took over this man over the course of several, you know, years and couple decades.

Uhm, and it seemed like to, to the extent that it was a problem, it seemed rather isolated to me at the time, meaning that you know, aside from him saying something completely weird at a barbecue, every once in a while, it seemed harmless. Uhm, and then the pandemic happened and it was like, oh, this is this is a, this is going to completely inform how he interacts with this. This virus is now not real. You can't get vaccinated for it because it's just going to kill you.

Uhm, and, and to see what I thought was an isolated individual who perhaps was contained within the confines of the fringes of society. To see that become mainstream and to see that become, like you know, a large swath of the of the American population was frightening triggering, and just like it, it was, it was terrifying. And so that kind of it formed a big part of my pandemic experience. I think a lot of us sort of discovered something about a relative. You know it was like, you know I, I would, I would talk to so many different friends or, or, you know what have you? And people would be like oh man, my mother is doing, you know and, and it was like this, people crawl from all, or crawled out of the woodwork to, to just contribute towards this this you know this cultural landscape of conspiracy and that was that was a big part of how the pandemic affected me was realizing that these ideas were mainstream now, and we're all going to have to deal with them, and that was a big part of the feeling of I, I want to scream.

Kat: Yeah, yeah, uh, a few questions and, and thoughts about that. It's it's so interesting. I relate in a lot of ways just with that kind of understanding. Yes, how that applies and how you're like, oh wow, OK, I'm seeing this in more places than I thought. And we have another piece that's in the exhibit and it's it's an abstract painting and the colors are actually very similar to this kind of these, these almost maroons and blues and yellows. And then there's there's a textural element to it like this, like kind of glitter, texture and thick paint strokes, and the name of it is Panic, and it came out of the, it came out of, you know, the artist statement is all about like, this was what I did when I witnessed this frenzied energy from people in the pandemic, and so I think that's that's really resonant for a lot of people from. The question that I had, uhm, because you know, so this this character that's in this is it's clearly a face and it's it's you know, humanesque right?Do you see yourself in this like when you look at this? Are you like that's me or that's a version of me and because you have multiple, you often have faces in them, do you think those are are are you when you're painting them? Are they your faces or are they representative of you somehow?

Cowface: I I think it's both. I, I think it's you know it's my face to a degree, you know. But it's also I think the face of how, you know it's the face of a lot of people you know, and it's the face of virtually everyone who is is experiencing something similar. I mean the the individual and the piece is, you know, kind of a kind of a worn out and and withered kind of sunken, uh, person and I think that that's kind of how all we were feeling. You know when we mean when we when we lived through the bulk of that you know the pandemic which you know in, in in in many parts of the world is still ongoing, yeah? And yeah, so I think it's it's definitely a a reflection of how I'm feeling at the time. Uhm, but uhm. But you know it it it's informed by how others are feeling too, I think.

Kat: Sure, sure, so it's almost like the expression in it is representative of you and then expansively, and that character is is like a vehicle to to showcase that expression to showcase those emotions to showcase that intensity that makes yeah. Uhm great, OK, let's do a couple more.

This is I'm going to get it wrong. It's something about vibrations and Bruce, right?

Cowface: Yeah, it's it's called Till the Edges Vibrate Bruce. And, uh, yeah, this this was....So I I I mentioned a while ago that you know I was dealing with some, you know, heart trouble hat kind of was causing me, uh, you know, a lot of a lot of issues and still is, you know, I actually recently had to have surgery and have to have a pacemaker put in, which is not something you want to have happen when you just turned 30, but it is what it is I guess. And and and and sort of realizing you know 'cause one of the ways that the disease manifests itself is constant palpitations which do not contribute to anxiety very well because when you're already feeling this heightened sense of you know, well, just aggravation and fear you know, having an increased heart rate or palpitating heart is only going to contribute to that in a in a negative way. And and so you know a big part of it was learning, you know how my physical health was affecting my mental health and vice versa. And just the feeling of, you know just the nightmarish having to navigate all of that while I was also navigating, you know, mental health issues, and while I was also navigating, you know plenty of other things. I think a lot of people were you know especially 'cause this was also created during the pandemic. And uhm, the the the quote on the on the piece is “my heart is still as time will tell,” which is actually a line from Ginsberg's Father Death Blues. In, uh, I, I think in a very real way you know my heart was still is, as time will tell you know it's but it's also an understanding that like you are still defining yourself, you are still, you know you are still you're you're you're under no obligation to be the person that you were yesterday. You are allowed to create who you want to be and and who that is is, you know, time will tell and, uh, and I and I think that that was, you know, kind of a an acknowledgement that yes, my my heart is kind of screwed up right now. But also like who you are and how you're you were going to deal with this and grapple with it and and and and you know, sort of yeah, internally reason with it is. It's going to take time and it's going to be defined on a day by day basis, but you'll you'll get there, sort of as a self-reassurance.

Kat: Just to do a verbal description of this. Cowface shared what the the writing on it says. So this is a vertical piece. And it's leaning against a house like you can see the siding of the house and some grass at the bottom at the bottom of this piece it's darker, thicker lines there's also that kind of abstracted skull shape that we see in a lot of Cowface’s work with the big gaping eyes. One eye socket has, you know, a white eye with the pupil in it. The other has like a pupil that's hugely dilated, and then the mouth is wide open with different teeth coming down in shades of white and black and kind of a like a yellowish brown. The writing is in black over, over orange and there's a heart around the heart. And then there's kind of different lines and cracks and the colors behind are are really just beautiful collection of blues and pinks and teals and yellows. And then from some...did you use spray paint for the, for the orange Of it?

Cowface: Yeah, I did.

Cowface: Yeah, 'cause it's really cool 'cause you can see the drips coming down. There's a line under “as” and “time” there's a line under there and the drips of the spray paint are coming down. Yeah, this one. This one almost has, there's like definitely graffiti elements to it that feel really cool, I'm, I'm gonna stop sharing for a bit and come back to us because that brings up your work is feels so personal and so you. But do you have any? Are there any artistic influences? Any folks that you look to or any styles you look to that have influenced your artwork?

Cowface: Uhm, no, not really.

Kat: Great, I love that answer.

Cowface: Uhm I I I. I wish like I truly do wish that I could, I could, you know, describe myself as being, you know, a a sort of, you know, having my ear to the ground to you know contemporary artists, and having a deep well of understanding of the of the greats who did it, you know way back, when I I truly know very little about both present day artists and artists you know of of yesteryear. Uhm and and I I actually. you know, one of the things that you know I try to do it and and when I say try to do it, I mean like I, I I do it almost out of out of spite is to violate conventions that I think are taught within those, sort of, you know. Like like like you know I I had a I I tried to take an art class in college as kind of like an elective you know whatever. This was before I dropped out, but, uh, but they were. they were telling they were adamant that like you can't use, you can't paint with black and you can't, uhm, leave bare patches of canvas on the canvas you have to fill the entire canvas and you have to, you know, you know this is no, but nobody paints with black. Nobody ever does it, you know? I mean, look at, look at Monet. Look at, you know Van Gogh. Look at all of these people. You know you can darken shades with other colors, but don't don't use black.

And it's like, well, screw that. Right? Like you, you make your own painting, then like I'm gonna do so like a lot of my work has blank swaths of canvas in it. You know a lot of it has, as you know, I use black pretty liberally in in in my in my work and and so I I guess to the extent that those people inform my art style, it's to basically serve as a as a aAs a landmark for you know what I don't want to do, which is kind of spiteful, but you know, it's it's the truth.

Kat: I I think that it's it's brilliant. I mean, I think that's the thing is, you know, inspiration comes from everywhere, and if inspirations. You know there's that like imitation is the greatest form of flattery. But like you don't have to imitate anybody else. And I think what you've talked about is so much about how your art comes from your mind, your heart, your your senses going out there, and so that's such a personal thing. And if you were bringing that and then trying to replicate someone else’s style, you know, I feel like there would, it would take away from the connection from your emotions, your kind of where your head's at. Getting it on that canvas. If you were just trying to replicate somebody else, because what you're trying you you've talked about how your process is grounding your processes, discover your processes, all these things, and if your process was just, you know to to duplicate somebody else's process it probably would I would imagine it would have less impact and it wouldn't come, and and you're also somebody who you know you're a relatively young person like you've been, you have an art style that's so definitive and so distinctive as yours, you know, and I think sometimes when people try to replicate something else, they don't get to that state. You know, because they're trying to and and and doesn't mean their their art is less valid or more, whatever it is, but like you've, you've developed something that is so quintessentially Cowface.

Cowface: Yeah, and and I, I think a big a big part of it too is, you know, as I've said, you know a lot of my mental health issues kind of inform the art that I do. Uhm, and you know one of the symptoms of my one of one of my illnesses is having a, you know, a sort of constant state of identity crisis. To have have this this this feeling of not really knowing who you are uhm or or not knowing how to identify what makes you, you and so you kind of grasp at a lot of different straws and you try on a lot of different hats and you, do you know it, it it sort of makes establishing one's identity rather difficult, and I think that when I when I you know when I approach painting. Part of why I am hesitant to want to bring those method, all those those methods or those those you know inspirations into the fold is because I want it to be as me as possible. I want Cowface to represent me and create you know that identity. I guess if if that makes sense and if I'm if I'm if I'm letting other people sway that identity, then it's kind of going against the the goal.

Kat: That it makes tons of sense, it absolutely makes sense. Yeah, uhm. Where, how do you see yourself evolving as an artist? Where do you? How do you think you have evolved and where do you think you're going as an artist?

Cowface: Well, I mean, I've I've, I've certainly you know evolved in the sense that my my style and my sort of, you know my brand if you will, is is continuing to get more and more refined, it's it's, you know, I'm able to, it sounds weird to say, but I'm able to paint like myself. You know I'm able to paint something that looks like things that I paint. You know I'm able to step back afterwards and say, yeah, that's a Cowface right there like that's that's a a piece of my work and I'm able to do that more consistently and also able to discard some of the doubt you know, I I, I constantly struggle with that nagging and and and gnawing feeling of being like this isn't going to be good. This already looks like shit. This isn't coming out how you want. You're you're you're bad, you're terrible, you're awful. And that's that's you know that doesn't just manifest itself in my painting. You know that that that's that's a hat's an internal monologue that I deal with on pretty much a daily basis. But I find it easier to sort of push that aside now. And to that end, I think that is serving my evolution as an artist, it's it's helping me, you know, get better and and and sort of accept when things aren't going the way that I want. It's like well, but it's going somewhere. You know work with work with that 'cause 'cause it's not done yet?

Kat: I want to share one more piece, which I think is a really personal piece and I think it's very explicitly personal and then I have a question about it and then we'll wrap up because we could talk all day. I could talk to you all day, but I could, you're just, I am so appreciative of you as an artist and as a human and your generosity with how you're sharing yourself. And I'm I'm going to just say the piece that we're about to bring up is, has some challenging things in it and has references to violence and has references to self harm. So, so I just want to say that so, this piece is called Cowface Pt. 1, and what we're looking at right now is a piece at the center is a medical document and around our is kind of a frame of blues and dark blues, cobalt blues almost to like deep deep navy, almost black and then teal and then layered on top of that and in this picture it's there's. You can see that there's texture to the green, red, pink, yellow kind of splotches, short lines, dots around it. At center is a medical document. It says Vermont. It says 802. It says hospital and it says emergency room notes and and there is, it's typed out, but on top of it in red it's written, “It's not your fault” under the name, it's been whited out or painted out, and it says Cowface and and it's, in in this it says anytime Cowface is referenced, it says Cowface. It also says dadface and momface and I'm not going to read everything, but basically this is an account of you going to the hospital as a young boy. And you were there because you had threatened to harm yourself. You threatened to stab yourself. And also when you turned up at the hospital, there was bruising on your face which your mother was talking about was caused by your father from pinching, pinching your face, and that that was. And that you were, you said you hate your life and this is talking a lot about the dynamic between your parents and and it seems like from what I'm what what I've gotten from it, you lived, they lived separately, and you were sometimes with one or sometimes with the other, and in red again, It says “”it's not your fault.” So this is Cowface, Pt. 1 and, and uhm, tell us a little bit about this piece as much as you want as much as as feels comfortable, yeah yeah, yeah.

Cowface: So you know I mentioned earlier that I I grew up with a father who was very much involved in the conspiracy space. You know, he, you know that that fear and that anger that he was sort of poised at the world, wasn't only aimed at external sources. You know he was, he was always, you know, an angry and and and violent and just, you know, not a not a good man. You know he was abusive to my mother, he was abusive to myself and my brother. And you know that that kind of you know, informs a big part of you know the the mental health struggles that I deal with today. You know, I I I struggle with PTSD as a as a as a you know, largely as a as an effect of having to live with that man you know to be in a constant state of fear, not just a constant state of fear in that you know he's just going to come home and he's just going to be an angry, you know, bag of shit, and he's going to hit me or he's going to do whatever. But you know the fear that he instilled, you know in me about the world, you know the the government, the world, the government is poisoning you. Vaccines are going to do this and that you know the world is ending. The world is ending. The world is ending. And that you know really sits with a child I think and and I even believed many, you know, a you know a lot of that stuff until you know I reached, you know, an age where I was just like this guy really doesn't know what the hell he's talking about?

And so you know my mother, obviously, she she you know took me to the emergency room and I and I I found this this document because, you know, during the pandemic I was like, you know this this antivax stance that my dad has has actually gone on for a long time and I need to make sure that I'm like I'm up to code if you will.

Kat: Right.

Cowface: So I actually requested all of the medical documents that my childhood, you know pediatrician had on. File for me. I was like just send me over everything that you have. I need to go through it. I need to see what I need and what I have. And I need to give it to you know, my current medical provider. And I found this and I was, you know, as soon as I saw the paper I was like, Oh yeah, I remember that, you know I remember, you know feeling. You know, like you know, I've I've been suicidal for basically my entire life. And you know my mother took me to the emergency room. They discovered these bruises on my face from when my father sort of grabbed my face, palmed it, and squeezed it like a like a basketball. Uhm and uhm, you know they had me speak to a therapist they wanted me to come, you know, tell on my father and I clammed up, I just wouldn't say anything and and you know, sort of sought to protect him, even though he was, you know worthy of you know whatever would have happened to him.

But uhm, yeah it was, it was just kind of kind of jarring to see that to be like, oh yeah, this is, this is, this is where a lot of this comes from. You know what I mean, this is where a lot of this comes from, this fear and anxiety of the world. You know? He still lives with it. Uhm, as do I, but this is where it comes from, or at least where some of it comes from. And if it, if that's where some of it comes from, then it's not it's not entirely your fault, you know? You didn't, you didn't ask to be like this. And you know, you know a big part of Cowface is to externalize those those feelings, separate them from oneself in a way that feels safe. So that I can look at them and say, you know, this is, you know this is a part of you. But look it's over here you know and like you're you're, you're allowed to set that over there, and and and and, you know not have it, not have it define you.

Kat: Thank you for being so generous and sharing that. And thank you for making this art and you know, of a very vulnerable and personal moment. I'm going to bring us back. So my question is and just yeah, I'm going to take a minute. Thank you. Thank you. Your work you know, especially this piece, but all your pieces there's there's so much that's personal in them. How do you reconcile or or how does it make sense to you, the personal and then art that's consumed publicly? You know the personal and public of your art, yeah?

Cowface: Well, that's that's the, that's the fine line, isn't it? You know it's, I, uh, I I mean. I I I do it for rather selfish reasons. You know I'm I'm not, you know I'm not really concerned with how the public is going to digest the pieces. I probably should because I would sell more of them. But, uh, you know, it's, I'm I'm I'm, how how the public interacts with the art is so just the last thing on my mind when I'm creating it, I couldn't care less. I mean obviously if somebody loves it and it resonates with them, that that's great, and it makes me feel really good and I'm grateful. But I don't I don't design my pieces with that in mind. I I never I never create something thinking well, how is this going, you know you know, are, are people going to like this? Is it going to, is it going to make them feel uncomfortable or is it going to be something that they will want in their living room? You know, yeah, 'cause that's going to stop me from doing a lot. You know what I mean? Like I it, it's going to stop me from creating some of the things that I create and it's going to stop me from being honest, I think with myself. And I think you know, to you know, quote Ginsberg again he, he described, you know how one should approach their muse, and he says that you should approach your approach your muse, as frankly as you would approach yourself, and I think that that's you know, that's a big part of how I engage with my with my art I I'm, I'm I'm trying to be as honest as possible to myself, and if that can resonate with others and and make them feel good, and that's just an exciting after effect.

Kat: Thanks for that. I'm glad you're making art the way you're making art, because it's just it's, what you're doing is incredible and it's powerful. It's beautiful. It's a, it's grotesque in some ways, and in the best way possible. And like I, you know, as a performer I like I'm a performer myself and. I like going to those places that feel really good for me, and sometimes I'm like and if it if somebody connects to it, they do. But sometimes you need to do it for you and and I think it's it's really commendable and uhm, because I think so many people get caught up in pleasing others that they lose themselves. And I think the fact that you're working really hard to remain honest to yourself as an artist as a creator is a really powerful thing. Uhm, so thank you for being you. And for your art.

Cowface: Yeah, I appreciate it. Thank you.

Kat: Of course we are about to wrap up, but I is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to say? Is there any where can people find you? What would you like people to know about you.

Cowface: Uhm, yeah, people can hand find me instagram.com/cowfacevt. Certainly, uh, you know, give it a look, you know, give it a shout out if you can. Uhm, I've got a couple of pieces in the uh, oh gosh, it's in the the building with the WCAX news building and the Ben and Jerry's headquarters. You can go in there, you're allowed.

Kat: Oh cool.

Cowface: Uhm, and uh, yeah, I've you know, basically just been a Vermonter and a creator my my whole life and it's really fun and exciting to be able to share it with the world now.

Kat: We really appreciate, are appreciative that you shared it with us and that you're part of Masked and part of this community. You're a dynamo and I just I'm a huge fan, so you definitely gained one major fan and I'm sure you're going to gain a ton more. I already know there's more than me out there who've seen your work in this exhibit and are just phenomenally impressed with what you put on canvas and so thank you for being the human you are, the creator you are, the artist, you are, and we're so grateful and we are so excited to chat with folks next week after we go live and and answer some questions, but Cowface, thank you. Thank you for this and thank you for your generosity and just being an incredible human. Alright thanks everyone.

Cowface: Yeah, thank you so much.