**Inclusive Arts Vermont**

**Transcript**

**MASKED Artist Talk with Persephone Ringgenberg**

**Featuring Persephone Ringgenberg and Heidi Swevens**

**Heidi:** Hello, and welcome to this individual artist talk for *MASKED* with artist Persephone Ringgenberg.

My name is Heidi Swevens, and I am the Director of Community Partnerships at Inclusive Arts Vermont. For access purposes I will do a visual description. I have blue eyes and pale skin with short brown hair and today I’m wearing a green turtle neck and a tan patterned wool sweater. Behind me, are angles and lights from the ceiling and the angle of my iPad. I use she/they pronouns. And I'm, I'm really really thrilled to be here tonight with Persephone. And we've had, *MASKED* has been touring the State since January of 2022. It is currently at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center in New Hampshire, and it'll come back to the Burlington area and wind down at the State House in April of 2023. You can find more information about that on our website. [MASKED] features 22 Vermont artists with disabilities, and a lot of accessibility features. And tonight we're here with Persephone Ringgenberg and I wanna invite you to introduce yourself, Persephone.

**Persephone:** Hi! My name's Persephone. I use she/her they/them pronouns. Description: long hair, pulled back in a ponytail, glasses, blue glasses, t-shirt on and it looks like I've got an antennas coming out of my head, but it's really a lamp. And candles flickering around me.

**Heidi:** Thanks, Persephone. So we're gonna start this conversation the way we start, I think, all of the artist talks. I hesitate to say all in case there's one that's not, but with the art that's in *MASKED*. And we have with us Megan behind the scenes with tech and description support. So Megan's gonna screen share now and do a verbal description of the piece in *MASKED*, which is titled *Panic*.

**Megan:** On the screen we have a vertical painting. It's filled with lots of movement from brush strokes.

And you can see different textures of paint. The brushstrokes are in many different colors. There are reds and purples and yellows and greens and turquoise. And there are areas where the colors also blend together. And Persephone, is there anything else that you would like to add?

**Persephone:** There’s also glitter in there.

**Megan:** Perfect, yes - glitter.

**Heidi:** Wonderful. So tell us a little bit about this piece, Persephone If you would. And thanks for the description, Megan. Beautiful.

**Persephone:** Oh, well, it's kind of funny. I did it

when they put into place the - and said stock up on things. Umm. Things might not be available like toilet paper, food, everything. My mom was just like oh, people are making a big deal. This virus isn’t like shut down- it's gonna pass.

We're now three years into it. (laughing) My mom was like, when the lockdown actually happened, was like, I guess you're right. I was wrong. (Laughter) So this is how I feeling, like I just painted everything I was feeling. I was just like - of hearing wear masks. It’s coming over. It's spreading. And tried to convey that to my mother and she's just not listening to me. Sorry for laughing.

It's kind of funny because her- my aunt is auto has an autoimmune, uh disease, autoimmune disease.

And that's, that just happened within - they just diagnosed her with that.

So now we're taking those precautions, that my mom was not taking those precautions. And she also has immune compromised issues. So it's just like…

I was the voice. So yeah, my thought process was the sky is falling, the sky is falling.

**Heidi:** Yeah, thank you for that, and Megan, if you want to stop screen sharing, that would be okay.

You know, I - you say sorry for laughing, or you're laughing. I think sometimes emotions come all at once, you know, and, and that's just part of being human.

And you know, this was March of 2020. Is that when, when *Panic* was created?

**Persephone:** Yeah, it, it should say on the back of the, of the painting. Cause that was one of the first ones that I titled then put the date on.

**Heidi:** Yeah, and you know, so that, I think sometimes time gives us retrospect and even though the experience has lots of different ways of being around it. You know, you can sort of chuckle at it, and like, yeah, I was feeling it and here it is. And I, I'm curious, if you want to share more about how it got its title?

It might be obvious, but if there's anything more to say about *Panic* and…

**Persephone:** Yeah it, it was because like it was like there it was. We were being told to sort of panic. And so it's just that's how it came out is because the world was that, being told to panic.

**Heidi:** Hmm. you also mentioned that there's glitter in there. So I’m curious if you want to say more about that detail? Either in what it looks like to you, or what it felt like to you, or kind of in all of this panic, why glitter? We’re just…

**Persephone:** I don't know. I just felt like it. I was doing mixed medium, and it was, I think, body gel that I just smeared on there. And that's why, it, I was like I feel like this needs this on here. This is how

I feel and hey it’s… I feel like different people do journaling in a different way. So for me that was like one of my first journal entries, doing painting.

Even though I've done painting for a while, but in different forms. That was just like I'm gonna date this, title it, put it away. And then when you guys titled that exhibition for *MASKED* I was like “I know, I'm gonna put in there!”

**Heidi:** Yeah, so you said a couple of things that I just want to follow up on and again, there's not a right or wrong. And asking you with words, and here you are talking about journaling with painting, right?

This decision to create with visual imagery, and then sign it and date it so you know, cause you have a mixed media, multiple media. So the question I want to ask, just explore a little bit more is, when did you first start making art and maybe you can tell us a little bit about which mediums you use and what you engage in?

**Persephone:** Oh my god.

**Heidi:** Again, no right or wrong.

**Persephone:** I’ve been doing art in some form or another for years. Middle School I did photography, and I can't remember what year, it was must’ve been 2004 or 2005. I experimented, I was doing arts and computers in Montpelier.

Also in high school, when I went to U32, I was taking art classes there. Wasn't that good, but I had a, one of the teachers that like would help me. Like I would just draw things like, I wouldn't do, I would do some of their, some of their assignments, but like I would go off and like I'd be able to draw like the fire alarm. I feel like better detailed than I could do other things that they were asking us to do at one point. They helped me draw a picture of a horse. Because I was doing horseback riding, or therapeutic horseback riding. But going back to the painting, I sold my first painting I ever sold was the one that I did. Cause I did, numerous of them. But I had to only pick one that was displayed at the State House, and it was sold and that was called *Imagine*, and it was all abstract. And I think I think it was oils. I can't remember oils or acrylics.

But I kick myself in the butt, because I wish I would have taken those paintings that I left there saying, “Oh, get them next year.” I should have oh, “Hi! Kitty (cat walks into Heidi’s screen) Oh!”

**Heidi:** Excuse. That’s okay, I'm back.

**Persephone:** You turned into the cat, like the judge.

**Heidi:** You were talking about the, the paintings, and…

**Persephone:** Yeah, I, I really wish I would have kept those and put them into a portfolio, so I think those could have possibly sold.

**Heidi:** Yeah. What other kinds of mediums do you use? So you have the painting and the mixed media with…

**Persephone:** And photography. And so like I take, I feel like I take more photos now. Like during the summer I take photos of flowers and stuff and stuff like that, like my past, this past trip when I went to Florida I took some photos of, oh, of our trip there and those are up on my social media. So, like some people, might not think that that's very photography or stuff like that, but for me, it's just again that's my journaling. So it's how I showing myself. And then there's the photos of the dogs. Notorious for taking pictures of dogs, I- they’re, easier to take pictures of than humans, and I take wonderful pictures of dogs.

**Heidi:** Yeah, it sounds like, maybe you have a, a love of dogs.

**Persephone:** Oh, yes, I do, and the dogs love me back. Especially the dogs at the dog park.

**Heidi:** Yeah, I'm curious like, in other artists’ stories

there were animals who seem to be posing, do you have any stories of, you know, photographing dogs that you might want to share? You you don't have to, I'm just curious because you said

**Persephone:** Well, one person, another owner, took photo of me with their dog and both of us are smiling. And like I would totally steal their dog because I love their dogs so much. It's a mini Aussie doodle, and I said, like, I would totally like, be like how would take that dog, like if it’s a miniature dog I'll take it, and have my dog as well. But yeah, I'll take you, you're my dog.

**Heidi:** Well, you're talking about photography, and I think it might be a good time to show a photograph that you had in the exhibition before *MASKED*, which is called *ANEW*. So Megan if you would screen share this photograph and describe it and then first Persephone will ask you to add anything and tell a story.

**Megan:** On the screen we have a square photograph. It is an outdoor photo from Carnival…

**Persephone:** Not the carnival -fair.

**Megan:** Sorry from a fair, and there are many structures for trapeze artists, and the structures are held up with ropes that have lots of yellow and white and orange triangular flags on them. The sun is setting, so the flags are illuminated by the setting sun. And on the right hand side of the image are two trapeze artists in silhouette reaching out for their trapezes. And then on the left hand side, is one trapeze artist in silhouette who is swinging through the air. And then on the ground you can, there's a large tent in the background that is striped with yellow and blue, and red. And did I miss anything else Persephone?

**Persephone:** No, lights. That’s about it.

**Heidi:** And yeah, Persephone . Would you tell us a little bit about how you took this picture? What's the sort of the setting, the scene, the moment?

**Persephone:** It was the right place at the right time.

I took a couple of shots, and it was, I think, it was like your first, first exhibition you guys were doing or at least the first one I heard of.

**Heidi:** Yeah, I think it was the first one for you. It's it, we've done four now so, but yeah, so it was the first one you. Yeah it's how you met us. How we met you, yeah.

**Persephone:** I, it was between this and I was also thinking of entering actually a photo that I took in from my sister's wedding. But I was advised not to so I was just like, but okay.

**Heidi:** Yeah, and you just mentioned your sister, which reminds me that before we started recording, Megan, if you want to stop screen sharing that would be…

We were talking about this photograph, because you and I met when you dropped it off at the Inclusive office. Yeah, yeah, and can you tell the audience where this photograph is now, and maybe a little bit more about what…

**Persephone:** So this photo, my Aunt saw it at the, at Dartmouth and we didn't know that she liked it.

But we were like - I was thinking, let's just give it to Aunt Anna and Uncle Fred. My mom's sister and my mom's brother-in-law. And come to find out, and it's taken us a while, to finally give it to them. And then come to find out that my aunt had actually liked the photo. She just didn’t buy it, so we just surprised her with it. Like, I was giving her a couple of photos, like one was of her chickens. When they had chickens.

**Heidi:** Yeah, nice. So you, you gave her the photo, without knowing that it was one of the ones that she liked, yeah, awesome.

**Persephone:** Yeah.

**Heidi:** So you had mentioned also, Persephone, that you, the first painting you sold, was at the State House. Was that connected through some high school art?

**Persephone:** Well, no, it was through, it wasn't through high school. Oh, it was something, it was a program that was going on like once a week. I don't know who, who it, who was doing it. I think it was like some state sort of thing that was happening in Montpelier.

**Heidi:** Gotcha, I guess that was less relevant. Then the question I wanna ask, which I don't think was on the, the one ahead of time, it's a spontaneous one.

But what is it like for you to have your art shown in exhibitions? And, you know, what is that like for you, as an artist?

**Persephone:** Good, but I feel sad when like nothing gets sold, that like, sort of like, should I continue doing it? Like I will, also had stuff shown a couple of times in the arthop and like nothing sold, and that and like my like one time was my photography and then another time was painting.

**Heidi:** Yeah, you know, the other artists are yeah, frustrating, the other artists… thank you for being honest, about that, you know it's like, it's exciting.

and that’s disappointing. Yeah some of the other artists were talking about that in the, the panel that we just recorded, about you know, things haven't sold and I think part of the current economic context is influencing everything, and I'm not saying that to take away any of your feelings of disappointment, or sadness. But you know artists create to create and, and then you know part of what some of the others are saying and I'm curious what you think about this

it's like it's nice to create. It’s important to create. And it's nice to share and those are kind of two different parts of the artist journey, as how does that…

**Persephone:** But I would never want it, but I would never want to date an artist, we’re too condescending. We, we, we just break each other down. And you're too much of like, like competition. And criticize - your work's not good enough, my works better, like

Oh, yeah, you're imagining.

**Heidi:** There, are you're thinking there would be some sort of competition, or race, or who sells more or that sort of thing?

**Persephone:** No, no like just like your works, not like, because I, I sort of dated, an artist before in college, and that was not a healthy relationship. But it was just like they were just like my stuff was, my stuff was better than yours. So it's sort of like that mentality of entitlement and thinking that their work is better. And your work is not as good as theirs. And I think that well, maybe there are some nice artists out there that would be good people. That would be supportive. I've yet to meet them. But it's just I, I think it's just how artists are. That we're very much about our art, I'm very…my art is good. My art is better.

**Heidi:** Hmm, like I, I might disagree a little bit about and not to challenge. Just I think that, that artists are like all kinds of people, that they're different. You know, you've met one artist and you've met one artist, they're so unique. And it sounds like you had an experience that was impactful for you and the, the part that I'm wondering about or at sort of touching my heart, is this sense of you know we're so told by the world that you know you have to be higher, faster, better, best, in that lens of kind of a hierarchy, sort of, is not the only lens to look through, but artists are so trying, not artists, many artists, creative people you know find value in what they do in a world that doesn't always say, Oh, look! This is beautiful art. This is really meaningful. This is really valuable. And then I'm gonna pause there and see if that resonates at all for you.

**Persephone:** Yeah, but I still like hear like the sort of like criticism, like this is what you could do differently.

And no, like I, I ask, somebody, once to help me with a camera. And they were just like - mind you they were at their work. They're at the bubble tea place, but they pawned me off onto one of their, one of their people, that comes in and gets stuff to eat quite often. And the person, just like was so fast and like I had no idea what the heck they were saying like that I couldn't follow them like. So I haven't used the camera.

**Heidi:** So, one of the other things that I'm wondering about in terms of like, bigger, faster, good, better, best is how at least for me, sometimes I think about that with disability and like disability identity and, Persephone, I'm curious if there's any link or parallel for you with that?

**Persephone:** The higher, the hierarchy, like I'm on the CDCI and I don't feel like I necessarily fit in with the people on that board, on the, the people with disabilities on that board. I often get very annoyed and wanna bang my head because, I feel this is probably gonna bite me in the butt, but I feel there's like only one person I feel that I’m like close to, like on the same wavelength with. And yeah, it's it's very hard to be like from going from somebody that was functioning when they were 15 at a 5 year old to I don't know what I'm functioning at now, but not at that level. And probably if I was diagnosed now I'd be diagnosed as the Asperger's but I don't like think that like I

more entitled, or that I'm smarter than other

other people. Even though some people might say because I say some stuff that I am. But like I don't think like I don't have like that high IQ like I've had like in, interactions with people who have Aspergers and you're like, "I'm smarter than you.” “I, I'm gonna get their job.” Like yeah, “I know better than you." It's just like, okay.

**Heidi:** Yeah, and, I mean, thank you Persephone, for sort of articulating that and again, if I misunderstood, or if I say this in a way that doesn't resonate. But there's hierarchies everywhere in our world. So, whether that's how good is your art, or how smart are you, or how fast can you go like, we just there, there's parts of the world that I think are outside of that or can be authentic connection. But sometimes when there's a lot of history, or at least for me, I know I've tried to prove myself. And I've kind, I know I'm trying to let go of that because you know having a disability there's a lot of places in the world where I’m dismissed. Or, you know. Yeah, so I can relate to that sort of wanting to prove myself and, and also the sort of sense of like there's even categories within communities about things, that we label, and then we assign value to is that?

**Persephone:** That’s why I like music so much. Like, I feel like I connect, I can connect with certain music.

And I can just put that on and be okay and like, listen to it while I do art and…

**Heidi:** That was one of my next questions, like what inspires you? It sounds like music is one of those things that inspires you?

**Persephone:** Music, and just like whatever like I haven't been inspired for a while, since I got my furry companion. I can’t, I can't trust her to be alone.

**Heidi:** So your furry companion. We have another photograph of you at the same St. Johnsbury Atheneum artists reception. And I believe your furry friend is in that. Maybe we can share that now and you can tell us. You know, Megan will describe, and you can tell us anything else.

**Persephone:** Although she's a lot more furry. Now she's a lot more fluffy. She got groomed and brushed out.

**Megan:** This is Megan. On the screen is a vertical photograph. It is from an opening reception. Heidi, I believe, it's at the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum correct? Yes, and it is Persephone standing with their dog, your dog's name is Willow?

**Persephone:** Yep Willow.

**Megan:** Willow is kind of like light gray and tan with some wiry, fluffy fur and is wearing a red vest. And next to Persephone and Willow is the painting *Panic.* And the wall behind them is yellow and to the left and right of Persephone are some other artworks from the exhibition.

**Heidi:** Great anything else Persephone? Besides, that she's differently groomed?

**Persephone:** Willow is a Labradoodle

**Heidi:** Hmm hmm yeah, thank you, Megan.

**Persephone:** Yes, we're talking about you.

**Heidi:** And you have music going. So you, you get inspired by music, any other things? Topics? Content? You know, dogs, it sounds like..

**Persephone:** I love taking photos of sunsets.

**Heidi:** Have you ever had, like some artists, talk about a kind of a happy accident. I'm putting that in air quotes with my hands up. But like something that you weren't intending to do in the creative process and you were like, “Oops, I really kinda like this. It's actually cool.”

(Pause)

**Persephone:** I’d have, I think one of my paintings that came out was a happy accident. I was just like I started it as one thing and it didn't turn out what I wanted to be. Or a couple of them have like turned out to be an owl, and when turned out to just be like an explosion.

**Heidi:** Yeah, sounds like you have some abstract art in your repertoire.

**Persephone:** Yeah, that's what I like to do is more abstract.

**Heidi:** With adding in glitter, or on occasion. Yeah.

**Persephone:** Yes.

**Heidi:** Yeah. We’re winding down our time and I heard you say that since you've got Willow you haven't had as much time and space to create in the same way. Is there anything that you're working on or any way people can stay in touch with you? I think you have an instagram.

**Persephone:** I mainly take photos. I'm always down to take dog photos. I love dogs. They can follow me on Instagram.

**Heidi:** And what what's the Instagram handle? And Megan, when we go, live, we'll make sure that gets posted. And I say this Megan, but it's just because I know your skill set, I'm not trying to tell you what to do I'm just so grateful for your teamwork. But what's the..

**Persephone:** @worldthromyeyes

**Heidi:** And you have dogs on there? What other kinds of things are on the Instagram?

**Persephone:** It’s all sorts of different things. It's got some photos from the fair, flowers, campfires, representing the anniversary of the American Disabilities Act, picture with chicken. And my dog even has her own face, Instagram page, too if you want to follow her.

**Heidi:** And what's that handle? Is it even a handled address?

**Persephone:** Willow Stykas.

**Heidi:** Alright Persephone. Thank you so much for sharing your time, your, your ideas, your creativity, and, and these art pieces. Is there anything else you want to share with the audience before we say bye for now?

**Persephone:** No, have a wonderful night!