**Pam Ferris-Olson** (00:04): Today on the Women Mind the Water Artivist Series, I'm going to turn the mic over to our guest and let her do all the talking. My guest is Maanarak of Grey, a visual artist and storyteller, who's originally from the Caribbean island of Bonaire. She now lives in the Netherlands. I'm grateful to Maanarak for being willing to share her thoughts about the ocean, plastic pollution, collaboration, and art.

**Maanarak of Grey** (00:33): Hi, this is Maanarak of Grey. I am a storyteller, visual artist, writer and also a dancer. I like to use my platform to bring awareness to current day issues, but also offer solutions from the perspective of someone that has studied international development management. I am interested in the ocean because I believe ocean and water in general is such a vital part of life on earth, not only for humans but also for animals and just our ecosystem in general. And I'm also interested in the ocean because I grew up surrounded by the ocean.

**Maanarak of Grey** (01:25): I was born and raised in the Caribbean on the beautiful island of Bonaire. We have some of the greatest beaches there. And I just love looking at the ocean life, like the reefs and the fishes and everything else. And it concerns me that we're seeing an alarming rate of coral bleaching because we have corals that are so close to the coast and they are suffering due to climate change, but also human activity. And not only the corals, but animals such as turtles are eating plastic bags and thinking that they are jellyfish. And I'm sure other animals also do similar activities with plastic pollution that ends up in the water. So this is why I'm interested in the ocean.

**Maanarak of Grey** (02:28): I found Women Mind the Water while I was doing some research. I'm not sure what exactly I was searching for in that moment, but I was very happy that I found them and I found their website and I saw their message and that they love collaborating with a female artist. And I thought to myself, "I have to work with them." And so I sent a message. We talked about what a collaboration between Maanarak and Women Mind the Water would look like. And I wasn't sure, I just wanted to contribute somehow. And I ended up learning about this project that had to do with pollution and how the microplastics end up in our body and in our bloodstream eventually.

**Maanarak of Grey** (03:29): And my process in designing was basically drawing by hand different plastic products that I thought were common. And then I chose three of them and I digitalized it in Photoshop. And then after that process I go to Illustrator and I make the final pattern there. I decided that all three of my designs would have a background pattern, so a pattern within the pattern, if you may, that is microplastics. So to symbolize how these products that you're seeing end up not biodegraded. Because we know by now, it's not really biodegradable the plastic, but it ends up as tinier and tinier pieces of plastic.

**Maanarak of Grey** (04:25): So thinking about this, how we consume plastic, how we are engulfed by plastic, I chose the toothbrush as a symbol of the consumption of plastic because it is one plastic object that is day in and day out in our mouths. So we wake up and we brush our teeth, we brush our teeth before we go to sleep. And so for me, this symbolizes that with sunrise and sunset, we have plastic in our mouths.

**Maanarak of Grey** (05:07): And then I chose the bottle because I think one of the common plastic polluters is plastic bottles. And I did specifically the water bottles because thinking of how there's a lot of issues around water shortages, issues with people getting proper clean water in their area of residence and they end up having to buy bottled water that's bottled in plastic bottles just to survive, to fulfill a very, very basic need of water, having clean water to drink.

**Maanarak of Grey** (05:54): And then the third one was a bag. And I think bag is just one of those other very common plastic polluters that ocean life often can confuse for their food. And I think of, as I said before, the turtles thinking that it's jellyfish and they eat this and it's just very dangerous for the ocean life that eat this and think that is your food. And I chose this design with the thank you on it because I remember the plastic bags that had like thank you, thank you, thank you. And I thought how ironic. You're thanking me for polluting the environment with this single use plastic bag. And I found also an opportunity to kind of showcase my own sense of humor, my characteristics, that I really like dry humor and a bit of dark humor. So that's why I put the upside down smiley face on it. And I like that when I turned the bag the other side that the smile was the right side up. So I like this contrast.

**Maanarak of Grey** (07:11): And what I would like people to take away from this collection is a reflection on how much and how common the use of plastic actually is, how it's not healthy because it's ending up as microplastics in our body, in our bloodstream, in other living beings on earth as well. And I want us to reflect on how it will take collective action to reduce this.

**Maanarak of Grey** (07:45): And I think that that's the beauty of having a pattern because it shows how one individual can buy one plastic bottle or bag or toothbrush, but if I only count my whole apartment building already, that's maybe hundreds or maybe thousands of plastic bottles, bags, and toothbrushes. And if you keep adding up on a global scale, it's just gets more and more. And I don't want to think about it as collective in the sense of the consumers have to solve this. Because a lot of the times, as consumers, as I said before, we are solving or we are attending to our basic needs, such as having clean water, having detergent to have a clean house, or just having a tool to keep our teeth healthy and clean.

**Maanarak of Grey** (08:51): So I think the issue has to be tackled at that we're producing it in the first place. And I think that the industry, the production of plastic should be taking a lot more responsibility for the production of it. And I think that the lie that most of it can be recycled also has to stop because it is not mostly recycled. A lot of it ends up in the oceans and landfills. Being burned ends up in our airways. I think it's very dangerous and I think the only way to truly tackle something like that is not to produce it anymore. That seems logical to me.

**Maanarak of Grey** (09:42): And if you are interested in getting a copy of this work or just knowing more about me and what I do, what I stand for, I invite you to visit my website. You can find all the information there. I thank Women Mind the Water for the opportunity to collaborate with them. I enjoyed getting to know the organization more and I love that women are coming together for such an important cause.

**Pam Ferris-Olson** (10:15): I'd like to remind listeners that they have been listening to Maanarak of Greyfor the Women Mind the Water Artivist Series podcast. This series can be viewed on womenmindthewater.com. An audio only version of this podcast is also available on the Women Mind the Water website, on iTunes and Buzzfeed. 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.