**Pam Ferris-Olson** (00:02): Today, on the Women Mind the Water Artivist Series, I'm speaking with Danielle Burnside. Danielle is a Hawaii-based artist who discovered her passion for the ocean while working on a manta ray boat. What's remarkable about this is that Danielle admits she had been scared of dark water and suffered with seasickness. (singing) Instead of deciding that the ocean was not her happy place, she felt inspired. As an artist, Danielle works in many mediums, including watercolor, gold, and copper. In all her art, she hopes to call attention to how precious our planet is. The Women Mind the Water podcast series engages artists in conversation about their work and explores their connection with the ocean. Through their stories, Women Mind the Water hopes to inspire and encourage action to protect the ocean and her creatures. I am really happy to welcome Danielle Burnside to the Women Mind the Water Artivist Series podcast.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (01:02): Danielle is my second guest in as many months to be based in Hawaii and have been inspired by manta rays. Danielle says that art is an extension of her soul, a way to express her passion, inspiration, and embodies her commitment to preserving our planet. Her hope is that her artwork conveys a sense of swimming in the sea and leads to a connection to the powerful forces within the sea and within each of us. Welcome, Danielle. I am always grateful to meet an artist who uses sustainable practices to create her art. I'm interested to hear more about your journey, one that has clearly brought you joy and fueled a passion for the ocean.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (01:48): Both are expressed in your art. You have made many beautiful pieces, but today, I'd like to focus on your Shell Series. It is a series where images of marine animals inhabit real shells. The work is both unusual and engaging. Danielle, living in Hawaii, a person is surrounded by water. How is it that your passion for the ocean wasn't realized until you worked on a manta ray tour boat?

**Danielle Burnside** (02:17): Thank you so much for having me, Pam. I'm really grateful to be here, and thank you for your question. It is miraculous. I grew up in Michigan, which is absolutely beautiful, and I grew up on the lake. Amazing. I got to see the sunset over the lake almost every day, but I was even scared of seaweed in Lake Michigan. When I first moved here, I don't think I actually went underwater with a snorkel for about two years when I lived here. I just didn't. I'm like, "That's a lot. I respect it. Don't need to engage."

**Danielle Burnside** (03:00): But after living here for about two years, just by divine intervention, I'll call it, my friend was working on a manta ray tour boat. She was leaving the island, and they needed to fill her position. She's like, "I got you an interview at this time, Danielle. Show up then," and I'm like, "Okay. I'm going to go." It's something I've always wanted to do, but I never did. Because I was, again, scared of dark water. I got seasick, but I took some Dramamine, and I just had a beautiful evening. I met the manta rays for the first time on a tour. I wasn't working. They just kind of introduced me to it, just for ... to see if I enjoyed it, and I fell in love. It's absolutely incredible, an experience that you ... I just hope everyone gets to have themselves, because the intimacy, and how close they come, and the magic, and the peace that you have with them is beyond words. As soon as I got off that boat, I was like, "I want the job. I'll do anything," and they-

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (04:17): So having-

**Danielle Burnside** (04:18): Yeah.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (04:19): Having been up on Lake Michigan, what was the largest thing you encountered in the water?

**Danielle Burnside** (04:25): Maybe a fish.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (04:26): A manta ray is a fish, but how big were the fish in the lake?

**Danielle Burnside** (04:32): Oh. A trout. My stepdad was a charter captain, so we would get Chinook and rainbow trout and pretty big fish, maybe three feet long. That's a huge fish. But manta rays are 10 feet long to 18 feet long in diameter, and they can weigh up to like a thousand pounds, so ...

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (04:58): Well, clearly, it was a transformational experience to go from, "I'm not getting in that water," to going into the water at night and swimming with huge creatures.

**Danielle Burnside** (05:09): Yes.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (05:10): So how did that inspire you to want to create ocean-themed art?

**Danielle Burnside** (05:16): Yeah. It did take getting used to, and a lot of the guys on that boat taught me so much. They were so patient with me, bless their hearts, because I know I got under their skin a lot. Because I just didn't have any idea what, even, side port side was on the boat. They just, they really taught me everything I knew, and meeting the ocean in that way, I'm an artist my entire life, is what I've been doing. So when my friend was leaving, I painted her a card, and I painted her a whale on her goodbye card.

**Danielle Burnside** (05:57): I posted that on social media at the time, and another one of my friends was like, "Oh my gosh, I love that. Can you paint me a whale?" I was like, "Oh. Yeah. Sure. Of course." So I just started painting more ocean creatures, and then a bride reached out to me and asked me to paint a different ocean creature for each one of her bridesmaids. I was like, "Yeah. Absolutely," and looking at this body of work in front of me, she had like seven bridesmaids, I just kind of had the thought come in my mind. I'm like, "This is a body of work. It's a series of work of mine, and I wonder what I could do with it."

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (06:42): Well, they say sometimes the universe opens up in front of us, so clearly, the luck that somebody left and you tried out the manta ray boat led to one enormous epiphany. Then, the bridal shower led to another. That's just lovely.

**Danielle Burnside** (07:04): It's truly amazing. Yeah. People ask me-

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (07:07): Because your art is very passionate and beautiful, so ... Where did the inspiration for the Shell Series come from?

**Danielle Burnside** (07:15): Well, it was about three years after I had really laid down some roots in my watercolor series, and I hand-embellish every single piece with copper as prints and originals. I've just been painting the ocean for years at this point, and it was in my head to paint an abalone seashell with an ocean creature inside of it. So I had this idea maybe like three years ago, and it was just sitting in my head. I think it was probably beginning when I was starting to seashell on Big Island of Hawaii. I'm obsessed with seashelling. I love seashelling. I comb the beaches. I go underwater. It's just like an Easter egg hunt every single day down there, and it's all sustainable. I never take a live shell or any inhabitants, but I think that just resparked my passion, and beautiful inspiration, and just awe from abalone seashells.

**Danielle Burnside** (08:27): My first job ever was at a cute little retail shop on the lake, but they had an abalone seashell in there that they would put their jewelry in. I was just amazed by it. It's just a epitome of what a mermaid decor is. You know? Two years after I had that idea in my head, I was like, "Yeah. Yeah." I just didn't know how to do it. It was in my head, and I just never knew how to work with it. I'm like, "Why don't you just pour some resin?" Resin was kind of starting to pick up, what's that, like popularity in a lot of people's work. And so I was like, "I'm just going to pour some resin and just begin." That's all it really takes, is just to start, and then you can figure what you're working through there. I just never started for two years. It was just an idea in my head. So just miracles inspired it, I suppose.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (09:32): Right. So do you find all your shells?

**Danielle Burnside** (09:35): No. I don't. I find a lot of seashells, but abalone do not live in Hawaii. They-

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (09:42): That's what I thought, because I used to live in California, and so I know they like colder water.

**Danielle Burnside** (09:48): Yep. So I get a lot from California, actually, but I'm sure as you know, they're very endangered in California right now. You're not really allowed to dive for abalone seashells in California. So the ones that I've gotten from California are probably 10 years old, from when people used to dive for them and just have them in plentiful amounts at their home now. Because they eat them, and they still do, I think. There are ways you can fish for them sustainably right now. I just, I'm not certain about that. So I get some from the abalone farm here and some from a abalone farm in, I believe, Australia.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (10:32): Wow.

**Danielle Burnside** (10:33): Yep. So farming, I get some of my shells. Some of them, years ago from California. Some, I find in thrift stores and just refurbish, and some people gift them to me, too. So it's really special how I come about the shells.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (10:50): Lovely. So does a shell inspire you to decide what animal to put in it? Or do you have an animal in your head, and you go looking for the shell?

**Danielle Burnside** (11:02): A little bit of both, I would say, especially at the beginning of just getting to know my medium and what I was working with. The abalones, I really loved doing whales in, just the curvature of their body along with the curvature of the shell. It really is harmonious and synchronistic. Then, the blister pearl shells that I work with are a little bit more peachy and pearly and blush tones, so that, I would do maybe a moon with, just a different way and a different subject matter inside the shells.

**Danielle Burnside** (11:43): I hand paint every single image on different layers of resin inside these seashells, so it's a really long process. These take me weeks to paint. They're all hand-done. I pour my first layer of resin. I have to completely prep the shell. I clean it. I tape the back of it, making sure that no leaks can happen, because that would ruin the entire process. The first pour, you really have to make sure ... It's the deepest pour. You really have to make sure your resin is mixed very well. I blowtorch the bubbles out of it.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (12:23): Gee.

**Danielle Burnside** (12:24): I also go back every five minutes and blowtorch the bubbles out of it, because it just, that's the way it sets until it sets. Some can come. Once it's set, that's when I paint my first layer. So say I have like three whales in a shell. I'll paint one. So I have to save those colors to make sure that they're exactly the same color as the first whale. I kind of sketch out with my paint brush, and then I paint directly onto that surface. It's a very waxy surface, so I must use acrylic paint for that.

**Danielle Burnside** (13:02): Then, once that whale is completely finished, I'll either embellish it with a bit of copper or actual freshwater pearls, and then I start the process all over again. I pour another layer of resin on top. Then, I get ... allow that to set overnight, potentially two days, and I will paint the next whale by hand. It takes me hours to paint each whale and weeks to have a finished piece.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (13:34): Amazing. So first, I want to say to those people who are not watching the podcast, I will have, on my site, Danielle's website so you can see these amazing things. I want to say that there's an old saying that says you can hear the ocean when you put a shell to your ear. I can say that when you look at one of her shells, it puts you in the ocean, and she really does create a sense of being in the presence of the animal. I see on your website that all the pieces are spoken for, and I think you have a waiting list. Why do you think this series is so popular?

**Danielle Burnside** (14:17): I think it's because all of my seashells are one of a kind. There's never two seashells that are alike ever. A lot of them have deep jewel tones. Some of them have swirls in them. Some of them are gifted to me by the individual who found the actual seashell, who wants a painting inside that one. So first, I just want to, yeah, honor that the seashells are really what helped me make these so special, because they're all completely different, one of a kind, unique, and miraculous.

**Danielle Burnside** (14:56): Then, I also think it's just I don't think a lot of artists do this. It's something that I've really crafted myself, and I also honor the experiences we all have in the ocean. I advocate for the health of our oceans, and I think that the relationship that everyone else has with the water also can be seen within these shells. So I think it's just because they're one-of-a-kind painting. They're all hand-done. I will never paint the same whale twice. I will never paint the same turtle twice. It's with my full devotion, and attention, and heart. All of my prints, I hand-embellish, as well, and I put a lot of love into each one. But these ones are truly a labor of love.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (15:48): For me, I could definitely see that. I feel the love. I see the passion, and they inspire me. So what do you plan to work on next?

**Danielle Burnside** ([15:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=u6FCb-Yl2C0mI7SizCYNbQyDAMoJhkuhDCRlZi5xp6XdVxFqXWfF7WuOYpNazSEOfMA0BVLJFu7gIcaBd8OvLFkXuTk&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=959.37)): I have a long list of seashells that I am excited to paint. I love new subject matter, but I do continue ... I plan to continue with my seashell work, wherever that takes me, maybe different seashells. Then, I also want to continue painting some larger-scale watercolor paintings that contribute to the series and body of work that I've had within my business for the past four years. I've also had a series of, I call them soul paintings or spirit paintings that I did probably 10 years ago in college, these beautiful peachy circles, I guess, spheres of energy I painted that were large-scale, six-foot-by-six-foot oil paintings that are hand-embellished with copper on all four sides, as well. I'd love to continue that work. It's more of a gallery style setting, and it's more of a conceptual body of work. But I'd love to add different hues and colors to that palette, like maybe an abalone-inspired color palette, also, just some angelic-inspired color palettes or turquoises. I-

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (17:22) : So before we conclude, I wonder if you think a listener who lives far from the ocean, or maybe someone who is scared of the dark water, or deep water, or sharks, can they still care about the ocean?

**Danielle Burnside** (17:37): Absolutely. I'm really glad you asked this question. Our oceans are in turmoil right now. I am a huge advocate for ocean conservation and protection, and I think when I grew up, every breath we took, we have to thank the trees, like, yes, every breath we take, "Thank you trees." Also, every other breath you take is because of our oceans. There's a saying that no blue, no green. Without our oceans, human life cannot survive, and this notion came to me from living in Michigan. My entire life, I just looked at the ocean. I knew it was available. I knew it existed, but for the longest time, I just looked at the surface. I never dove underneath the surface of the ocean.

**Danielle Burnside** (18:34): Once I did that, my life truly changed. It was another life, another planet, another world that I was introduced to that became so close to my heart. In that way, I can now protect it. So without a relationship with our oceans, I think it's harder to want to save our oceans. I think that that's why I paint, and that's why I paint beautiful things, so that you can understand the breadth and beauty of our planet. That helps you want to create a relationship with it and protect what's right in front of us.

**Danielle Burnside** (19:20): So absolutely. I think I used to watch ocean documentaries every chance I could get, even while I was painting and looking at the ocean at the same time. There's so many ways in which you can have a relationship now, especially on social media, following people that really have great practices with our ocean, going on tours with people that conserve our waters and advocate for ocean conservation. Getting in the water, I think, is what will heal the planet, truly, so ...

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (19:59): Well, you certainly ... I can feel your passion, and you are a beautiful person. Hopefully, people who have been anxious about the water will feel a little bit differently now.

**Danielle Burnside** (20:14): Oh. Yeah.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (20:15): So thank you, Danielle, for being on the Women Mind the Water podcast.

**Danielle Burnside** (20:19): Thank you.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (20:21): Our talk, like your art, has been deeply personal and engaging. I am so pleased that you agreed to be on the podcast. I'd like to remind listeners that I have been speaking with Danielle Burnsidefor the Women Mind the Water podcast series. (singing) The series can be viewed on womenmindthewater.com. An audio-only version of this podcast is available on the Women Mind the Water website, on iTunes, and other sites. Women Mind the Water is grateful to Jane Rice for the use of her song, Women of Water. All Rights for the Women Mind the Water name and logo belong to Pam Ferris-Olson. This is Pam Ferris-Olson.