**Inclusive Arts Vermont**

**Artist Talk with Liam Malone**

**Featuring: Liam Malone and Kat Redniss**

**Kat:**  Hi everyone! I'm Kat Redniss, and I am here with artist Liam Malone. How are you today, Liam?

**Liam:** I am thriving.

**Kat:** (laughter) I love it. I love it and I'm so happy to be here with Liam. And Liam is an artist featured in the *MASKED* exhibit through Inclusive Arts Vermont, which features 22 Vermont artists with disabilities, and it is traveling around the state right now. It is currently at Southern Vermont. Art Center in Manchester and then it is going to Main Street Arts in Saxtons River, Vermont, and then it'll be at Dartmouth Hitchcock, then back in Burlington, and then at the State House, where it will, it will finish up. And so Liam, we're so happy to be here with you today.

I'm gonna do a brief verbal description of myself just for access purposes.

I'll invite you to do the same after that. And then we'll get into your art and into you as an artist and a human being. So I'm Kat. I am the Director of Communications and Development for Inclusive Arts Vermont. I am a platinum blonde, my hair's kind of like wavy, shaggy bangs, shoulder length. I have a big metallic earring on, kind of geometric round with different color metals. I am a fat femme, freckled, pale, skinned human being. I have light-colored eyes. I'm wearing a pink lip and wearing a cream-colored tank top today. I have visible shoulder tattoos, cats and a bear, and I'm in my sunroom. So I have black windows letting in lots of light and kind of foliage from a neighborhood. There's a little cat over my shoulder and the walls and ceiling are kind of a whitewashed wood. Oh, I use she/her pronouns and I'm so grateful to be here with this dear wonderful human Liam.

Liam, how are you? Tell us about you. Introduce yourself, tell us you know your verbal description. Then anything you'd like us to know about you.

**Liam:** All right my name is Liam Malone. I use they/them pronouns. I'm actually originally from Manchester, Vermont. But didn't get to see the show down there because I just moved to Burlington. I work at UVM, and I am an artist as my side hustle, just kidding. Yeah. So my verbal description - to the right of me has, like a little purple hue from an accent light. On my left are-

you can see two plants, and they are on top of each other. And this beautiful fixture that I did a DIY project from, and then a shelf with some of my favorite nicknacks and meaningful things. There is a rainbow can that I have just held onto for so long. There's a paper peace sign above my head that I got at a great crafts fair and

**Kat:** That’s made of paper, that’s super cool.

**Liam:** Yeah of like yeah folded paper and then I have the Vogue cover with Harry Styles wearing a dress as reminders that masculine people can wear dresses, too.

**Kat:** Absolutely.

**Liam:** So. yeah, thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here. Yeah.

**Kat:** Wonderful. So we're gonna get right into Liam's artwork. And then we're gonna kind of once we explore Liam's artwork, we’re going to go into your creative process and kind of your, your view of yourself as an artist, and just you know what got you into making art.

And so what's really cool is the piece Liam submitted or that Liam has in MASKED is part of a series. So we're gonna look through the whole series, it's a five-part series, and go through that, and it'll end with the piece that they have in MASKED. And so we're gonna get started and we're gonna do that, and I'm so excited because I love the journey these pieces take. and so this is the first piece yeah?

**Liam:** Yes.

**Kat:** Okay great I'm gonna do a brief verbal description. And then I'm gonna ask Liam to give us a little bit about what makes this was like kind of anything you'd like to share about this piece. The meaning of it or the creation of it. And so this is Liam's work that they submitted to MASKED is all kinds of collage and different various techniques than collage. And we can talk about that because you incorporate painting, you incorporate digital collage, you incorporate kind of the traditional clipping, and you really all most of your stuff has a mixture of text and images.

And so this is a- this is a collage, and it is kind of, I think the main, their main background piece there is what looks like a living room set with this, like dusty floral pattern, with kind of sage and dusty rows. There is a red kind of chair or sofa and then a wooden table with a lamp on it.

There's also this kind of sage or seafoam door behind it, above the chair which is the chair is like this deep, deep red, there is a what looks like a toy helicopter floating above the chairs. And then in the background. I’m not sure what the very background is, there’s, there's an image behind that that looks like it may be like flower petals or pieces of fabric or like shards of something…

**Liam:** In the back back?

**Kat:** Yeah.

**Liam:** So in the backpack is a crystal cave. Its Mexico's cave of crystals. I only know that because of the bottom of the page.

**Kat:** Yeah, at the very bottom there's a caption. You're right. It says Mexico's cave of crystals deep below the Chihuahuan desert formed over Millennia. These crystals are among the largest yet discovered on earth. Layered over that to the left side is a picture of a street and in the foreground is kind of this, like slightly overgrown, like grass or wildflowers growing. Looks like there may be some debris in the grass and then there's like an asphalt road, and we see kind of on both sides it's bisected by another image that's coming over it, but on both sides they're on on the left side there's what looks like the front of like a trailer hitch and a trailer, and then we see part of a rooftop and some cars in the background, and there's some more debris in the street. And then to the right side, there's another car and some other roofs, and we can see the sky and some more trees in the background. Then layered upon that is a picture of a person sitting backwards in a chair. The person is wearing kind of dark pants and a white shirt. Their arms are crossed in front of them, with one hand at their face, kind of right by their chin line. The person is pale-skinned. There also looks like there’s, Liam, did you do…Is it drawing? Did you draw the piece below? So, there’s a drawing attached to the bottom of that that looks like it's like charcoal or pencil, and it has legs coming down from

that so kind of down to where the bottom of the chair or the legs would be of that chair. And across the person's eyes and the top of their head is a red panel, and then leered above that and over that is writing that, says “Chapter 28 Pandemics. Reducing the distance between me and my story.” and then layered on top of kind of the left side of that person by their elbow.

It says “Unprecedented improvement. Thank you for your patience."

Did I miss anything?

**Liam:** That was beautiful.

**Kat:** Oh, it's a beautiful piece.

**Liam:** It’s really interesting to like hear what other people see in it. So this piece has multiple layers as you were describing. So the very background element, which is the like, the collage with the you know, the living room, the crystals like in the way back and the grass, asphalt and trailer, as well as the drawing, which is actually like a person in a, what I would call like a refrigerator box. So like with a refrigerator box over themselves Kind of hiding. And so that was that piece was actually created when I was in high school. So the collage is from high school itself and - I, so a lot of people would describe me as a hoarder, and I like to say I'm actually, I prefer sentimentalist, because I keep literally all the things. Which, like artwork, I feel like, is a normal thing to keep but. So this piece has stayed in my portfolio and when I learned about the *MASKED* exhibition, I kind of went back in my portfolio, as I you know, as I've developed as an artist I've, my like style has… I just like to explore different things. And most recently, like, I guess, over the pandemic I really explored like digital art in like a really significant mixed media way. So the yeah, So the background is from high school the photo of the pale-skinned human is actually a series of self-portrait pictures that I took during the pandemic as a way to explore and celebrate my gender expression. I would describe it as like a more, I think, actually, I had like put on makeup and was like ‘I need to document this’ and so, you know, I set up my tripod with a self timer, and would set the timer and then run and get on the chair. And so that photo is this is from that series

And then the text, the ‘Chapter, 28 Pandemics’. So I turned 28 in the middle of the pandemic, or first you part of the pandemic…Actually, last year I turned 28 last year. Now I'm 29. And but I but this piece was made you know like right when I turned 28. The, the text at least, and it was a I, I don't actually know…I don't remember what the rest of the, the rest of the what's it called collage looked like because I basically erased the rest of the collage and just left the text.

And so this, the piece that we'll see today are like pieces that were made with the prompt masked. And so I think that this piece speaks like on multiple layers to that, especially, though like ‘Reducing the distance between me and my story.’ is kind of - you know, when when I think about masked, I think for me, I think about what the process has been for unmasking. And unmasking in multiple ways like my gender expression, my disability status my neurodivergent-ness.

And so yeah, I think, looking back at this piece, the like original piece from high school just was like a pretty loud image that stood out to me from my portfolio around hiding. And hiding in my, in my direct environment. Yeah, so this is the beginning of the series of me unmasking in all the different ways.

**Kat:** That's really powerful, and I know you and I have spoken a little bit about this before. But I think that I didn't know the history of you revisiting things from high school, which adds again, like talking about the layers of this- that adds this completely additional layer to it. And this poignancy of how do you revisit that with this new understanding, or new unmasking of yourself in these moments?

And I love that collage has given you that opportunity to revisit those pieces and evolve them as you've evolved as a human, and as your own understanding and your own also like public sharing of yourself has, has shifted. And I think what you said, too, is another thing that, I think in your artist statement you talk about how for the pandemic a lot of people, you know, like kind of went inward and like it was a time like you talked about unmasking and how, when the irony of like how everybody was masked up.

But it provided you this opportunity to unmask which is, thank you so much for sharing that.

Okay, let's go to two.

**Liam:** Alright.

**Kat:** Okay. So this one…

**Liam:** So the, the rest of them are - it's like interesting because when I was thinking about like, them being in a collection, I imagine that kind of like a book. So these are like individual pieces that if you imagine like the first one was the cover, and then this would be like if you opened the book

to the first page. So so the image on the left and yeah, I think that's right.

You said you said it opposite, but I think so the picture of the kid on the left.

**Kat:** Yes, I think what you know. what I said is, I said, I was doing like because the other picture was facing us.

**Liam:** So this is the the the photo on the or the image on the left is - actually, can you do the verbal description?

**Kat:** Happily, happily Liam. So this is yeah like Liam said, it's kind of a twofold like theres two pieces there, and it's bisected in the middle,

**Liam:** But can you give you the left one first?

**Kat:** Sure I’ll do the left and then we’ll revisit. Perfect. So this is the left one, and so this is there's a picture of a child who has kind of shaggy brownish blond hair. They are leaning over what looks like maybe a car or a table. Some sort of like dark blue, or, or, you know, muted blue metal or plastic structure. Their eyes are covered, and the kind of their hands are on rested on their arms that are crossed in front of them. And in the background maybe there’s maybe there's some foliage but it kind of in the distance we lose the detail of it, because the focal point is on the child who's up front. At the bottom left of this there's a date which says it's February 16, 1987, is what it looks like. There is also on the right side of this there's a pit, excuse me, there's a picture and, and the picture is of it looks like kind of the back of somebody, and with a child, like holding a child and the child's hugging them. They have their hand on the top of the child's head. The child's eyes are closed. And then over, so at the top left is again that kind of cut-out writing that says ‘I could hear the urgency. They were invisible, but they seemed reasonably happy.’ And then right at the center. And this is the piece that is over the child's eyes it says ‘The more you understand their world the more possibilities you see.’

And one thing that I'll notice is it looks like it originally said *her world* by the *t*, and an *i* have been added to make it *their*. And then over the child's kind of shoulder and arm, it says ‘I lie awake at night and worry burdened with the weight. I can't tell if they are happy.’

**Liam:** Beautifully done. So, so the image of the child is baby Liam. I believe I'm on the hood of my grandfather's old car. I, I sort of wish you could see my eyes because there was a deep sadness in my eyes. But I think that that's kind of part of why they're covered. This piece was also made specifically, well okay. So the, the image part on the, on the left. So the image of me as a kid on the hood of the car -and it's funny that it says 1987 because I was definitely not born yet.

**Kat:** I was wondering I was doing the math in my head it didn’t seem right.

**Liam:** Yeah, I, I don't know where that came from if it's just like a really old role of film, or what. But so that piece was created, so it, it, to me it reads: ‘I could hear the urgency. They were invisible, but they seemed reasonably. happy. I lie awake at night and worry burden with the weight. I can't tell if they're happy.’

So that was like its own call, well, I, I'd call it more of like a spoken word or not spoken, found word poetry piece. That yeah, this, this image, this picture that I've had of myself, I hold dearly, and it's one that I come back to as I continue to like nurture my inner child. So, so then that brings

me to the part on the right, which is a pencil drawing that I did immediately after an inner child healing meditation. And I, I think it was like part of some sort of full moon ritual, or you know something that I was, you know, really reflecting on.

And I hate meditating period. But this, I found this like inner child healing meditation, and I was like, ‘All right I'll give it a try.’ And so yeah the, the piece is me now. And it's me now, facing backwards and you can tell, because the cow lick in the back of my head, is the same cow lick I have on the back of my head, which is like a spiral - holding the shaggy-haired kid, which is also me. So yeah.

**Kat:** I love that we're talking about these because you know it’s, art is so subjective you know? It's so interesting because when I see these when I saw these originally, there's you know I put my own understanding on it, and so to hear these pieces, to hear the piece came from high school. To hear this is you holding yourself and nurturing yourself. Like my assumption had been this was an adult in your life or something like that, or you know, I don’t - And so I just, I love the again, I know it, it's coming up again, that these layers of understanding and layers of connection to self and to past Liam and current Liam. And reconciling those two existences in this really beautiful, and caring, and nurturing way. Oh, my gosh! I, I love knowing that. Thank you so much for sharing that. It’s, it's really beautiful to like hold that and know that about this piece.

Yeah, should we do the right side?

**Liam:** Yeah

**Kat:** Okay, great. So the right side of this is the background is like three-quarters of the page is, is mostly white, and then there's this kind of what looks like a torn paper edge with a grey band going down the right side. It looks like a, a painting of like almost like a fishbowl, like a rounded fish bowl, and there's a figure in it underwater with their knees up to their chest and kind of arms crossed in front of their face. And to me, it looks as if maybe something has been tossed into the water like a stone, or something like that. And it's creating a splash that's coming out of it, and there's like bubbles in the water where it's hitting the water. And then layered over that is this brightly colored almost rainbow-Esque fish - Angel Fish type of figurine which has these really elaborate fins, and it's striped.

There's white stripes vertical white stripes. The body of it is kind of this magenta pink and then it the you know, as it goes out into the kind of angel wingy fin pieces of it it's yellow and green, and then blue. and it looks shiny, like the appearance of it looks shiny. And then the text in this says: ‘You learn to ask what makes me comfortable. Could he be happier?’

**Liam:** Alright, so great job. I think I'm not sure. and I don't. wanna like mess up my screen by going to look at the, this is also multiple pieces layered together. I think that the thing that looks like it's being thrown in is actually a fish like spraying water out of the tank.

**Kat:** Oh, yep,

**Liam:** I think so, Just and I don't know that that gives it any more context.

But like, I think that's just what it is.

**Kat:** That would make sense. Yeah.

**Liam:** So, let's start in the very back which is the painting of, that would be me again.

**Kat:** I figured.

**Liam:** And the full painting is actually a, someone holding, a like imagine like a goldfish bag.

**Kat:** Yeah. Oh, yeah okay.

**Liam:** And I’m inside the goldfish bag. Kind of as something that…

I know that there's like deepness to the piece. I I wanna say that it has probably something to do with feeling trapped. And feeling trapped at the cost of others or at the benefit of others. You know, like being trapped to benefit others kind of like I’m being almost restrained if you will. Which was a, an experience that I had often as a youth. And so, yeah, that is the way back.

And then so the rest of it was actually a separate collage once again.

And I like digitally put the painting in the background. So then the rest of the painting was from a series of you know, pandemic let's be creative, and make a collage every day. But yeah, I, I put I found these two and put them together.

So I think it's it's kind of about learning to like step out of, or jump out of, literally jump out of being you know, being held in, in captivity, or like being so immersed in a culture where I feel like I'm like drowning almost. And

so when asking, like what makes me comfortable, this, like bright, beautiful fish, comes across the screen, the like photo. Is this what it would look like if I left this bowl or this you know this isolation that I was that I had experienced growing up and, and fully was able to be my bright, beautiful, wild self? So could he be happier? Yes.

I do think it's interesting that the pronouns across this journey change, you know. Sometimes it was easier to put the *their* in it. But actually, I think that like at that time when I was like a very young kid, I identified as a boy. And so I think that yeah part of, part of this is also the, the exploration of gender throughout my life. So, so you'll see them the pronouns and stuff probably go all over the place.

**Kat:** Right. Because this is yeah, you’re, you're representing a journey over a, a you know a quarter lifespan basically and really showing how that's evolved at different moments and also at different moments where, where you were kind of landing with that. And now you know again this juxtaposition of color where you have you know this kind of really gray scale reality versus this bright rainbow bold you know out of the out of the bag type of existence of this fish right here. And there's this you know like the scope of it, it’s so expansive like the different you know. I see the figure very closed and then you've got this fish that you know the, the are so broad and open and so great.

**Liam:** Yeah, it's taking up a lot of space. of the picture.

And yeah, I think that this is probably like a direct unmasking. Yeah. Yeah.

**Kat:** Hmm: Okay, let's do this next one should we go left again? Left first?

**Liam:** Yeah, ‘cause you imagine just turning the page Yeah. So maybe I can do this one. Yeah, alright. So on the left is a, in the background is a black and white painting of a…Okay, no, I can’t.

**Kat:** That’s totally fine. So it looks like to me, there’s somebody who is like sitting, maybe in a bathtub. and it's a painting of the what looks like the nude back of a person, and maybe the upper of their bottom and then you know arms kind of bent so we see the bottoms of their elbows, the top of their head. We see the back of their hair and their shadows.

To the left of them is a sink. We see part of a faucet, and just, you know some of the like a soap right there. And then overlaid on kind of filling up their back and their hips and kind of butt area is a in-color picture of a stack of chocolate chip cookies on a plate, and the plate is kind of right at the base of their spine. And it's a stack of a bunch of cookies.

and then there's one kind of leaning against the person, and the text here says “They were truly generous during a difficult time. Reciprocate their kindness.’

**Liam:** So, this is a painting of a picture that, that was taken last summer.

Jenna and I, Jenna my partner and I went to a, a beautiful Airbnb in the Adirondacks, and honestly, we went there for the bathtub, you know.

‘Wow! This bathtub's gorgeous. Let’s go.’ The whole property was gorgeous, too. But, so yeah, there's beautiful natural light we took these like gorgeous pictures, and it was like a pretty huge moment for me to be photographed nude, naked, in all of my glory. And it so, there’s like a lot of reasons you know, I have a body that was assigned female at birth. There are parts of my body that have large scars on the on it. And so really, and to take a photo of myself naked, I, I mean, from behind naked and look at it long enough to paint it, was like a huge moment for me to just like, like moving towards just accepting my body the way that it is and all of its parts.

Which is complicated as a trans-non-binary person and I think I, growing up, had a lot of…I was often like shamed for eating, for eating too much, for being what you know was called like a closet eater.

And really I, you know, the more that I, the more that I know about like kind of diet culture, and the fact that my mom was like always on a diet. And actually so I there's a podcast called ‘Maintenance Phase’, my favorite podcast ever literally. I, I cannot wait every single week. I'm like this is the best day of my week. I love Michael Hobbs and Avery Gordon, Aubrey Gordon. And just really the ability to, like their podcast really shifted my views about like what diet culture is and how it's so ingrained in like everyone. And yeah, I, I, I mean my, my mom, not to throw her under the bus, but you know she was always on a diet. But she also ran a daycare out of our house, and so she always had snacks for the kids, and they were like kind of off limits to me, you know? My dinner consisted of like that miserable cabbage soup, that was, you know, that was like a thing.

**Kat:** The cabbage soup diet, yes.

**Liam:** Yeah, exactly which like on its own once in a while honestly, not that bad. I love cabbage. But yeah, yeah, so I would sneak food. And had a lot of shame about that, and then continue to like have a lot of shame about patterns of eating and specifically around like how diet culture influences like binge eating content, I guess could maybe be put in there, but like it. totally Yeah, And how that continues to show up in my relationship with my body, and how I'm continuing to try to separate those two things. Like my body is like separate from the way that I eat or consume food, at least like mentally, right? And so I, I think I did find a lot of comfort in food, which I, I think makes sense looking back. And so this is really a piece that is like, ‘Listen! You don't need to hate, you don't need to hate the cookies. You don't need to hate your body. Like both have been very kind to you.’ And they can exist together in a beautiful piece of art. So yeah, kind of like a, a very specific unmasking of my physical body. Is that piece, is this piece.

**Kat:** Thank you for sharing that, and you know, for those who don't know Liam and I know each other a bit outside of this realm. And so you know, we've engaged in kind of conversations around bodies and size, and all of that, and, and Liam I'm right with you with Maintenance Phase. It's amazing we'll make sure to link it in, you know the live talk.

**Liam:** In the show notes? We'll put in the show notes?

**Kat:** Yes, Maintenance Phase! And it really does help you rethink, but you know, and I, I know to you know, I'm I'm a bit older than you but our parents are probably you know, in a similar generation, and you know I think especially AFAB people, or you know, who like were adults in the eighties and nineties like that was peak diet culture.

And so, it’s so, it's so prevalent in so many of our lives, like we were all raised by women who were just fixated on diets. And it really, I think our our generation or our generations I'm from probably a slightly different one. But like really are doing a lot of work to debunk some of that. And so thank you for sharing that.

So the right side of this is the well, I guess actually the background of this is a picture of I'm gonna assume Liam. Yes, of Liam and Liam is in darkness, and this is Liam sitting in a chair backwards, which kind of is a call back to that first picture. So Liam, with arms crossed one of the hands hanging over kind of at the forefront of the picture. It's a black metal folding chair, wearing a light colored shirt, dark pants, hair coif, you know kind of a, a dark dark brownish hair coif. Relatively neutral thing. Excuse me, neutral face. And again the eye is covered by text. Overlaid over that is a series of a bunch of different images and I'll let you, Liam, when, after I do the text, talk a little bit more about like what those are. But it's like tons and tons of images of things almost like you were looking at like on your computer, like a collage of all the different, like files you had.

And it was all the different pictures or images of that and the text over this, which goes over Liam's eyes, and then chest to the top of the chair.

So it says ‘For a moment your eyes open all the way. Explore the pleasure in taking it easy.’

**Liam:** So I wish that I had a better explanation for all the pictures.

Honestly, it was a magazine cut out great but it was a magazine cut out of it was from an art magazine, and I think I think that maybe it was like the pieces, like pieces on social, social commentary. I don't know if, if I, if I find the… if I figure out what it where it's from, which I, I know I still have the magazine I'll send you an email.

**Kat:** Yeah.

**Liam:** So that piece. I just really loved how chaotic almost it was and how, so I think it speaks kind of to there's so much going on around you.

And I think to me it reminds me of just like being bombarded with content.

You know, if you just imagine each of these little pictures is actually like a Tic Tok, or, you know, like content.

Exactly, exactly. So that's happening all around me and then this photo again is from the same series where I had put makeup on which I like never had done really before. And I was, it was like a gender euphoria day.

And I thought that this - so actually the, the collage, the picture in the that's like overlaid the photo of me and the text that's from collage that I actually… so I made a series of collages for into a calendar for Jenna, my partner’s, birthday. And so that's, where that like originated and yeah it's an interesting motif that like my eyes are either covered or backwards, or like cause I think that that also adds to the like masked element of

not fully showing my whole self in a lot of ways, but in a lot of ways still being able to show up in a more authentic way.

So yeah, this was this: is just a and and following the piece with the cookies. I think that this is just a piece that's like you can rest. It's okay to rest it's Okay, to be still, despite all of the things that are going on around you. Yeah and, and exploring my relationship to pleasure in a, on a nonjudgmental way, a neutral way.

**Kat:** Yeah, this, these two pages there's there's almost like you're giving yourself permission to you know to indulge and not judge indulgence like and like indulgence in a way that we you know don’t think about it. Like indulgent rest, and cherish that. Indulge in food in a way that gives is like giving kindness to yourself, you know, like indulge in your own body, Indulge in putting makeup on like this, this idea, I think, often indulgence is seen as gratuitous, but, like it just is also really that, that idea of giving yourself kindness, I think, is a beautiful way that you've put it in here is like reciprocate kindness to yourself. You know, like we're always told to like put that energy externally, which is great, you know.

Kindness to others is hugely important. But I think when when you turn it in, especially if you're somebody who's like a give, give, give like, how can I do that when you turn that to yourself, and allow yourself those moments so it's so poignant.

**Liam:** Yeah and I think that like there's so much shame that, like capitalist culture has created around pleasure and around stillness. And so if it just takes a lot to unlearn it, you know, like unlearn, unmask, whatever you wanna call it this like conforming to society. So yeah, I think that, like all of these pieces, are kind of like this is what society taught me. And now, like this is how I'm unlearning that in the context of especially in the context of Covid and being by myself.

**Kat:** Yeah, yeah. Okay. We've got two well, technically three more. Oh, my gosh! We've just like, I love how the depth we're going in. So the left of this is what looks like kind of a gallery wall set up of frames and inside, the frames are different kind of springs of botanicals. You know, kind of ferns and large monstera leaves, and like flattened leaves.

And then there’s, at the base of it there is a book with a blue vase, and it looks like there's paint brushes at the bottom. And in the background or -kind of, this is one where background/foreground almost it's hard to

distinguish which came first because they kind of both are there.

There's a painting of a person. I'm assuming it's Liam, because if we're going on the theme, it’s Liam. Sitting what looks like cross-legged with their arm in their kind of lap resting against maybe their knees and their shins.

It looks like I’m, I'm not sure in this if you are wearing a shirt, or if you are bare chested, and dark hair kind of head tilt to the side. And the interesting thing about this is there's no face. So there's no eyes again, no mouth which is a theme that we're seeing of kind of this covered up or, or you know omission of, of facial facial features in a way. And the text on this says says: ‘When I finally opened my eyes, I felt closer to the earth, and to myself. I hadn't gone anywhere exactly but my path had taken me right where I needed to be.”

**Liam:** Yeah, I think this piece pretty much speaks for itself. I'm just asking. I so again this is, this was a painting that I did also during like a a full moon ceremony. I assume it’s, it’s- as a triple cancer, it makes me feel very moon moon phases I feel really connected to. And so I often feel the most able to embrace my whole self during like full moon cycles.

**Kat:** I love that.

**Liam**: So yeah, this was a painting that I did and I, I took the photo, I think probably on my laptop you know, like Photobooth, or something, and was naked which was like this was probably the first time that I had photographed myself, and would you know like fully naked or just like photographed myself period without a shirt on.

Again, I, you know I had a double mastectomy as part of a gender affirming procedure. And while, I feel very fortunate to have access to that, there were some like complications with the sutures that they used and so I'm left with like pretty large scars. So even though I've had top surgery I rarely take my top off because of you know what, what is you know, still pretty jarring for me to see.

So yeah, this, this photo, this painting was done very quickly. When I'm doing a full moon kind of like ritual, I like to set kind of like a timer, not a timer, generally it's in the form of a playlist and I'll give myself a specific amount of time to create to the music. And, and so yeah, this piece has no face. I think that it goes very, you know, like directly to the masked theme, in that, like I'm still continuing to figure out what it means to show up as my full self. And so like parts of me are able to come forward or even come into the background.

But so then the collage in front of it. ‘When I opened my eyes I felt closer to the earth and to myself hadn't gone anywhere, exactly, but my path had taken me a right to where I needed to be.’ I think this really speaks to Covid and to finding myself literally by, by literally not going anywhere. You know, Being at home alone, and you know, exploring what it looked like to photograph myself without clothes on or like buying more feminine clothes. And so, yeah, really, this piece, I think, is just about finding yourself where you are. And also the like, ‘No matter where you go, there you are.’ sentiment.

And so, yeah, and then the like, the image, the like leaf image, I think, is just kind of like all different pieces of growth that kind of like make up this gallery.

**Kat:** Yeah, beautiful, Thank you, Liam. I, it just reminds, like I follow a lot of like fat liberationists, and it's not, not to make a direct comparison, because it's a very different experience, but like there's this idea of like fat vanity. Like the idea of like taking photos of yourself. You know also looking at images of other people like, and how that impacts body acceptance or body, you know, like just like your own relationship with your body.

And how for people who live in marginalized, bodies but aren't as seen in the mainstream, that like things like that, you know what's perceived as vanity, can be an active, revolution because it can be like

right like you're saying like this, was a really new thing for me to look at my body in this way, like it was in so many ways it was a revolutionary act.

And so thank you for sharing it with us.

**Liam:** Yeah.

So on the right side of this is the background is an image of what kind of looks like rolling hills. Looks like it's like kind of a dry time the grass looks a little like kind of brown part of the kind of dip or valley areas and shadow

And then there's this kind of gray blue sky, but that's perfectly clear, like no clouds or anything. And at the top, like on the top of this hill is this very small tree, with a few branches and almost looks like a bonsai tree, but like at the top of the hill, and then with a little bit of like shrubbery next to it. And then overlaid over that is a drawing of, I assume it’s Liam, and it is a person it's Liam, with kind of their back to us, but looking over their shoulder and looking right at the viewer wearing a hoodie kind of with this toussled hair, eyes looking at us. We get eyes, and a mouth and nose, and with what looks like a pretty broad, open smile. We see teeth, we see lips, we see that kind of cheeks forming that smile look. And the writing for this says ‘Loving is an absolute treasure. You have to dig for it, digest it, and then you have to let it grow.

**Liam:** So, this was a, the background with the tree and the text that was a collage on its own. And it was also part of the calendar series that I made. And the drawing, yes, it is of me, I think I look pretty adorable with my bowl cut. I was probably like 8 or 9 years old and it's drawn from a photo of me, looking very happy, and loved and cared for. And I think that the like image of the tree kind of being in the distance is kind of like a note of hope that like so there's this like cheeky little me turning and is like, you know, like you see that tree. Like we can get to that tree, and, and the tree being a metaphor for love and nurture in what is otherwise like a barren landscape. And so it's kind of like a hope that, like if I get to this tree or I, I or not, if I get to the tree, I can get to this tree. And I might have to like, go through periods of darkness to get there. but it is within sight. So I will leave that there

**Kat:**  I love that. Thank you yeah. I love how it's both such a metaphor and there's also some really literal things in that like the barrenness of it and is really representative of everything you're saying. Okay, So now I, I just love the knowledge that I've gained about this series, and I'm so, thank you so much for your generosity.

This is the piece that is in *MASKED s*o this is the one that is touring the state. This is the one that’s at Southern Vermont Art Center right now.

So this is, if we think about the piece is a book. This is the, the end, the end of the book. This is the kind of final page the back cover.

And so this is, at the very background or the very back it looks like there is a really full luscious bouquet of roses and flowers. The roses are a mix of like pink, and purple, and yellow and orange and

**Liam:** I think I think that the painting is in the very back.

**Kat:** Okay, the painting is in the very back. Yeah, Oh, okay, I see, what you're saying, okay, great thank you So that's overlaid over that and then there's a painting which I think is as Liam saying is the back. And the painting is of Liam walking. There's water to their left and they're walking, on like a sidewalk and there's bricks to their right and we're seeing the back of them, and they're holding a bag wearing kind of cuffed pants and looks like a bluish t-shirt head, kind of down, maybe. Looking towards the water, I see the signature flip of your hair a little bit.

We've got that really great coifed hair right there. Looks a little bit like a cityscape that we're seeing in the background of it. And I think you said it was like the Christian Science Reading Room, or something like that. This is where you were. And is it, is it, Boston?

**Liam:** Yeah. it's the like scientology building in Boston, which is gorgeous. but

**Kat:** Yeah. And then at the you know bottom of the picture, we see the shadow. So we see Liam’s shadow coming off. So the the shadow of their feet, and the bag, and maybe one of their hands is visible.

And then to the left of this, which is a really like dominant image of this, is a hand pulling open what looks like a theater curtain, that like bright red theater curtain. And so that is covering most of the water, and like making kind of the figure of Liam, like the centeral center of the stage type of piece.

And then the, the text says, ‘But this doesn't tell the full story because they've bloomed to survive the best we could.’ And is that the order I remember there was.

**Liam:** Yep

**Kat:** Okay. great. great Okay, tell us about this piece and this is the *MASKED* piece that's in the exhibit right now.

**Liam:** So I picked this painting for a couple of reasons. One. I think it's gorgeous the painting itself. It looks a little distorted in this. But yeah, it was. It was a gorgeous black and white photo that I was like I just have to paint that. And so when constructing this whole, this image as a whole for the *MASKED* exhibition I think that the like walking away holding some baggage, looking towards you know the reflection in the water kind of like, you know, continuing to move like my foot is in the air. Continuing steps forward. I think that yeah in ending, if, if you think of it, yeah, like a book, this is kind of like an ending, but not an ending. And that's why, it says like ‘This doesn't tell the full story.’ right? So this, this is part of the story, and this story, the process of unmasking has been quite literally life-saving.

And I mean I think the, the so it's like three different pieces.

So it's like the background painting and then overlay that is a so the collage you can not really see. But it's like the flowers that you were talking about and then the flowers and the text actually go together, I just the text more visible. But yeah, I think the flowers kind of like represent, I don't wanna say grieving or like a death like also I don't know like maybe what you would get if you had just performed a you know, on stage right? You you get a bouquet of flowers, people cheer for you. So it's both like I think, a celebration, and like a mourning at the same time. And that's what the flowers to me how they fit into this.

And then the hand holding the collage is a separate element. Or this the handholding not the collage, the handholding the curtain, was a separate collage that really was kind of like alright, we're about to close this curtain but you need to know that like this isn't it for us. And and also yeah, giving myself some compassion for doing what I need to do to survive even if it wasn't pretty. And yeah, that, that’s, that's it.

**Kat:** I love it i'm gonna. Hi we get to be full face now. Oh, my gosh, what a beautiful journey! Thank you for taking us on that! And I feel like I understand the piece like just so much more deeply, and I'm so grateful for you and your generosity for that. We are close to the end of time, because we got to go so deep into that.

But I just wanna ask, you he said this isn't it for us, so if you can just talk briefly about what's next for you is an artist, or what what are some of the things you hope for next for artist or a a human being kind of what’s, what's where's the next chapter.

**Liam:** So I think that the way that this art has helped me most is just by naming the things, you know, putting them out there. Giving myself a reference to go back to to look at they're saved on my phone, so sometimes I'll revisit them. I can also share them with up you know like easily share them with others. I think what's next for me is like integrating all of it. So like it's one thing to say like cognitively, intellectually I believe these things, and it's another to feel it in your heart and like embody what it means to embrace yourself fully.

And so yeah, I, I feel like we didn't really talk about how this intersects with my, my disabilities. And so I think that I'm excited to do the like other part, the like live part. I can talk more about that.

**Kat:** Yeah, and if you want to do that If you want to talk a little bit. About that now you’re welcome to. It's whatever you have capacity, for we can also talk about that night of, that's totally okay.

**Liam:** I think they're talking about it at night of because I feel, yeah. Yeah, I think I want to organize my thoughts around it a little bit better. Yeah because I think that it is largely intertwined and, and like how I create in general is like largely related to you know, chronic health, with chronic migraines, being nuerodivergent autistic and having ADHD and yeah. And the ways that that has made art one of the ways that I can communicate without communicating. Or like yeah, and I mean communicating without like speaking it so yeah I think it's really interesting, because I don't think there are many people that are be able to sit down with and like talk this through so like that speak still my trust, and in you and and Inclusive Arts Vermont in general.

**Kat:** Thank you friend. Thank you, that's beautiful. And yeah, and I'm excited to talk further the night of and also like I love the way you said that art gives you a way to communicate things that might be, you know, for whatever reason challenging or just not you know that that communicating it with words might not be like - I love the fact that you said you have these saved on your phone that you can look at, but you can also share them with other people. Like and I think that is such like this is such a, a beautiful peek into you as a human being and your experience. And I can imagine, like, if you're like, ‘Hey. This was a moment of my life. Let me show you this piece I made about it.’ and it's really evocative to help somebody understand kind of where you were in that moment.

And maybe it doesn't have every single detail but it has pieces of it, and elements of it that I think would help somebody understand the feeling and the you know where you were in those moments. And so I think that's really beautiful. Yeah go ahead.

**Liam:** I think I think that that that like I don't know, necessarily create with the intention of like, ‘Oh, this is gonna this. This is it? This like this

Is gonna communicate…’ or like I don't I don't need no, I don't even set out to be like This is what I want to communicate with this piece.

It's just like it's like kind of like Freudian in a way it's like just whatever comes out comes out and then I get to interpret it how I want to. And normally, when I do have time to reflect back on like, Oh, yeah, yeah.

So like a lot of the pieces had elements that we're either like in the recent past, or like high school. And so coming back to them and seeing how I was communicating back then, without even knowing necessarily, not having the words to communicate. And then the other thing that I think that is interesting and that you said earlier, is like how everybody's gonna interpret. I mean art is subjective, so everybody gets their own understanding of the pieces, and I think I really love that as well. Yeah.

**Kat:** So, friends, Thank you so much for joining us for this. Liam, you are on Instagram @theycreate.vt right. That's so that's where folks can learn more about Liams art, more about Liam, and also your at theycreatevt.com and we will make sure that those exist in the comments and all of that. So you can access that. Liam any last things you want to say before we end our interview, our recording today? Anything you want to share?

**Liam:** No I don't think so

**Kat:** I'm so grateful for you I'm so grateful for your art, and I'm so grateful for your generosity of spirit, and just everything you've given us today. And we're so excited for the live portion of this. So come, come, uh come, visit us then, and check out Inclusive Arts Vermont.org, where you can find all -we have an audio tour, we have a visual tour of all of the paintings, and all of the pieces in the exhibit. Liam’s piece is there also, with you know, beautifully done artist statement as well. And Liam, thank you so much, dnd folks, thanks for joining us today. So grateful for all of you.

**Liam:** Thank you so much.