

Discussion 31

Everything Creative TEMPLE MURALS

[Introduction, Music, and Narration]

NANCY HANSON: Welcome to Everything Creative, I'm Nancy Hanson, I'll be talking today with muralist, Robert Marshall. Robert tells me he's been a teacher and a muralist for 40yrs, and that's all there is to tell, but let me tell you a little bit about him. He began teaching, um, at Fullerton College, in Fullerton, California, in 1968. He taught at BYU, from 1969 to 2008. During his career at BYU, he was chair of the department of visual art for 12yrs. Designated by the University to receive the Suzanne Young Gates University Professorship, 1999 to 2006. As well as the Karl G. Maeser Research and Creative arts award, and the college of fine arts and communications annual award for creative excellence. In 2003, he was named the higher education art educator of the year, by the Utah Art Education Association. Receiving numerous awards for his paintings, he has had over 50 solo and group exhibitions nationally. Robert was one of 6 artists commissioned to paint murals for the Nauvoo temple as well as the Sacramento, California Temple. So, yeah, a little bit more than a teacher and an artist for 40yrs. Robert Marshall thank you for being here with us today, on Everything Creative!

ROBERT MARSHALL: My pleasure.

NANCY HANSON: Well, we want to talk about the what's and whys and how's of your creative. First let's talk a little about you. Introduce yourself and tell us where you were born and raised.

ROBERT MARSHALL: You may become a little suspect, if you find out too many of these facts. (laugh) I was born in Mesquite, Nevada.

NANCY HANSON: Oh, wow!

[ROBERT MARSHALL]: And..um, and I grew up living in small towns throughout the west, my father worked construction and we traveled, uh, quickly (laugh), and usually for a short period of time. uh. I grew up going to multiple schools and multiple states every year. Till my father, my mother decided that uh, we were, we had been gypsies long enough, and so we settled in southern California, where I completed Jr. High, and High School. um...

NANCY HANSON: What about your siblings?

ROBERT MARSHALL: I had one brother, and um, we um...cause I've had multiple fights here. The arts were never part of my home. You'd think that someone who ends up in the arts, probably their parents gave them music lessons or drawing lessons, from the time they could walk, well, I never had an art class in Jr. High or High School.

NANCY HANSON: When you were a little boy growing up..[Interruption]

ROBERT MARSHALL: I did draw a lot. I loved to make things.

NANCY HANSON: Was art something you uh. You loved to draw, yeah.

ROBERT MARSHALL: I got to look forward to being 6 where I could stay home from school (laugh), and make things out of tooth picks, and toilet paper, and glue and construct stuff. I drew a lot, and both received applause, and criticism, for doing it in the wrong place.

[NANCY HANSON] : oops!

ROBERT MARSHALL: I cleaned all the desks one day in the 6th grade because I made a drawing on my desk, and thought maybe someone else would like to see it. The teacher thought I

could learn a different lesson. (laugh)So, I got to clean all the desks in the room. I grew up thinking I was going to be something important and manly, an architect or an engineer, somebody who made stuff, big stuff, so. In High School, my classes were math and physics, and chemistry, those kinds of classes, and it wasn't until I was a sophomore in college when I really started thinking of what I might like to do with my life. I decided that maybe I wanted to be an architect, and uh, I had been recruited as an athlete and come to BYU to play football, and so I was there. I realized that they didn't have a program in architecture. So, I started looking at a parallel discipline that might prepare to then..[interruption]

NANCY HANSON: Move into that...

ROBERT MARSHALL: ...Go to graduate school in architecture. I had a counselor say, well, take a drawing class, and take an art class. I took a drawing class, and I took a watercolor class. It was really as if all the lights went on in the room, and I realized that those things that I love to do, and was connected to, without even thinking about making those connections when I was growing up, but there were people that were very serious about it, and it was an important part of their lives. It wasn't something I had to do after I did important things.

NANCY HANSON: hm..

ROBERT MARSHALL: I then took another class, and another class, and changed my major to painting, to the arts.

NANCY HANSON: Wow! So growing up this whole time you still kept drawing, and you still had that interest and were very creative, just with something that was sorta like, this is fun, and on the side.

ROBERT MARSHALL: Well, my drawing wasn't all that serious, you know, I was a fan of Mad magazine.

NANCY HANSON: Mmhmm... (Laugh)

ROBERT MARSHALL: ...Of comic books, and copying Tarzan and Prince Valiant, and just drawing people doing stuff, in armor. Typical adolescent.

NANCY HANSON: You had a knack for it obviously. So then when you started into these classes, it just felt right, and felt natural.

ROBERT MARSHALL: Never looked back. I know when I tried to explain to my parents that I was going to be an art major, you know, coming from a family where art had never been part of their life that was a bit of a surprise.

NANCY HANSON: Sure, yeah, where did that come from?

ROBERT MARSHALL: Exactly. He got switched at birth! (laugh)

NANCY HANSON: And now do you have children yourself?

ROBERT MARSHALL: I do, I have 6 children.

NANCY HANSON: 6 children, are they artistic?

ROBERT MARSHALL: Yes!

NANCY HANSON: I'm sure they are in different ways. Is there one that has followed?

ROBERT MARSHALL: I have one, my second son, Todd, graduated from BYU, with a degree in sculpture, performance, and video art. He's married to a woman who is a painter.

They live in Salt Lake, and have tried to carve out a career as artists. They have found those challenging experiences to be both plus' and minus', but they've hung in there! They're still doing it. I think my other three children who were interested in art; I think it's hard to measure yourself against someone in the house who does it for a living. I'm sure you have a bit of that with your career too. While I never thought I was comparing them, I know that they would always measure themselves against Dad. So, one decided to go to law school, and one went to dental school, one is a high school principal. (laugh) They draw well, and they paint well, and all of them would find themselves into my office, at BYU in-between classes when they had had all the chemistry they could handle, and say, "Dad I need to paint for an hour."

NANCY HANSON: Oh, that's awesome!

ROBERT MARSHALL: Yeah, and now I have grandchildren that love to come and sit on the floor of the studio, and do watercolors, while I'm painting.

NANCY HANSON: That's so great that they see that that's something that you do and that opens of a world of possibility to them. [Interruption]

ROBERT MARSHALL: Everything they do is wonderful!

NANCY HANSON: Oh, sure, of course! How did you meet your wife?

ROBERT MARSHALL: I met her in southern California. I was--Do I want my ward to know this, since they call me bishop at times, but I was not an active Latter-day Saint growing up, and as I started to become interested in the church, I met her at a church dance. I knew that I was going to marry her. (laugh) We dated in southern California, came to BYU at the same time, and got married a few years later.

NANCY HANSON: Oh, that's a great story!

ROBERT MARSHALL: It's a wonderful story! (laugh) She is the reason I do most of what I do.

NANCY HANSON: How do you form an idea, and take something from an idea to an actual piece of art.

ROBERT MARSHALL: I learned a long time ago that you don't define what you're going to do in advance, and then fill in the pieces to get it to match, that painting, I don't know if I'm speaking for poets or writers, but in painting you have to trust what you don't know, and you have to really invent your way through possibilities and I think creative people, if they are different than other people, are just individuals who are willing to accept that there are multiple solutions going on at the same time, and that you can connect to any one of them and that could be the right solution, but you don't know exactly what it's going to be, until you work through a lot of choices, a lot of possibilities. I've noticed that children who stop drawing, or stop being what we think of as being creative, is I think they are insecure with that.

NANCY HANSON: mmhm.

ROBERT MARSHALL: Or someone tells them what they're doing isn't acceptable, or they decide themselves that it doesn't quite accomplish what they set out to do, and they get discouraged and they, and they "oh, I can't do that" or, "My friend can really draw, but I can't draw."

NANCY HANSON: Right, how often do you hear that?

ROBERT MARSHALL: SO, if someone listening could understand that all artists no matter how accomplished, and skillful, and successful they are go through that same process, with everything they begin anew. It is a struggle trying to figure out what is appropriate for what you're doing at that moment, and you only figure that out by eliminating possibilities, not by making a list. Well, it's going to be green, it's going to have a tree, it's going to have a little girl, she's going to be happy. You

have to let this thing that you're creating speak to you, and talk to you. You have to make a friend of it. It sounds silly, but, paintings do talk to me. "That's too much red Marshall, it's too big a shape, it's clunky, paint that out, wipe it off, make me better!" I think is what the painting is trying to say. A lot of times you can't, you battle it for a lot of time, and then you make a break through somehow, you come back and look at it a anew, and say "Ooo, that might work, what if I try this?"

NANCY HANSON: So, what you're saying is it's not like you sit down and you have this idea of an end result, and as you start it's going to change. I could say the same for maybe song writing. It's great, you have an idea and you start, but you may end in a completely different place.

ROBERT MARSHALL: If I'm a portrait painter, and I'm painting you. Obviously, you want it to look somewhat like you.

NANCY HANSON: That'd be nice, yeah.

ROBERT MARSHALL: So, I can't take any liberty that I would like. There are so many things that happen, as you paint, as you make an image, that causes that painting to shift slightly one direction or another, and I think that all the sensitive person does, is somehow connect with that and stay in tune with what they were trying to do all along. Then enjoy the serendipitous happenstance moments when I didn't know I was going to do that, but I like that!

NANCY HANSON: That's what's so exciting about creativity, about creating something; it's seeing it morph into this thing that you didn't know was going to be there.

ROBERT MARSHALL: Every now and then you finish one, and set it aside, and a few months later, and you look at it, and you still like it! That's even better!

NANCY HANSON: Yeah!

ROBERT MARSHALL: Instead of saying, I got to paint that, I got to paint that out!

NANCY HANSON: SO, did you start in watercolors?

ROBERT MARSHALL: I did. I painted watercolors almost exclusively for 15 or 18yrs.

NANCY HANSON: So, help me understand, so do you, if that's kind of your main thing, is it a completely different process to paint with oils or is that just something that you're just, I just do watercolors? I'm kind of naive here.

ROBERT MARSHALL: I still do a few watercolors.

NANCY HANSON: SO, now that's not?

ROBERT MARSHALL: I would answer your question, by saying; I do great big watercolors now on canvas, with oil paint. The things that I learned while I was painting with watercolor are still in the paintings that I do in oil. There are certain responses and sensibilities, connections that you make to what you like, what seems to be the solution. While I painted watercolor all those years, I actually stopped painting them, because I didn't want people to write on my tomb stone, here lies the best watercolorist to live in the state of Utah, kind of thing. I would rather have them say, here lies a pretty good painter, who happened to do watercolors well. I wanted to have a bigger kind of umbrella there.

NANCY HANSON: Which is more forgiving? Oils or watercolors?

ROBERT MARSHALL: You can always tear up a watercolor. (laugh) People will say watercolor is so hard, you can't make a mistake, and you make lots of mistakes. The idea, the ones that survive, are the ones that you turn what you thought was a mistake into a positive part of the painting. As a watercolorist, I try very hard to, to make it

spontaneous, to be surprised by the things that happen on the piece of paper, and then let that direct what you do next, and next. With oil painting, I do the same; it's just bigger, and thicker, and smells different. (laugh)

NANCY HANSON: So do you sketch out before?

ROBERT MARSHALL: A little bit.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah?

ROBERT MARSHALL: I should do more drawing, but I've over the years discovered that I don't like to do a drawing and then fill it in with color, you know, make a painting out of it. I draw while I'm painting. So, the drawing is something that happens. I've had artist friends come by and kind of laugh at the scrap, the reference material that I'm using. They say, how do you use that? It's so obscure. It doesn't, can you turn it this way, or this way? I say that I'm not trying to copy what I'm looking at; I'm just using it as a way to get somewhere else. As I am painting, what I think are kind of intimate responses to the landscape, I'm figuring it out with the brush, as I draw it on, rather than making a drawing carefully that I then fill in with color.

NANCY HANSON: Now, isn't that different then the way other artists do it?

ROBERT MARSHALL: Many artists start from a very careful drawing, and are very fastidious in making sure that everything stays connected to the initial drawing.

NANCY HANSON: Right.

ROBERT MARSHALL: I want mine to surprise me.

NANCY HANSON: Are you kind of unique in that, do you think?

ROBERT MARSHALL: No, it probably means I don't draw as well as they do. (laugh)So, I cover it up with a lot of bravado, and Swiss.

NANCY HANSON: You're just making mistakes all over the place, and turning them into something brilliant.

ROBERT MARSHALL: Yup! Life is full of doing that. Isn't that the way we live?

NANCY HANSON: I love that! So, if you, what do you mostly paint, landscapes then, it sounds like?

ROBERT MARSHALL: Yes, I find myself wandering around, looking at things that most people don't take the time to look at, and I take a lot of reference photographs of patterns and shapes, and colors. I come back and try to arrange them into a new reality, and my studio then hopefully causes someone to say, wow I've seen that place before, when in fact there is no place. It's at its best, it can potentially be everyone's that place, where you can go, and think about things that are important.

NANCY HANSON: SO, it's not a specific, it's not like you take a picture of a mountain scene, and copy it?

ROBERT MARSHALL: Seldom, seldom.

NANCY HANSON: It's just a place that you imagine.

ROBERT MARSHALL: A place that I paint, hopefully in a way that causes you to want to be there too.

NANCY HANSON: Mhmm.

ROBERT MARSHALL: I believe that gifts that we have, while not necessarily parallel and equal to gifts of the spirit, I think that gifts that were given, that are related to the arts, are meant to bless the kingdom, and help us figure out our own place in the world, and who we are and how we connect to our neighbors, and a bigger community, and then connect to deity. I think that if my art work has value beyond just making me feel good for the moment as I paint it. I think it has to serve a purpose. That reconnects us to things bigger than ourselves, more important than ourselves. I'm not saying that to imply that my work is scripture, that we look at it and read it. I think that in a way, art has a potential of serving a similar kind of purpose. That it can cause us to think about important things, and reevaluate our relationship to all those in our lives that are important to us, and give us a chance to hide from the world for a little while. We're so caught up in things that don't matter.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah.

ROBERT MARSHALL: That I would hope that my paintings would give you a place where you can have a rest bit from those things that don't matter, and help you think about some important things.

NANCY HANSON: Sure, and that's..[Interruption], yeah.

ROBERT MARSHALL: Rather than just a pretty picture, it's not a picture it's a place.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah, Yeah. That's probably part of the reason we've been given art, and the ability to appreciate that, it's to feel closer to God, and to feel the spirit.

ROBERT MARSHALL: Yeah, I think so.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah, can you share some stories, example, or experiences of times that you have really felt inspired, led, or guided by the spirit, as you've created? Is that a really strong part of your creation?

ROBERT MARSHALL: Let me come at it in kind of obliquely, and we'll see if we find our way back there. While we were working, the 6 of us working on the murals for the Nauvoo temple, a lot of people came in the picture studios where we were working, and watched what we were doing, and asked lots of questions. Many times the questions were similar to what you just asked. I would always tell them the same thing, that I haven't had any visitations from angels helping me paint this thing. I don't know, even though we would have a prayer every day to start that painting session, I don't know that a singular thought came into my mind, do this, as opposed to doing this. What happened was, you got in and worked at solving a set of problems you were working on that day, whether it was color a tree, flower, or animal. Whatever you were trying to solve, you approached it with a focus that allowed you to bring to it all your experience, hopefully all your trust and faith in yourself, and the fact that you could receive impressions that would help you solve a problem. After the fact and hind side looked at it, that's kind of the way it happened every day, you just went and did the work.

NANCY HANSON: Mhmm...

ROBERT MARSHALL: In the process of doing the work, one solution tended to present itself in a more positive way than another solution, and you had a confirmation that what you were doing was right. I think every painter, every artist who is serious about what they do, and is serious about looking into their own motives, and their own intentions would be able to honorably say, I am being true to all those things that I am, that I'm not pretending, and I'm not trying to make this something that I'm not able to do, because it's outside of who I am. I taught painting for a long time, I think that while it's hard to teach painting, that may not be, in fact, what I was trying to teach, I think what I was trying to teach was helping an individual figure out who they were, what they were trying to do, and to figure out a way that they could best do that, they could best say that, so I wasn't teaching them how to paint clouds or how to paint the marks that look like a face. There may be times when that's the skill maybe you need, and you would help someone learn how to do something specific. I think more importantly was helping them discover who they

were, and how they saw the world, and what was important to them, and then what image, narrative, and content could they bring to their work..[Interruption]

NANCY HANSON: And how they could express that. [Interruption] Yeah.

ROBERT MARSHALL: And a way to confirm that. Exactly.

NANCY HANSON: And who taught you that? Is that something you learned, as you were..?
[Interruption]

ROBERT MARSHALL: This is going to sound a little self-serving, but I think I taught myself that.

[NANCY HANSON]: Sure.

ROBERT MARSHALL: While I was teaching 40 years.

[NANCY HANSON]: Mhmm.

ROBERT MARSHALL: Trying to help others understand it.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah, that's the question I had for you, was what you think you've learned as you teach, because as we teach, we always learn.

ROBERT MARSHALL: Well, I want to line up every one of those students and thank them for what they give me; hopefully some of them remember something I gave them. It was that street running the other way.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah. It does work backwards, it works both ways. So, can we talk about the temple murals? As we are all able to go into an open house, and walk into the temple and see all those things, you know, there's different rooms. As you were asked to participate in painting these, there were 5 other artists.

ROBERT MARSHALL: In Nauvoo, there were 6 of us. Most other temples, it's a singular artist who does the work.

NANCY HANSON: Oh, ok.

ROBERT MARSHALL: But there were 3 ordinance rooms, with Nauvoo, that was the first temple really since Los Angeles, I think in 1956, when they put murals in temples, and all subsequent temples didn't have them. When they determined to put them in Nauvoo, they had the world room, the creation room, and the garden room, which had been, if you go to the Salt Lake Temple, or Los Angeles in the older temples, that was the way they were made. I am not sure why they chose 6 of us, other than probably time, and also I think they wanted a little variety. They didn't want one artist's work to be in all...[Interruption]

NANCY HANSON: ...the rooms.

ROBERT MARSHALL: 3 rooms, and we were told to not to try to make your half of the room look like your partner's half, that we're happy to have the uniqueness of one artist...[Interruption]

NANCY HANSON: Really?!

ROBERT MARSHALL: Speak as well as the uniqueness of another.

NANCY HANSON: So, you worked together, but almost on halves of the room.

ROBERT MARSHALL: We drew a chalk line down the middle, and said, don't come on my line!

NANCY HANSON: (laugh) Did you sit down and kind of sketch out the mural for the entire room?

ROBERT MARSHALL: Yes, we had to send cartoon studies up, that were approved by the brethren, before we could start. Of course we had to come up with a finished product that looked like that. We couldn't take a lot of liberties. We did a lot of changing, adding things of course as this things involves, but for the most part you were trying to make it look like what they thought they were going to get.

NANCY HANSON: How exciting was that? To be...wasn't it amazing? Yeah?

ROBERT MARSHALL: How does it get any better?..Then that?

NANCY HANSON: Now, how do you go from what was your first mural, how do you go from a little drawing or painting to suddenly a huge, how does that transfer?

ROBERT MARSHALL: Well, I do large paintings, so, 6x8 foot painting is, I won't say typical, but I'm very comfortable doing big images, in fact my work, after I stopped doing water colors completely, one of the reasons I changed was I wanted a scale change in my imagery. Watercolor would only allow me to work a certain size, and so I wanted to work a lot bigger. That didn't present a problem. I would explain it to people like this that, the murals were 90+ ft long, and 12 ft high, that sounds like a lot of area to cover.

[NANCY HANSON]: Yeah!

ROBERT MARSHALL: When in fact, you can only think of a 2x3foot piece of canvas that you're looking at in front of you. You're really just painting hundreds of 24x36 inch paintings. (laugh)

NANCY HANSON: (laugh)

ROBERT MARSHALL: You back off, and connect them all together, but when you're painting, your arm is only so long, and so the distance between you and the canvas, allows you to see just so much, so that's what you're working on.

NANCY HANSON: Which seems to be more difficult, because...standing back.

ROBERT MARSHALL: You spend a lot of time walking away, and coming forward, walking away, and coming forward. Or having your painting partner yell at you, what you're doing it ugly. (laugh)

NANCY HANSON: (laugh) Can't imagine that.

ROBERT MARSHALL: No, never. We had to bring a little humor in to keep our sanity there.

NANCY HANSON: I'm sure, how long does some project like that take?

ROBERT MARSHALL: Probably longer than it would if we hadn't have painted it where we had painted them. Motion Picture Studios was generous enough to give us a sound stage, and built the walls that we stretched the canvas on to paint them. There were times when we had to take the walls down, because they had to shoot something that week, and so they'd put us against the wall, and then they'd say that you can't paint for 3 weeks. So, it was about 10 months. When I did Sacramento, the image was almost as large as a full room, which I had only done half of in Nauvoo. The image in Sacramento was almost as large as the full room, and there was just

myself. I did that in about 8 months. I was still at the motion picture studios, and there were times when I couldn't work. So, I think, probably about 6 months.

NANCY HANSON: So that, for California you painted that at the Motion Picture Studio, you painted that as well? So, we picture those of us, who just go to the temple, and look at these gorgeous walls. we picture the artist in that room, just painting away.

ROBERT MARSHALL: Like Michelangelo, in the Sistine chapel?

NANCY HANSON: Yes, exactly!

ROBERT MARSHALL: Lying on his back. Having the folk yell, "When will you be finished?" (laugh) Well, there are so many reasons why you can't do that. Other people are working on that building at the same time. So, the sheet rock isn't even up until a certain phase, and then it has to be available to those that are doing the finished carpentry, the carpet layers, the chairs, and everything is on such a tight schedule, that you paint them at a different location. Then we would roll them up and then ship them. They are attached to the wall, much like you attach wall paper. Just put an adhesive on, roll them out, make sure they line up and then, since when you're painting them, you've never seen the corners together, you paint a wall, you paint a wall, in the temple they come together, so then the artist, I would go and spend about a week adjusting, making sure that everything fit the way it should fit.

NANCY HANSON: Wow!

ROBERT MARSHALL: But, I was only at the temple for about a week total, putting them on the walls, painting them, and putting a varnish on them.

NANCY HANSON: What an opportunity! That's pretty cool; there are very few people that have the chance to work on something like that in temples. What a great blessing, and opportunity for you, and to be able to do something that you love, for your life!

ROBERT MARSHALL: Yes, and to realize that you're doing something that's for a venue, to has as its intent, something very different than what artists usually account for and to when they're doing work, and doing it for a home or a corporation, or a museum. We approached it differently then I think there was a reverence, a sense that this gift that we've talked about earlier, is being used in a way, that has some real significance!

[NANCY HANSON]: Yeah, and it's not like people know that this was painted by you.

ROBERT MARSHALL: No, in fact, we didn't sign them, some of the earlier murals had been signed, but we, as a group, decided, somewhat like medieval cathedrals, where those that worked on them, didn't sign them, that what's theirs is hopefully an anonymous gift to the place.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah, I like that. Let's talk a little about teaching, and art, which is something that you have done for 40 years. Could you teach me to draw, if I'm just, here I am in my 40s, and always thought I was horrible artist, and can't even do a stick figure. (laugh)

ROBERT MARSHALL: Yes! Could I teach you to draw well? Possibly. I think that's one [Interruption]

NANCY HANSON: Something that would resemble the actual thing that you ask me..

ROBERT MARSHALL: Oh, yeah. When people think of drawing or painting, most people have lumped everything into a fairly tight ball that involves hand-eye coordination, and technical skills. The longer I taught drawing, I realized that that was a part of it, but a small part of it. That getting you to have something to say will help you become, more successful at your drawings. More than teaching you a certain technique or a skill. I can help you better see proportions. I can help you measure things, and get distances, and other things that go into causing an image on a

piece of paper to look something like a replica of something else, like drawing a face.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah, like angles and lines.

ROBERT MARSHALL: There are lots of devices and clues, and procedures and techniques, that artists learn, that helps them to be able to do that. I can help you in color theory. We can talk about modulating color, and getting harmonies to develop with your color choices, that have to do with mixing procedures. That they might not have known before. I can help you maybe be sensible to different tools, ways of putting the paint down, that all of these are something a technician can learn. They're important, and I think that for much of the 20th century, they were dismissed as unimportant, as visual art, took a self serving direction, and a lot of the art that was done in the 80s and 90s, until the year 2000 is so self-serving, that it doesn't connect to too many people outside of the person who made or very few people who have a similar agenda, and the idea that you're making something beautiful, was dismissed at that time as antithetical to the process. I'm just old enough, I'm a bit of a dinosaur, but I think beauty is a very important thing in the world, and it's something that we need a lot more of. Learning the craft of painting is important. The more important thing is for you to discover what there is inside of you that is peculiar to you, and would let you give evidence of what you see in this world, that has importance and beauty to you. When that starts to drive your work then I think that you then acquire the skills you need if you work at it, learning to draw well, takes a long time. Now, I don't play the piano, but I watch people who do play it well, and I know that they practice as much every day as I paint. So, I don't think you can just say, well, I want to be a painter.

NANCY HANSON: So, you're kind of saying anyone can learn to draw. You could take some art classes and learn how to draw these, you know. Learn the skill and the craft, but it's giving it that, when you really become an artist.

ROBERT MARSHALL: And one of the problems, that I think inflicts, a little severe here, but, people who decide that they would like to learn to paint, go to places where they are then given formulas that they can repeat over and over again, that have proven themselves to be, at least superficially, successful. So, you take lessons from

someone who teaches you to do a certain thing, and while there is value in learning to do a lot of certain things, that is really not what painting is all about. It's very hard for people to get out of the mindset of well, show me how to paint the clouds, show me how to paint the grass, so I can repeat it over and over again, I can look at it and say I'm successful because I've made it look like what I've been told is the model, the paradigm. When you realize that that shifts with every painting.

NANCY HANSON: Isn't that a good place to start though?

ROBERT MARSHALL: If you're confident enough to get through it. I think most people want to do art, so they can show something to someone and have them tell them that they did something well.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah.

ROBERT MARSHALL: To challenge them to ask well, why am I doing this? What is there that's important in this to me?

NANCY HANSON: So, that's what you're lucky students have been able to learn from you.

ROBERT MARSHALL: I hope so, I preached it enough.

NANCY HANSON: (laugh) Well, it reminds me of when I recently interviewed Angela Johnson who is a sculptor, and she talked about, from the beginning not just wanting to sculpt a bird, just a bird, you know, you got all the anatomy right or whatever, but think about is this bird happy, is it well, what's its expression, what's it feeling, and be able to convey that more than just drawing the bird.

ROBERT MARSHALL: And when people look at the bird, what will it cause them to connect to from their life experiences. I think that the art that we talked earlier on, about museums, but, I go to museums a lot, a lot of museums, much of the work bores me. That's a little strong; some of the work bores me.

NANCY HANSON: I'm glad I'm not the only one!

ROBERT MARSHALL: Some of it, is so challenging that I almost feel my blood pressure change, and my palms get sweaty, and I can hardly breathe, because of what I'm looking at, and those moments, I think, are connected to the reason why our survives, generation after generation, culture after culture, I don't know a lot about Chinese art, but I've been moved to tears by some carved ivory pieces, that I can imagine that someone spent his entire life doing that.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah.

ROBERT MARSHALL: That gives it meaning and value, beyond almost anything else. It was important to that human being, that they spent their life doing it.

NANCY HANSON: Yup, that's perfect, you're absolutely right.

ROBERT MARSHALL: And I remember lying back, I was going to say lying on my back in the Sistine chapel, lying back, looking up and realizing that as awesome as it was, it was just a painting on a ceiling. It didn't make me want to go out and be a better person. Now, maybe those two things don't have to always be connected, but I've seen art that has moved me, to understand something and sense that I can go out and become a better person. I'm sure that if I went back the next day to the Sistine chapel, I would have left thinking I could be a better person. It's a pretty impressive place. It's as much a monument to Michelangelo, and just his insight and his genius and while I respect that, I'm just as happy being in my studio, doing some clunky painting that I think is good, then seeing something that the world has said is so significant, because in the final analysis, the process is such a personal journey, it's between me and that paint, and that canvas.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah, that's what I'm learning about today from talking to you about that, you know, if you were to, what happens to you when you explain standing there, and feeling just whatever that is that takes over you, do you feel more inspired, like you can't wait to get back to your brush? Or do you sometimes get that feeling that, why do I even try, like when you see a great piece that moves you like that? Or is it sometimes different?

ROBERT MARSHALL: There are days and weeks that I go into my studio, and I don't want to paint. I know that I'm not very good at it, and nothing I've done is worth much, and everything in the room is ugly.

NANCY HANSON: wow...(laugh)

ROBERT MARSHALL: (laugh) I have found that the way that I get through that, is to somehow focus on a place, a concept, an issue, maybe even the concept is nothing more than just rhythms, and patterns, but I start connecting to something pretty simple, and I then try to pain through what I have decided has some value, and then at the end, I think that some of the things I've done have been successful. I've got a lot of very successful friends that are every bit insecure with their work as a rookie painter.

NANCY HANSON: See? Isn't that interesting? I think it's important to talk about that, because our listeners may be hearing you say that, and thinking no way, no way does he have those kinds of days where...[Interruption]

ROBERT MARSHALL: And I also know that the better you get at something, the smaller your audience really becomes, and there are those who I'm sure compose, and write poetry and paint that are painting for a very small audience. That their vision has removed a lot of access, from a lot of other people, because they haven't worked hard enough to be able to understand it.

NANCY HANSON: Who really appreciate what that is.

ROBERT MARSHALL: Exactly. As a painter, I am blessed with having 4 or 5 good friends that I respect their work, and I know that they are good painters. We talk ourselves through this stuff too.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah, I just think about myself in song writing, and anyone who creates, and you tend to compare yourself obviously to other people, you know, which is not good, so, what is it, that you think, makes us feel so insecure? Is it comparing ourselves with other people? How can you leave a piece at night, and think that's brilliant, and walk up the next morning and go what was I thinking?

ROBERT MARSHALL: I think that if you're serious about what you're doing, that you continue to ask yourself the kinds of questions that push you forward, that you, I thought I was pretty good last year, well, I've had a year more painting, and we learn, we get better, and you, in a final analysis, you were the only one you were trying to please, or should be. If you've determined that you're trying to please an external audience, an external critical process somewhere, that you're going to get lost. You have to, there are those that are perfectly happy doing copies of calendars, and making a pretty picture, and if that's your goal, and that gives you satisfaction, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. As you set a different goal, a different set of expectations, I think that's when you realize, how more often than not, you don't quite get it right, but you keep doing it because you believe it has value, the value is in trying to get it right, and doing the next painting, the value is not in doing the next painting that then becomes the definitive painting. As soon as I'm finished with a painting, it's just, what happened yesterday, there is another blank canvas sitting there. I think that part of maybe what you're talking about. For the professional artist, for the one who does a whole lot of work, there is always a blank canvas, and that can be really intimidating.

NANCY HANSON: Do you ever finish something and say wow that was great; I will never be able to do something that great again?

ROBERT MARSHALL: No, because I would hope that the next one is going to be better. I have done painting where I told myself, that's pretty good. That one I will not be

embarrassed by having someone have it hanging in their house, 20 years from now.

NANCY HANSON: Well, Robert it's been great talking with you, and these last few minutes, I want to ask you, well now that I ask you this question, it's probably not something I'm going to grow up and become an artist, because it's probably something you have to work into, but it's probably pretty hard to make a living. What advice could you give to people that were really trying to catch a break?

ROBERT MARSHALL: Making art has nothing to do with making a living. There are fortunate group of people who merge the two, for those that don't, making art still has the same value to you, as someone who for what set of circumstances has figured out how to make a living with their art. For those who make a living doing something else, their art can bless their lives, in ways that are significant, and unmatched by other activities. I think that's why people continue to do it. It nourishes, and it ennobles, and it enlightens, and it just helps me feel better about life.

NANCY HANSON: You just answered my next question, which was, what are your favorite things about what you get to do, and how do you feel your life has been blessed with your creative gifts?

ROBERT MARSHALL: Oh my word! I've always kind of teased that I hope reincarnation isn't the plan, because I don't want to have to come back and have a real job.(laugh)

NANCY HANSON: Do something else? (laugh)

ROBERT MARSHALL: Exactly! I've spent my life doing things that have allowed me to be surrounded by creative people, to be able to talk about things that have creative substance, and to be able to go to the privacy of my own studio, and make stuff that's important to me. I don't know how it gets any better than that.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah.

ROBERT MARSHALL: And on the other side, people like you, call me down, and say, we think you're important, let's listen. Doesn't happen at my house too often. (laugh)

NANCY HANSON: It's pretty great. So, you're almost saying, you really cannot make a plan to become a successful artist? I mean, you teach all these students in your art classes.

ROBERT MARSHALL: No, I actually think you have to make a plan, if your intent is to merge those two things then like any other business plan. You have to make it and be very focused on making things happen in a way that that can be your lives work. Now, I don't know too many successful artists, who just woke up one morning and said...[Interruption]

NANCY HANSON: This is what I'm going to do!

ROBERT MARSHALL: Aw shucks, I got important. Uh, no, they've worked hard, and tried to open the right doors, shut the right doors, and do the things that would get to work out. The first thing you have to do is make a lot of stuff, you have to make a lot of art, and then you have to make art that defines who you are, and then you have to find a market.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah, find something that's appealing to other people, and sell...[Interruption]

ROBERT MARSHALL: Well, maybe not, there is a lot of art that doesn't appeal to me, and people are able to make a living, making it.

[NANCY HANSON]: It appeals to somebody.

ROBERT MARSHALL: It appeals to someone, right. So, if you're true to yourself, honorable, you can figure out a place where that work can be reviewed and people will want it.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah.

ROBERT MARSHALL: You know it's a wonderful thing about living in America, the time we live in, I can do anything.

NANCY HANSON: What would you say; maybe to a parent who sees something in their children that is real natural artistic ability? How to encourage that? I see so many kids that just quit. They have something there, but it's just fear, or something is holding them back.

ROBERT MARSHALL: If I have a son who I want him to be a football player, so I put him in all the football camps, and make sure he's on all the city teams, doesn't mean he's going to like playing football. I think you give them opportunities to receive some nourishment back to receive a feeling that I'd like to do this, but it also is important for me to do this, the child will keep doing it, and if they don't they'll do something else they like. So, I don't think you can make someone, as a child, grow up to be something that...(they don't want to be.) [Interruption]

NANCY HANSON: But if you see that natural ability and talent there and interest, just to be able to encourage that, and to praise, and to you know, just the things we've talked about today, just helping them to see that, you know, you can make..[Interruption]

ROBERT MARSHALL: I have a boy that sits in front of me in the next pew in church, since we tend to sit in the same row, he's about 15yrs old, he brings a sketch book, and he draws the entire time he is sitting in sacrament meeting. Is he being irreverent? No. Is he doing something that's important to him? Yeah. The fact that he's doing it means that he's going to be doing it other times, when he has a choice to do something else, and I think those are the ones that get good at a particular gift. If you just keep doing it. So, encourage them, give them all the tools, and try to avoid an assessment that would cause them to lose what little confidence they have. I mean, my granddaughters come in, and sit on the floor, and paint in my studio. Now two years from now someone might tell them their work isn't any good at school, and they won't want to do that anymore, and I can help deflect that a little

bit. If they believe, if they want to they'll come in and sit on the floor, regardless of what other people say.

NANCY HANSON: Be able and sit there and hang out with grandpa the artist, and create, doesn't get better than that. Robert, thanks for joining us here on Everything Creative, it's been a very inspiring discussion. Any final thoughts?

ROBERT MARSHALL: The final thought that I just had, is it's a lot easier to paint in this room, talking about it, then at home in the studio, actually doing it. I'm a much better painter here, then when I'm home struggling, with stuff I don't ever let you see. It is hard work, and I think many times, because we think of art as being a little peculiar, and outside of the normal mix of those who do professional things, that artists work really hard at their craft. They struggle in private in ways that can be debilitating for people, and you have to learn to trust your own judgments and own instincts, and believe in yourself. Confidence is so easily lost; it's such a fragile commodity. In my moments of being less than significant, I think as an educator, I would cause someone to lose that confidence by something I said, I've always tried to be sensitive, in teaching art, it is so important, that that not happen. We are so connected to what we are doing; it's a piece of us. It's so easy to bruise a person. It's so important to help them develop confidence, and have that confidence grow to where they believe themselves, and trust themselves, and put on a bit of little armor to withstand the criticism from the outside. I think most people stop doing art, because they got bruised, at whatever age. If I were talking to parents, I would just say, help your child develop these confidences. If they want to do it, they will do it. Let them know that they are capable, and that they are not necessarily better than someone else at it, but they are reaping the rewards of the doing.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah and any creative effort should be praised and encouraged. Well, thank you so much for sharing so much of yourself with us today.