

Episode 3.16 Being That Bitch Sometimes with Julie Frances

February 1, 2019

- Hannah (Host): [00:08](#) [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Hey, wow. I guess January is over, huh? What a weird month. It's so loaded with toxic notions of improvement and self-perfectability and as a result, I think it's a really exhausting month for a lot of folks. I hope you manage to disengage as much as possible from all the "new year new me" bullshit, and that you're taking care and keeping cozy wherever you are, even in places where it's summer right now and coziness is more conceptual than practical. A little announcement before we get into things. I am hosting an event at the Vancouver Public Library's central location on Wednesday, February 27th from 7:00 to 8:30 PM with four amazing local writers, Jessica Johns, Keith Maillard, Shazia Hafiz Ramji, and Erika Thorkelson. We'll be talking about *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins* and about CanLit in general. It's going to be a really great evening, and it's free, and it's an accessible venue, and I would really love to see some of y'all there. So if you do come, come, say hi. And now let's meet Julie. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Julie Frances is a Cuban American artist living in Miami, Florida, where she works as a tattoo art-preneur. It's a portmanteau. Julie made me say a portmanteau. Can you believe, "art-preneur." Her work with clients and her community positions tattooing as a form of health and wellness, and aims to subvert the traditional tattoo shop environment by promoting diversity and inclusivity. [Music: "Kicking Back" by Mila J.]
- Julie: [01:58](#) It's art week in Miami, so I've been seeing a lot of like, really cool artwork and like getting around. It's like the city is like really packed right now.
- Hannah (Host): [02:23](#) That's awesome.
- Julie: [02:24](#) But today's the last day of art week. So...
- Hannah (Host): [02:26](#) What is art week? I mean it's self evident in the name, but...
- Julie: [02:31](#) Well there's this art convention called Art Basel that's been going on for 20 years, and it was first a convention on Miami Beach, and then as more and more of Miami's been gentrified

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and become, like we have more and more like art districts, it's kind of spread out to the whole city. And everybody comes from all over to see art of all kinds.

Hannah (Host): [02:52](#) I mean that sounds, that sounds, it sounds great. And then also like a function of gentrification.

Julie: [02:59](#) Yeah, I mean it shitty part is that like a lot of the like, bigger spaces like charge \$20 to \$40 to get in to see the art. So I was very strictly like, I'm only going to free spaces this year. Like, only like, local friends performing, or like showing. Like, that's all I'm going to do. I'm not giving money to these big things.

Hannah (Host): [03:17](#) There's a great, I think comparable, event that happens in, not Vancouver-wide but just in East Van, which is sort of the traditionally more working class area in Vancouver, you know, more diverse area. And also where a lot of artists still live, though East Van is becoming as unaffordable as the rest of Vancouver and artists are getting driven out inevitably. But there's still all of these sort of big old warehouse buildings that have been converted to live/work studio spaces. And there's a weekend long event called the East Van Culture Crawl, where everybody who wants to, who has one of these studio spaces can open them up. And you just, you get this like cool little map and you just walk around the neighborhood, and honestly find out that these buildings that you walk by every day are like, actually avant-garde dance studios and you just had no idea.

Julie: [04:08](#) That's really cool.

Hannah (Host): [04:09](#) And it's all free because the idea is that you buy art from the artists.

Julie: [04:14](#) It makes sense. There's this abandoned like, little mall in downtown Miami that some millionaire bought and is now like, renting out for really low rates to artists. And you had to like, you have to apply to like, have a studio space in this abandoned mall, because they, they're like specifically don't want it to be like stores and things. They just want it to be studio spaces. You apply for a space, the rents are really low, and it's like in a really cool part of Miami. And that's like, one of the venues that I went to to see like, a lot of work this weekend. It's really cool. It's called 777 Mall. For anybody in Miami wants to go check it out.

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Hannah (Host): [04:48](#) [Laughs] I can, surely nobody in Miami listens to this podcast. Like why would I assume? Because everybody's too cool. Everybody's too cool to listen to podcasts. What are you doing?

Julie: [05:00](#) [Laughs] It's just me. I'm the only one in Miami listening.

Hannah (Host): [05:02](#) [Laughs] So remind me, are you from Miami, or relocated as an adult?

Julie: [05:10](#) No, I'm from here. I was born in Los Angeles but I didn't spend any time there. I pretty much just popped out and then my family moved to Miami. And my, my family is all from Cuba and came over here and then I was like the first generation to be born here. And so yeah, I grew up in Miami, then I went to school in Boston for six years--

Hannah (Host): [05:29](#) Which is where I met you.

Julie: [05:33](#) --where I met you.

Julie: [05:33](#) And then shortly after I moved back to Miami. So I've been back in Miami for like a year and a half now.

Hannah (Host): [05:37](#) And the way you, you are the first person I've met who is, who's from Miami, but the way you talk about Miami makes me want to go to the city so badly. [Laughs].

Julie: [05:50](#) You've gotta come! [Laughs].

Hannah (Host): [05:50](#) [Laughs] But prior to that, like the, the cultural representation of Miami that I've experienced is not one that makes go like, "ah, a city for me."

Julie: [05:59](#) [Laughs]

Hannah (Host): [05:59](#) Like you know, the, what is the primary represent, like the Will Smith song and then also that TV show about a spy.

Julie: [06:10](#) [Laughs].

Hannah (Host): [06:10](#) There's a TV show. Oh! *Burn Notice*. *Burn Notice* is set in Miami. And there you go, that's my entire knowledge of Miami.

Julie: [06:17](#) Oh, isn't *Dexter* filmed in Miami too? It's about serial killers.

Hannah (Host): [06:17](#) I didn't watch *Dexter*, that's too scary for me.

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- Julie: [06:17](#) [Laughs] Miami's been changing a lot in the past few years. Like I was telling you about with that, this whole gentrification thing. But what I have seen, what's really cool is that a lot of people, so I'm 26 and a lot of people my age are seeing all this crazy development happening and seeing, you know, certain people getting pushed out and are really fighting back against that by opening up their own spaces, and like queering these development areas, and like making sure that they're, you know, diverse. So that's really cool and I really wanted to be a part of that happening in Miami. That's one of the reasons I was like, "I got to move back," and like be the change I want to see happening in the city. So yeah, I would say that's one of the changes in Miami. It's making me really happy. Yeah, just like queer, diversity, vegan, like all these fun things are like happening here.
- Hannah (Host): [07:13](#) [Laughs] You're just, you're laying a Hannah trap, is what you're doing.
- Julie: [07:13](#) [Laughs]
- Hannah (Host): [07:13](#) You're like "come here! It's full of queers and vegan; you'll love it!" [Laughs]
- Julie: [07:21](#) [Laughs] Yeah. Well, there's, there's like a huge, like Cuban and Haitian population down here, and that food is notoriously not vegan. But it's really cool because people from my generation are like, "well we still really want to eat these foods, so how do we make it vegan?" And like, a lot of people have been working to to recreate these classic recipes that our parent, like we grew up eating with our parents, but in ways that we can eat them.
- Hannah (Host): [07:44](#) That sounds very exciting. I'm really excited for a variety of uses of jackfruit. But the, so the, the, the other thing that it sounds like brought you back to Miami, which is the actual thing that we're going to talk about today, is your work as a tattoo artist, which does tie into all of these like the transformation of Miami as a space, as well.
- Julie: [08:03](#) Yeah. So I went to school for art for pretty long time. Miami has a lot of magnet art schools, so I had gotten into a magnet art school, middle school, which here is like sixth grade, 11 years old. And so I kind of started drawing around then and got this idea in my head like, "I'm going to be a starving artist." You know, at 11 years old.

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- Hannah (Host): [08:24](#) Sounds like such a good idea when it's somebody else's job to buy the groceries.
- Julie: [08:29](#) [Laughs] Yeah.
- Hannah (Host): [08:29](#) [Laughs]
- Julie: [08:31](#) And then I went to high school and it was another like, magnet art school, and I ended up going to, to college. And it really, it was like in, in college where I started to figure out that there's a lot of like, weird institutional things happening in the art world and I was like, "oh, I don't know if I want to be an artist. I don't know if I like, want to make art for museums. Or like you end up making work to sell, I feel like, not making work really fulfills you and sustains you. And that really turned me off and I stopped making art for awhile. And I was just trying to figure out how to survive and pay my bills, and how to make work that was aligned with my values. And I got a tattoo, my first tattoo and it's like a sword, a *Lord of the Rings* sword on my arm. And when I was sitting there, I started talking to the artist. I was like, "How did you get into this?" and "How does this work?" And just asking all these questions. And I started thinking like, maybe tattooing would be something cool to go into. But then there's a whole like apprenticeship part of it, which is basically an unpaid internship that can go on for like, a year or more. And at that time I was just like, "I can't, I can't do this. I didn't, can't even think about it," and just kind of put the idea out of my head. And then maybe a year later I was like, "wait, actually this is super aligned with what I want to do with art and I want to start drawing again." And after that I just started pursuing it a lot more feverishly, like who, who like talking a shops, like talking to people, asking questions. And I was, I was about to do an apprenticeship with like, a little, like there's a tattoo school in New York. And I was about to move there and do that. And then I sort of got drawn back into Miami from like, you know, things going on in my family and then just like seeing how it was changing, I was like, "you know what? Fuck it. I want to go to Miami. I'm tired of being cold.".
- Hannah (Host): [10:12](#) [Laughs].
- Julie: [10:12](#) And, and I didn't really like, know how it was, I was like doing stick and pokes for awhile and just like telling people like, "I'm going to be a tattoo artist," and like drawing up designs and like everything. And then, through a friend, they were like, "oh, this tattoo shop is looking for a manager," and I have a few years of management experience. And they're like, "oh, okay, well we'll hire you as a manager at the tattoo shop." And I was like,

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"perfect." So I started managing the tattoo shop and I was like, "this is going to be really cool. Start learning things." And being in the tattoo shop, I was like, "wow, like the tattoo industry is super fucking white and super misogynistic and really weird.".

Hannah (Host): [10:46](#) Yeah, just white dudes with dreads.

Julie: [10:48](#) And beards. And loud and, and I was just like, "what am I walking into here? Like, is this actually like the industry I want to be?" And I was like, "you know what? No this isn't the industry I want to be in. I want to change it." I like, I want to do this crap but I don't want it to look like this.

Hannah (Host): [11:02](#) Yeah.

Julie: [11:03](#) So being a manager I was like, "this is going to be a really good way to hire the kind of people I want to see in the shop." And also, you know, try to educate the people that are already working here like, how to like speak, you know?

Hannah (Host): [11:14](#) [Laughs].

Julie: [11:14](#) Cuz they were just saying like all sorts of things. And I just started learning a ton of things. Like, I would follow artists and they wouldn't have any people of color on their pages because the tattoos, in their words, they say it, they don't look as good, you can't see as many details on darker skin. So they, they like, a lot of artist will get really excited when they get a super white person to do a tattoo, and I'm just like, "this is so fucked up."

Hannah (Host): [11:38](#) You need to interrogate your aesthetics, maybe for a second.

Julie: [11:42](#) Yeah. So I challenged him like, "don't you want people to see like how good of an artist you are." You know? And like, "don't you want people of color to look at your page and be like, 'okay, this person can tattoo my skin type and this person could get color to show my skin type?'"

Hannah (Host): [11:54](#) Yep.

Julie: [11:54](#) I just, I tried to challenge them more on things like that.

Hannah (Host): [11:57](#) Yeah.

Julie: [11:57](#) And then through managing I've been able to just like ask questions like, "Oh, where'd you get that machine? How much does that cost? How did you do this?" You know?

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Hannah (Host): [12:04](#) Mmhmm.

Julie: [12:04](#) And I have just been slowly accumulating my materials, and my clients, and tattooing and practicing and all that.

Hannah (Host): [12:12](#) So is that you, have you gotten to, sort of, like backdoor your way into apprenticing by virtue of being the manager?

Julie: [12:18](#) Yeah.

Hannah (Host): [12:18](#) That's so smart. [Laughs] That's great. You're like, "Mmm, unpaid internship? I don't think so. I'm going to manage this tattoo shop." The fact that that tattooing is based on an unpaid internship was a revelation to me when I was having a conversation with a tattoo artist, I don't know, maybe four tattoos ago. Cuz I always ask people about, you know, I'm really interested in the art form and how people get into it. And, and it seems like such a very specific thing to get into, so I'm always curious how people end up there. And I was talking to this one artist at a great local studio, Liquid Amber, and she was talking about how almost all of the studios in Vancouver have this, you know, unpaid internship, like unpaid apprenticeship model. And there's no, obviously no accountability and no system behind how they take on apprentices. It's just sort of who they feel like. And so by the logic of people give preference to the people who are like them, white dudes take white dudes on as apprentices. And if you are a woman trying to get into tattooing, the, the relationship you end up having with your default-is-going-to-be-male mentor like, is often deeply fucked up.

Julie: [13:39](#) Oh yeah!

Hannah (Host): [13:39](#) And so she, this, this artist was telling me that she had apprenticed, she was actually just finishing her apprenticeship at Liquid Amber. And Liquid Amber is a woman-owned studio that has a policy that when they take on apprentices, they give them jobs at the studio, so that you never are work, you're never unpaid. You're, it's hard cause you're working a job and then also still doing all of this unpaid or underpaid tattooing. But like it's recognizing that like, if you want women to like, get into this field, maybe they need to make some money.

Julie: [14:12](#) Yeah. Cuz there's no way that you can afford to live and do a job for free.

Hannah (Host): [14:17](#) Yeah.

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Julie: [14:17](#) And a lot of shops, like you don't just sit there and watch the artist tattoo when you're an apprentice. No, you're cleaning the shop, you're handling the appointments, you're answering the phone calls, you're doing literally everything until like, after a year maybe somebody will teach you something.

Hannah (Host): [14:32](#) [Laughs] Yep.

Julie: [14:32](#) You know, so you're, you're still doing work. It's not like they're just like, "okay, you can come in whenever you want. Just kind of..." No, like your schedule, you have scheduled hours, like everything and then they don't pay you.

Hannah (Host): [14:40](#) Yeah, that's, that's fucked up. Like every industry that relies on that is just creating just a massive barrier to entry into that industry.

Julie: [14:50](#) Especially when you're a woman. There's like a lot of sexual favors involved or implied.

Hannah (Host): [14:54](#) Mhmm. yeah. So that was, that was a wild revelation for me, and one that it seems pretty obvious that if you are a person who is concerned about like, improving the world of tattooing and making it more inclusive and equitable, then that's a obviously a starting point for being like, "well this culture is a problem."

Julie: [15:16](#) Yeah. So basically that the whole managing thing was a perfect way for me to get my foot in the door.

Hannah (Host): [15:23](#) Yep.

Julie: [15:23](#) And I've been trying to like, offer the same thing to other people that like, want to learn to a tattoo. Like, "oh this is a great..." Like "come like, help me run the desk, we'll pay you. And then you know, on your free time and you can ask questions." And like all my artists, I'd make sure they're all super friendly. Like, I don't hire anybody that's like mean.

Hannah (Host): [15:40](#) Great

Julie: [15:40](#) And they all are so happy to offer advice and show you things. I mean one of the artists that I work with, she's the reason that I am tattooing now, cuz I was like so scared to start it. I had all my materials, I my machine, my ink. I somebody ready to go. And she was just like, "we're doing it now. Like, we're gonna set up and we're going to do it now." I was like, "really now?" And

she's like, "yes." And like, ever since she helped me like, break the ice it's been, you know, just all right, let's go. It's like so much easier once you like do it for the first time.

Hannah (Host): [16:11](#) I can picture that being terrifying, fucking permanent and somebody else's body. Like, that's just wild. I, I think about that every time when, when you know they get everything set up and then they're like, "okay, I'm going to make the first line." And understanding again, cuz I always ask so many questions, having a better sense now of like, the unpredictability inherent in tattooing. That you don't know how somebody's skin is going to take the ink until you get in there. And so that like--

Julie: [16:44](#) Mmhmm. Everyone's skin is so different.

Hannah (Host): [16:44](#) Yeah. Right? So that like, "I'm about to make the first line" is like, "well here we go. Like we are off on a journey together. I don't know what your skin's going to behave like. I don't know what you're going to be like. I don't know if you're going to cry." I don't know. Like it's so unpredictable.

Julie: [17:03](#) I've had clients, every time I put the needle in their muscle like, tenses up or like their whole body jerks. It's just like you don't, you don't know like--

Hannah (Host): [17:10](#) Yeah.

Julie: [17:10](#) --how people are going to behave until you get started.

Hannah (Host): [17:12](#) Yep.

Julie: [17:12](#) So yeah, every, every tattoo I do is different, which is kind of on what I, what I love about it.

Hannah (Host): [17:17](#) Yep.

Julie: [17:17](#) You know, why I feel like the traditional art making process never really like, fulfilled me and why tattooing does. And I also with tattooing like it's, it's a piece of art that lives and breathes and it always means something to somebody. Whereas like when I was, you know, just doing drawings on paper, doing print making whatever like that, I would just throw it in my closet when I was done. If nobody bought it or like I didn't, I wasn't showing somewhere. It would just go in my closet and be another thing that I have to move with when I changed apartments, you know? But like here and I'm just kind of like,

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"it's done and it walks away and I had never have to worry about it again."

Hannah (Host): [17:50](#) Yeah. Cuz it's alive now.

Julie: [17:50](#) It's got its own legs. I love it. I love that.

Hannah (Host): [17:54](#) I can see the excitement and I can see the terror. Like, those things both make total sense for me.

Julie: [17:57](#) [Laughs].

Hannah (Host): [17:57](#) I always have a little bit of that, like as the person getting tattooed, I always have a little bit of excitement and a little bit of terror.

Julie: [18:06](#) Mmhmm.

Hannah (Host): [18:06](#) Cuz there's, there's also a huge amount of trust involved in like what you're about to do, right?

Julie: [18:10](#) So much! Like you have to trust your artist to be a professional and to know what they're gonna do. And then also you just have somebody like, putting their hands on your body.

Hannah (Host): [18:19](#) Yeah.

Julie: [18:19](#) And depending on where you're getting the tattoo, it can be like a very intimate experience, especially if it's something like near your face or whatever. Like you're breathing each other's air.

Hannah (Host): [18:29](#) [Laughs].

Julie: [18:29](#) Sharing energy is like, I believe in energy and all that. So it's like, it's definitely has to be like, a consensual thing.

Hannah (Host): [18:35](#) Yeah.

Julie: [18:35](#) You know? And I think there's something really beautiful about that. So I actually maybe like an hour ago, submitted to iTunes for my, my first podcast.

Hannah (Host): [18:47](#) Really?!

Julie: [18:47](#) Yeah! And I'm talking to people about tattoos in it. And I think this, this first season that I'm going to do is going to be about people's relationship to their bodies and tattooing. And so I

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want to talk to people a lot about how tattooing helps them heal trauma--

Hannah (Host): [19:02](#) Yeah.

Julie: [19:02](#) --and how it helps them take control of their bodies, or their experiences getting tattooed and people's experiences doing tattoos.

Hannah (Host): [19:10](#) Yep.

Julie: [19:10](#) Cuz I, I know I saw an artist recently posts on their Instagram about tattoos and trauma, and the relationship between artists and clients. And she was like, "I can tell when a client has a lot of trauma through the way I touched them in the way they react and I'm trying to learn how to be more sensitive to that." And it's something that I've been thinking a lot about, you know?

Hannah (Host): [19:29](#) Yeah, absolutely. Because you are, again, sort of in this very intimate relationship with somebody else in that moment, but often total strangers before you begin. And you're saying like--

Julie: [19:41](#) Sometimes, yeah.

Hannah (Host): [19:41](#) --"Trust me with your body." And it's true that a lot of the time people are getting tattoos because we want to shift our relationship to our bodies in some way. And that has certainly, I know like, I have my own particular sort of reasons behind why tattoos appeal to me. I definitely have friends who have used tattoos as a way of healing from assault and abuse. Like that, that it's a really powerful way to reclaim agency over your body, but ironically, in the process of reclaiming that agency, you have to actually give agency of your body over to someone else again and trust that they're gonna like treat it well.

Julie: [20:21](#) Yeah, that's a really interesting relationship and dynamic that I'm super interested in talking to people about. And I know the first few tattoos I did own people, they were like, "I want you to do this, that to you because you're new at tattooing and I want all my tattoos to mean nothing," Or "I want like..." I know one person that only gets tattoos by people who are tattooing for the first time.

Hannah (Host): [20:40](#) Huh.

Julie: [20:40](#) Because like, that's kind of like the aesthetic they're curating a little bit, like DIY kind of look and they, it's a way for them to not take their body so seriously. Like one of my second tattoos, I did a lawn chair on this girl's size. She's like, yeah, I just want my tattoos just to like be like, random things. I don't want them to mean anything cause like, so some people are like, I haven't gotten a tattoo yet because I don't know what it's going to mean and I really want something that's going to last forever. You know, it's really going to, I'm going on one at forever. So people like approach tattoos from such different angles, you know? And it's, it's been really interesting to see that I've had people send me 5 million questions and other tattoo and they want me to revise the design over and over again. And I'm always more than happy to. I think that's another thing if your artist is getting frustrated with you, like revising your tattoo over and over again, maybe look for different artists because it's your tattoo. It's not their tattoos. So I always tell people, I'm like, if there's anything, like if when I'm placing this pencil, I don't care if I have to place it 15 times. Like it needs to be exactly the way you dreamed of it and exactly the way you want it because this is going to be on you forever. Yeah, I may never see it again, but you're going to see it every day. You know?

Hannah (Host): [21:44](#) That's a, it's an interesting aspect of tattoo culture that I do have the impression has been on the rise, in maybe the past five years, with the rise of platforms like Instagram, that there is a sense that artists are trying to create a reputation for themselves via the way their tattoos look. And so the focus is on tattooing the stuff they want to tattoo in the way they want to do it and less on what the clients want. You know, I'm thinking right now of like in Vancouver it's very difficult to get custom work done at most studios. Most artists will do almost entirely flash. So for listeners, that's images that they've already designed in advance and put up online and said like, "here's a thing I'm willing to tattoo." And the way that it works at so many studios in, in Vancouver is in demand artists will like, open their books maybe twice a year and take proposals and then choose a handful of projects that they want to work on, generally that are sort of most in keeping with the aesthetic that they're already curating. And so there is a sense of like, you are asking somebody to put their art on your body but it's not particularly about what you want. And I've seen like in appointments, I've seen people doing this, like saying to an artist like, "oh, is it possible to make this thing a little bit more like this?" And the artists being like, "no." And then the person's like, "okay, well yeah, I guess you're right." Like it's really interesting. And, and I have been told a friend of mine went through the experience recently of having an image that she

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loved by another artist, that she had paid that artist like a tattoo fee for, and then was trying to find a tattoo artist in Vancouver who would tattoo it on her, and that none of the sort of younger artists at the trendier studios were willing to do this. That, that idea of like tattooing somebody else's art was like absolutely not, but when she went to a sort of older studio with older artists they were like yeah of course, whatever, I'll tattoo or whatever you want.

Hannah (Host): [23:49](#) Yeah, there is a lot of that going on. I know me personally, I do try to post on my Instagram more of like my original pieces or work that I want to do so, so that I attract those kinds of clients.

Hannah (Host): [24:00](#) Mmhmm.

Julie: [24:00](#) But a lot of the work that are designs that I come up do have a lot of back and forth between me and the client cuz I want to make sure it's something that they like. I think the reason why a lot of artists just do flash or don't really want too much changing is because it does kind of make their lives harder.

Hannah (Host): [24:16](#) Yeah.

Julie: [24:16](#) Cuz you do have to like, change the design or like it opens the gates. And you start running late and then your next appointment and da da da...But I don't know. I kind of, that's not the way I want to do business personally. I know a lot of shops in Miami, I feel like are flips, so they have, it's, it's mostly appointment only. So you have a, a relationship with your artists, kind of, and you work on the designs together and then the artists will have a flash day--

Hannah (Host): [24:43](#) Yeah.

Julie: [24:43](#) --where you can come in and get flash, and usually the flash is a little bit cheaper. So the custom pieces are a little pricier.

Hannah (Host): [24:49](#) Mmhmm.

Julie: [24:49](#) Like that's bottom line because you are, the artist does have to do a little more work.

Hannah (Host): [24:54](#) Yeah.

Julie: [24:54](#) And redraw and you know, revisit the design a lot. And the flash is a little, you just, kind of, like size it, slap it on, get it done.

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Hannah (Host): [25:00](#) That's my sense that you pay for the hours of the tattooing with flash but not for the extra, sort of, the time the artist put into designing it. Which makes perfect sense because that's time.

Julie: [25:10](#) Mmhmm. Yeah, I like to have, I have some flash you ready to go just because some people just don't know what they want.

Hannah (Host): [25:14](#) Yeah.

Julie: [25:14](#) And they just want, they just want to look at your page and be like, "I love that. Do that on me."

Hannah (Host): [25:18](#) Oh yeah. I have a ton, a ton of my tattoos are flash, like other artists, flash designs. I just spend a lot of time looking at what artists produce, waiting for something to come up that's a thing that I want. And then I'm like, yeah, I'll take that.

Julie: [25:33](#) It's perfect. I mean it's, it's kind of like, I can understand cause you don't get, don't really go to a restaurant and you don't say like, "you know, I know you have this menu but I want you to do this, this and this. And then take, take the lettuce off and add the tomatoes and then no this, you know. Oh and then let's, let's debate about price too".

Hannah (Host): [25:50](#) [Laughs].

Julie: [25:50](#) You know, like you go to a restaurant and it's like like, "no, you have the hamburger, you have veggie burger, you have fries. Like, pick one. And this is the price for these." So it's, I can totally understand why some people, you know, want to kind of like stick to their flash and just makes your life a lot easier. But I kind of want to create more of an experience with tattooing, and especially like, you're sitting with your client and your client is sitting with you for at least an hour.

Hannah (Host): [26:15](#) Yeah.

Julie: [26:15](#) Like the, the fastest tattoo is maybe an hour, you know?

Hannah (Host): [26:20](#) Uh huh.

Julie: [26:20](#) And so you're usually having conversation and you're having a moment with them and people tend to share pretty big things with you while you're tattooing.

Hannah (Host): [26:29](#) Yeah.

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Julie: [26:29](#) And I felt like I'm not just doing artistic labor, I'm do a little bit of emotional labor while I'm tattooing as well.

Hannah (Host): [26:37](#) Absolutely.

Julie: [26:37](#) And, but I think it's beautiful.

Hannah (Host): [26:40](#) Yeah. I mean you're a, you're a body worker, right? In the same way that massage therapists and like the different kinds of like physical therapists are, like you are doing intense work on people's bodies that is often healing work, and that, thus goes hand in hand with it is this kind of emotional intensity. I think that's there as a sort of latent possibility in the dynamic all the time. I think not every artist wants to go there or for that to be how they do their work, and I think that that's legitimate. I surely don't think it should be required. Like I've had tattoos from artists who did not speak a word to me the entire time.

Julie: [27:19](#) And how did you feel during that time?

Hannah (Host): [27:19](#) Very relaxed. It was very soothing.

Julie: [27:24](#) Yeah, you didn't care?

Hannah (Host): [27:24](#) I will take total silence over like, my worst tattoo experiences have been with people who like we've been making idle small talk and then they've said something like shitty and transphobic and I'm like, "well I am stuck here. Like..."

Julie: [27:42](#) Yeah, and "you're a tattooing me."

Hannah (Host): [27:44](#) Yeah, exactly. Like I feel very vulnerable and not in a position to be like, "that's a really fucked up thing to say." Like while you were literally like dragging a needle across my skin. So that's sort of what, like I would actually prefer silence to that. Like let me just put on a podcast and we'll do this in total, total peace and quiet. I have encountered like surprisingly, I don't know, like before I started getting a lot of tattoos, I think I would have assumed that the average politics in a tattoo studio would be good, and that is incorrect.

Julie: [28:18](#) Yeah, man. Okay. So let's, can we go back to this whole apprenticeship conversation?

Hannah (Host): [28:24](#) Yeah.

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- Julie: [28:24](#) All right, so you would think that tattoo shop politics will be different. Everyone's kind of punk and like, they're doing like a taboo thing and they're all, they understand adversity, but then you get the apprenticeship thing and a lot of things that happened in an apprenticeship or akin to hazing. So I'm just like, "is this an apprenticeship or is this a frat house?" Like you have like, I don't know, it seems like white men will be white men [laughs]. Like whether they're bros or whether they're like rockers in the tattoo shop, like you know, there, there's still going to treat each other and treat other people the same way and use the same language. And it's just kind of like how like how different do you think you are? Cuz I feel like the old culture, Western colonized culture of tattoos, it's like, "oh, like we're different and like fuck these yuppies--"
- Hannah (Host): [29:08](#) Yeah.
- Julie: [29:08](#) --and this culture and whatever we're good at, we're going to, you know, put ink on our bodies and take ownership and you know, we're on the fringe of society." It's kind of like, yeah, but you're still doing the same, you're still hurting people. And you're still allowing the same things to happen, just you know, to other people. [Laughs] Like how do you not see that?
- Hannah (Host): [29:26](#) Yeah, yeah.
- Julie: [29:26](#) That happens in a lot of like punk spaces, you go and it's just like a lot of white men, like maybe some women, maybe people of color. Maybe. Like, and it's, it's just like I, it just seems really hypocritical.
- Hannah (Host): [29:40](#) Yeah.
- Julie: [29:40](#) So that's kind of what I want to see happening in tattoo shops now. And I, my goal for the next year, maybe longer, it would, is to open my own shop where I'm like, well, you know, I can hire people where we have these kinds of conversations, where it sets a standard of what tattoo shops are supposed to be.
- Hannah (Host): [29:58](#) Yeah.
- Julie: [29:58](#) And I, I want it to also be a space for kind of the art-prenuers in my community to do things as well, like selling zine, or clothes, or you know, spinning, like deejaying, in Miami is like really popular right now.
- Hannah (Host): [30:14](#) Oh!

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- Julie: [30:14](#) Yeah, there's this really cool group called (F)empower. You can look at them on Instagram. And it's like a group of young women of color that are like teaching each other, like they teach other gardening, they do a lot of fashion, they mostly do a lot of spinning as well. Like women teaching other women how to DJ and how to like, use the sound equipment because it's like a coveted skill only like men teach other men and you, it's hard to see other women spin.
- Hannah (Host): [30:36](#) Yup.
- Julie: [30:36](#) So there's a lot of that happening, like pockets of that happening in Miami where women are trying to show other women how to do things and giving women space to do things. So that's, I want to, I want to start doing that as well. Like, I was lucky enough to get my foot in the door in the shop. And I feel like part of it is because, yes, I'm Cuban, but I'm a white Cuban and I dye my hair blonde. So I feel like maybe if I looked different, I wouldn't have gotten hired for this position, cuz there was a lot of trust that went on because I had never worked in a shop before. I just had management experience.
- Hannah (Host): [31:04](#) Yeah.
- New Speaker: [31:04](#) So they were like, "okay, we're hiring you, but you have a lot to learn." And so I, I got this amazing opportunity that I feel part of it was because of my privilege and I want to be able to now extend that to other people that haven't had that opportunity.
- Hannah (Host): [31:18](#) Yeah. I just think there's so much potential in the art for a really radical approach to, to bodies and body politics, and identity and, and it has surprised me the degree to which that hasn't been the case in, in many of the environments that I've been in. Like why isn't everybody here like rad and down with diverse bodies, and, and, racialized bodies, and many gendered bodies--
- Julie: [31:47](#) Right?
- Hannah (Host): [31:47](#) --and many sized bodies, and disabled bodies, and like. Like, shouldn't this art go hand in hand with like, but it seems so often to go hand in hand with the fetishization of a certain kind of like, whiteness, and cisness, and thinness, and like all of these things. It's just like it has been, in many cases, really disappointing to me and then you know at a more base level, like what happens when you get a sort of self curated counterculture that's still massively dominated by whiteness--

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Julie: [32:19](#) Mmhmm!

Hannah (Host): [32:20](#) You get all of this, sort of, the reproduction of a particular kind of like, self-satisfied whiteness that, the most recent tattoo I was getting, overheard a conversation. It wasn't my tattoo artist, it was somebody else in the studio, a white woman, talking about how she like, loves traveling to Africa because it's so much more "real" and more "authentic" than other places, and that she hates going places where there are other tourists because you don't get the like "real experience." And that like South Africa is okay but it's like entry level Africa. Like just this, this colonialist, appropriative, white supremacist bullshit that is so entirely characteristic of a certain kind of white culture that imagines itself to be, you know, radical and resistant, but is ultimately perpetuating the sense of the world as uniquely available for our exploitation. Like it was just like such a moment of like, "Oh god, I just, just wish this was better."

Julie: [33:24](#) Yeah.

Hannah (Host): [33:24](#) But then like I follow artists on Instagram, who are like at other studios or in other cities and I'm like, "okay, this is happening."

Julie: [33:33](#) Mmhmm!

Hannah (Host): [33:33](#) Like I'm maybe, I haven't found it in Vancouver yet, or maybe it's not happening in Vancouver. I'm not sure. But it's a definitely happening because there are like rad queers all over the world who are like, reclaiming tattooing as a really interesting I'm radical practice.

Julie: [33:50](#) Yeah. I feel like, yeah, I definitely had a culture shock going from art school, where everybody was gay and it was pretty diverse. Then you know, we were having these conversations, like it was so normal and I was, I was definitely in this bubble. And then, you know, 2016 happened and then going into--

Hannah (Host): [34:09](#) [chuckles] It sure did.

Julie: [34:09](#) It sure did. And then going into a tattoo shop. I was just like whoa. Like I really have been in a bubble and the, the world is, is not what I thought it was. And like this, this tattoo scene that I thought would be a little more open, just because of what it is, isn't. And how do I teach people, cuz I feel like, you know, maybe a lot of these artists in these shops just like haven't had the same opportunities and access to education as I have.

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Hannah (Host): [34:36](#) Yeah.

Julie: [34:36](#) So I'm like, okay, how do I have these conversations with my artists here? Like without making them feel attacked or stupid? You know, so I've been trying to do a lot of that. I mean there were, there was one person that I just had to like, fire outright.

Hannah (Host): [34:49](#) Wow, yeah.

Julie: [34:49](#) Yeah, well he called me a stupid little girl who didn't know what I was doing, and he was like this, this older dude--

Hannah (Host): [34:56](#) I'm, my face right now. I'm just like "WHAAAT?!"

Julie: [35:00](#) Yeah. Like, I'm, I'm managing the shop, and now I manage three of the tattoo shops that are all owned by the same person, but at the time it was just managing the one. And, and he was like this older man from Serbia and I think we were like, talking about a client or something, and he was very much one of those artists that was like, he couldn't do like small pieces, just, it was outside of his ability. And instead of like saying, you know, "hey, I can't do that, but there's an art and other artists who can," he would just be like, "it's impossible." And so we were having an argument about that and he was like, "no, you're just a stupid girl who doesn't know anything." And then I talked to the owners and the next day I fired him. And that was just one of the many things that, that he said that was just like, ugh. So it's, it's that kind of shit like [laughs] unacceptable. And if, if I, if I can't have a conversation with you and some, some, some things need to die out I guess. You know? And I feel like this old tattoo culture in like vintage shops and things like they're, they're going to die out because millennials just, we're killing everything.

Hannah (Host): [35:58](#) [Laughs] We're killing. Anything we don't like, we kill it. So intolerant of us.

Julie: [36:03](#) And to your point of like, yeah there, there, there are queer artists out there. And like where are they? I feel like they're probably just really protective of their spaces because like, the tattoo world can be vicious.

Hannah (Host): [36:13](#) Yeah.

Julie: [36:13](#) And like, other artists might like come after them, you know. The internet trolls, you know. So that might be why they keep their books closed or why they stick to only flash, because they

might be scared of what their clients are going to say or you know, what, who comes into the shop.

Hannah (Host): [36:27](#) That's a really great point. And like, want to choose their clients really carefully, maybe want to choose people who either they know, or they're a friend of a friend, because again like it's a vulnerable activity. And if tattoo culture is full of like white bros, you don't want to put yourself in a dangerous situation.

Julie: [36:48](#) Yeah, exactly. That's exactly right.

Hannah (Host): [36:49](#) The point that you made, which I think is a really interesting and important one about like, trying to talk to these artists and recognizing that there's maybe a class or an education component in this as well, I think is really important. I've certainly had, in all kinds of spaces, that experience of like trying to have conversations about politics across different levels of education or different class backgrounds, and recognizing that like, a lot of the time the sticking point is like, what access have I had to particular vocabularies, experiences, etc. that, that people from working class backgrounds, or peoples whose education stopped at certain points, just haven't had access to. And, you know, I know a lot of tattoo artists do, like, it's interesting as an art that it is an art that is still has a lot of artists who are from working class backgrounds working it, which is maybe different from other kinds of art.

Julie: [37:45](#) Mmhmm.

Hannah (Host): [37:45](#) And so I don't want to simplistically say that like, working class people or people who, you know, haven't done postsecondary education don't also have radical politics, cuz that would be...wrong? That would be a patently untrue claim to make because radical grassroots politics often come out of working class communities. Obviously. I'm saying obvious things right now, but I want to say them so that everybody who is listening knows that I know these obvious things. But at the same time, I do think that there are conversations to be had about, about class in education and having political conversations. And like, a lot of the time my tattoo artists are like younger than me, like sometimes way younger than me, which is also an interesting thing to stop and be like, you know, what is the power dynamic here you are a young woman in your early twenties with no postsecondary education. You know, lack of access to stable housing right now, doing this art. I am like, a middle class professor, but you have a tattoo in my skin. So how, like, what's, what's playing out here in terms of the complexities of power in these scenarios? I think, I think is always worth sort of probing a

bit to make sure that we're having those conversations in, sort of, continuously nuanced ways, which I think doesn't apply as much in the case of a shitty older dude telling you that you're a stupid little girl. I think that was a more clear cut scenario.

Julie: [39:22](#)

But I definitely have conversations, like one of, one of my artists that I work with is this, he's about, he's around my age, like late twenties from southern California and his family's Mexican. And we have a lot of conversations about trans rights, and gender politics, and sexuality, and all that because he's just like the straight dude who's never had these conversations with his bros before. And like I'm, I'm like the first person that's come into his life, that can kind of spar with him [laughs] you know, and debate with him on these things. And he's really open minded and, and you know, if I say something that he's never thought about it before, he always goes like, "oh that's like, I've never thought of it like that." And I feel like those are the conversations that really mean a lot to me and make me feel like, "hey, maybe I'd change someone's mind on something today." Or I just, I feel like sometimes they're hard conversations and I definitely don't always want to have them. Sometimes. Sometimes I hear something and I'm just like, I'm just going to bite my tongue today cause I just don't have the energy to have this conversation. But in general when, when they, when they are happening and you see people reacting in positive ways, it makes me feel really, really good and it makes, makes me feel like if there are conversations worth having.

Hannah (Host): [40:31](#)

Yeah. That's so interesting because that is also, I think, characteristic of the difference between being a person who is trying to like, be part of and transform tattoo culture versus somebody, you know, like somebody like me who's just a regular client. I'm not invested in the same ways necessarily, or, or even if I am like willing to sink that emotional labour into it because I'm doing the, I'm doing that emotional labour elsewhere. [Laughs]

Julie: [40:59](#)

Oh yeah. And especially like, if you're just going to be in the shop for a couple hours getting your piece done, like do you really want to like, start this debate on, you know, whatever it is?

Hannah (Host): [41:07](#)

Yeah.

Julie: [41:07](#)

Whereas if this is your industry, like your industry is academics and literature and all that, so you're starting all these conversations that need to happen there. And so in my industry is tattooing, so I'm just like...Well when I was, like I said earlier,

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when I first started I was like, "damn, this is like what I'm going to have to live in? Is this like what the workplace is like in a tattoo shop?".

Hannah (Host): [41:28](#) Yeah.

Julie: [41:28](#) And it's like, no, it doesn't have to be. It doesn't have to be.

Hannah (Host): [41:30](#) [Laughs] Yeah.

Julie: [41:30](#) You know, and I'm like, I don't, I don't mind that bitch sometimes, you know? [Laughs]

Hannah (Host): [41:35](#) Yeah. I mean we all need to be that bitch sometimes, you just choose where. You just choose where and when you're going to be that bitch.

Julie: [41:41](#) Yeah.

Hannah (Host): [41:41](#) And where, where do you want to put your energies and if it's a thing that you're passionate about and excited about, then it can be easier to be like, "cool, this is where I'm going to put my energy to transform this and build space for other people because this is the thing that I love."

Julie: [41:56](#) Mmhmm. And it gives other people the power and the drive to join you on that too.

Hannah (Host): [42:01](#) Yeah.

Julie: [42:01](#) When I see other people doing it, it makes me like, "Damn, I really gotta do this too!".

Hannah (Host): [42:06](#) [Laughs].

Julie: [42:06](#) You know, I love, I love seeing people create and change things and when I see them doing things I'm just like, "yes!" I get, like it puts a fire in me to change more too, you know?

Hannah (Host): [42:16](#) Yeah. That's awesome. So will you tell the good people who are listening right now what the name of your podcast is?

Julie: [42:24](#) It's going to be *Midnight Moonlight*. That's kind of based off of...So like we talked about earlier, I, I manage the tattoo shop during the day and then, kind of, after hours or in the evenings I tattoo. So I've, I've been telling people that I moonlight as a tattoo artist.

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Hannah (Host): [42:40](#) Yeah.

Julie: [42:40](#) And so I decided to kind of almost brand myself around this moonlighting idea.

Hannah (Host): [42:46](#) That's awesome.

Julie: [42:47](#) And I'm also super into astrology, you know, and energies and all that kind of stuff.

Hannah (Host): [42:51](#) Yeah.

Julie: [42:51](#) So yeah, talking about the moon is very normal for me.

Hannah (Host): [42:57](#) [Laughs] Good.

Julie: [42:57](#) All of it's going to be about moon and light. [Laughs]

Hannah (Host): [43:00](#) Just moons, just moons and lights. [Music: "Kicking Back" by Mila J.]

Hannah (Host): [43:18](#) If you'd like to learn more about Julie, you can find her Instagram @midnightmoonlightttt with three T's, moonlight-t-t. She also has a new podcast *Midnight Moonlight*, which is linked from her Instagram and which you can find on Apple Podcasts. You can find show notes and all the episodes of *Secret Feminist Agenda* on secretfeministagenda.com. You can follow me on Twitter @hkpcgregor and you can tweet about the podcast, you using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda and you can review the show. There's a lovely new review from Erin Megan Schwartz. And then I went and checked some of the other countries, and in Great Britain there's a new review from BabySoph99, and in Australia two new reviews from Bela B. and SpiceDaddyTM. Great, just knocking the username game out of the park. There's definitely countries that it never occurs to me to check. So if you're in one of those and you've reviewed the podcast, my sincerest apologies. Communicate to me in some way where I should be looking. The podcast's theme song is "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans off their album Chub Rub. You can download the entire album on free music on free music, archive.org or follow them on Facebook. Julie's theme song was "Kicking Back" by Mila J. *Secret Feminist Agenda* is recorded on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh first nations where I'm grateful to live and work. This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]