

PORTRAITS Podcast – Packard-Gangloff Episode

[INTRO MUSIC]

Kim Sajet: Welcome to Portraits: a podcast from the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery where art and biography, history and identity collide. I'm Kim Sajet.

[MUSIC]

Kim Sajet: If you've come to visit us, you may have noticed that we don't just collect portraits of historical figures. We commission portraits of living breathing people too. Only the presidents and their spouses get in. No questions asked. For everyone else, we ask ourselves, "Who is making a game changing contribution to the life of our nation today? Or, in this case, the life of our oceans?"

Julie Packard: The ocean is our lungs. It's our pantry. It's our playground. And, of course, it's a huge source of inspiration and joy.

Kim Sajet: That's Julie Packard: one of the world's leading ocean conservationists. When her name came up for a possible portrait, our Board of Commissioners and the Smithsonian scientists voted unanimously in favor. And happily, she agreed. But then, we had to find the right artist for the job. And that's what this episode is all about. We work really hard to make a good match. It's sort of like Match.com for portraiture. We propose a few artists. We have some ideas, but at the end of the day, we want the sitter to be pleased and the artist to be inspired. It's a really important process because the synergy between the artist and the sitter can mean the difference between a fantastic portrait that everyone can identify with or a truly horrible one. So, Julie Packard was prepared to go on a first date with the artist, Hope Gangloff. Hope is a New York based artist, known for her careful observations, her neon hues and her wonderfully playful mix of patterns. Her portraits are almost exclusively of people that she knows really well and she once told The New York Times, "It's the way that I check in with friends." I sat down to speak with Julie and Hope, right after we unveiled Julie's portrait earlier this year.

[MUSIC]

Kim Sajet: So, Julie Packard, who is the Executive Director of the Monterey Bay Aquarium and a fierce shero for environmental activism. We love Julie because what she does is not just bring, um, the Aquarium and Marine Biology to life, but also really makes us think about the future and what we do. My other guest is Hope Gangloff, who actually just painted Julie's portrait. Um, we know, from firsthand experience, that if the sitter and the artist don't like each other, you can see it in the picture.

Hope Gangloff: For sure.

Kim Sajet: And there's a very, um, famous case of this with President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

[MUSIC]

Old Recording: "An Art explosion on Capitol Hill over a presidential portrait."

Kim Sajet: Who had his portrait done by Peter Hurd.

[MUSIC]

Old recording: "President Johnson called this painting, "the ugliest thing I ever saw."

Kim Sajet: And he really thought that he would know what he was getting because Hurd had done his portrait for the cover of Time. But the second time round, for some reason, and it's in the gallery. This is beautiful. He's actually standing there. There's the capital behind him. This kind of this dreamy, you know, sky. Um, he didn't like it. And it, and it was on. Like, they both absolutely trashed each other in front of the press and all that.

[Laughter]

Kim Sajet: And I don't know, you know. So, it's very, you know, it's really important for us. We kind of play this little role of matchmaker to see if you both like each other. And Julie, it was really smart of you to say well, "Let me go and meet this person first and see." And so, what was that like? You went to the studio and Hope was jamming.

[Laughter]

Kim Sajet: What was that like to meet?

Julie Packard: This whole thing was so new to me too. I was just, you know, following instructions like, "Wow. OK. What happens now? You know, how does this work?" But I said, "Great, you know, trip, you know, weekend in New York. That, that's fun." Took my daughter with me, you know, so, we could, you know, do a little shopping. And then, she actually came with me. We ventured out. Took the train out to Hope's studio in, in, uh, in Queens. And we found it. We, you know, we weren't quite sure exactly where we were going and...

Hope Gangloff: Queens is like that.

Julie Packard: And, and, yeah, I mean, her studio is just alive with color. I mean, it's just all about the color and just even looking at her, her table of all of her paint bottles. I mean, there must be a thousand of her hand mixed, little bottles of paint and just every amazing color you could think of and each one she's mixed. And, and later when we were visiting again, she was telling us, you know, the names she had put on them; and the particular pigments that went in them. And where she got the ingredients and all of that, which I just love. That was super fun and super interesting and um, yeah. So, we, uh, you know, I wouldn't say either of us probably is it, you know, by nature, super outgoing person, you know, and I could tell, I mean, I hope, she's an artist. She's just like crazy about, she's obsessed with her art.

[Laughter]

Julie Packard: But it was really easy for us to warm up to each other.

Kim Sajet: That's great.

Julie Packard: That was absolutely well, you know, not a problem.

Kim Sajat: You both have these, uh, passions. So, I can completely see how you would become friends with someone like Hope Gangloff. Um, it's lovely to think that you are mixing colors and, Hope, how did you actually come to art? And then, how did you come to portraiture?

Hope Gangloff: Um, well, I just... the way that I relate to the things around me is I paint them or draw them or make a joke out of them and I relate to people by drawing them to kind of like, revere them or tease them a little bit or both. So, it's really just kind of how I move through the world. It's supernatural for me just, to just like, I feel very confident that this is kind of why I'm... my language.

Julie Packard: Why you're here. Yeah.

Hope Gangloff: Why I'm here.

Kim Sajat: So, the responsibility of finding a match of a sitter and the artist really is with our Chief Curator, Brandon Brame Fortune. She has a whole team of very smart curators, who think about this for a living and know a lot of artists. Um, I will say that Julie throws a bit of a curve ball, when she said, "I'd really like someone who can paint fish and water." We don't get that a lot. So, let's describe this picture first and maybe I could start with the sitter. Julie, can you describe what you see when you look at the portrait of yourself? It must be a sort of a strange experience.

Julie Packard: I just, I'm so crazy about this painting. It's amazing and to me, what I love about it is, it totally captures our most iconic exhibition at Monterey Bay Aquarium, which is our giant Pacific kelp forest exhibit. So, what we tried to do with that exhibit when we designed it, was recreate what it felt like to dive in the Monterey Bay.

Kim Sajat: Wow!

Julie Packard: So, Monterey Bay. We have these beautiful kelp forests that are teeming with fish and this beautiful light coming through. And, and Hope has captured the view into that exhibit, um, with the sunlight coming down, reflecting from under the surface, you know, of the surface of the water; and then, just all the myriad of crazy fish and forms, swimming around inside.

Kim Sajat: So, was, did this live up to your thoughts? Do you recognize the fish here? Are they fairly accurate fish?

Julie Packard: Absolutely! Uh, the fish are definitely accurate. And, and um, we have in the painting, we have these bright orange fish that just pop. Those were Garibaldi and um, they are California's state marine fish. And then there are these beautiful blue, um, gray/blue kind of slatey fish above my head. Those are blue rockfish and there's something like 70 species of rockfish on the California coast. They're fascinating. They can live to be 150 years old.

Kim Sajat: Gosh.

Julie Packard: And then, then my favorite perhaps, down by my elbow, there's this, this very, um, inquisitive pink and black fish, kind of giving me a, giving me the eye. And that's the California sheep head. And they start out as females and turn to males and became, become very colorful. And my story about that fish is that it looked great, but when I saw it

as the painting was near completion, I told Hope, "Sheep head's missing his teeth and the sheep head have these really prominent teeth because they eat really crunchy things with hard shells and so, uh..."

Kim Sajat: They needed teeth.

Julie Packard: Yeah. He, he needs his teeth and nobody else's teeth. He looks, he looks fabulous.

Kim Sajat: Huh. Well, he does look great. He looks at...or he or she, I guess? That's kind of fascinating that this face actually changes gender. So, Hope, I'm going to ask you. You must look at this picture from a very different perspective. Is it hard with so many different types of blues that it doesn't just look like one big blur of blue?

Hope Gangloff: Um, yes. I definitely had a difficult time with the, the, um, with how much blue I was looking at. And I tried to make sure that I had, um, other giant color fields in my studio to clear my head, while I was working on this, um, uh, because, um, after being, working very close to the painting. It's 81 inches by 54 inches.

Kim Sajat: It's big. It's really big picture.

Hope Gangloff: So, it's like, it takes up your whole field of vision. And so, working on it, I was overcome by the, the overall blueness of it. And, but you know, I have my Violet blues and I have my, my um, my cobalt Bermuda blues and I have my other cerulean blues. I had a lot of different blues and I just had to try and make decisions about which blue I was using. And yeah, it made my eyes go crossed quite, quite a bit.

[Laughter]

Kim Sajat: I can imagine... yeah.

Hope Gangloff: So, like, really it was a pleasure to just put teeth on the fish. Like, I wish that was the...

[Laughter]

Kim Sajat: That was the easy part.

[Laughter]

Hope Gangloff: That was, that was great.

Kim Sajat: That was a good part.

Hope Gangloff: That was really funny.

Kim Sajat: Um, however, I would imagine that standing in front of the kelp forests might be one of the more harder places to actually paint somebody.

Hope Gangloff: I was a little concerned that I was gonna barb my kelp in the wrong direction.

[Laughter]

Hope Gangloff: Because Julie did her, uh, did her papers were on the kelp of Monterey Bay. Like, she's...

Kim Sajet: Research...

Hope Gangloff: Her research papers...

Kim Sajet: Julie's research about the kelp of Monterey Bay. Yes. So, a bit of pressure there to get the kelp

Hope Gangloff: I was a little bit worried.

Kim Sajet: And do you take photographs as well or no?

Hope Gangloff: Uh, for this project, you better believe, I took like...

[Laughter]

Kim Sajet: So many photographs, because the fish do not hold still. It was enough to get kind of the shape, and like, I don't know. It was, it was, it was scrappy.

Kim Sajet: Well, it looks fantastic because it really does look like it's alive. And one of the things that you notice when everyone comes to the National Portrait Gallery, is that you've actually applied some collage to the surface of the picture. Can you talk about that?

Hope Gangloff: Um, I paint an acrylic because I like how fast it dries. And I like being able to make big changes and big moves and like sand things off without waiting for dry time because and I'm always doing things last minute. But um, anyway, sometimes, I would be painting on paper and just making a place holder to be, like, I think I want this compositional element over here and I draw it on a piece of paper. I painted on a piece of paper and put it on the canvas. And then, at a certain point, you know, just as natural to maybe glue it down because it looks better, nice and fresh and better than anything I could put onto the canvas.

Kim Sajet: And in fact, when you look at the ring that Julie's wearing, you've had, you've got a little piece of collage on that ring that makes it pop.

Hope Gangloff: Oh. Ah, right! Cool!

Kim Sajet: Yes, I noticed that.

[Laughter]

Kim Sajet: When we come back, we'll hear what it's actually like sitting for a portrait. And why the Monterey Bay Aquarium puts picture frames around jellyfish. Stay with us.

[MUSIC]

Kim Sajet: I'm talking with ocean conservationist, Julie Packard and artist Hope Gangloff about what it's like when the National Portrait Gallery is your matchmaker. Once we'd

commissioned Hope to paint a portrait of Julie, Hope made plans to travel to the Monterey Bay Aquarium in California, where Julie is based. There was one small hitch.

Hope Gangloff: I'm not going to get on a plane.

Kim Sajat: Hope is based in New York City and she doesn't like to fly.

Kim Sajat: You don't like to fly?

Hope Gangloff: I don't like to fly but I do love...

Kim Sajat: Oh, you love to drive.

Hope Gangloff: To drive. And I do like to check out what's happening in the country.

Kim Sajat: So, Hope loaded into a car with a friend.

Hope Gangloff: Oh yeah, I have a co-pilot because, uh I'm not very computer literate.

Kim Sajat: And with her super dog Ali.

Hope Gangloff: She just sits there. She's great, high energy and quiet.

Kim Sajat: And set out for California.

Hope Gangloff: We hit the Grand Canyon and, um, we went through Taos and stayed in Georgia O'Keeffe's town in, uh...

Kim Sajat: Oh wow!

Voice: In Abiquiu.

Hope Gangloff: Abiquiu. Yeah and we went all the way over to Palm Springs. I'd never hung out there before. Checked out all the succulent gardens and stuff. I was just bouncing around the car like a Super Ball. By the time I got over to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, I was like so ready. I was so ready to rumble.

[Laughter]

Hope Gangloff: I had, like, just days and days of beautiful sky scapes and, like, outrageous vistas and then to get to the Pacific Ocean, it was really just triumphant. So, I was like ready to get in there and just give it everything. And I was totally filled with joy. And uh, yeah, I was knocked out by the aquarium.

Kim Sajat: Uh, so, if I understand it Hope, you actually painted Julie in her office. And so, Julie, I'm guessing you had to stand still for awhile. You had to pose in a certain way and you're really under scrutiny. What was that like?

Julie Packard: Well, it's so interesting because I figured I need to sit quote unquote for this portrait and I sort of envision, "Oh, I'm going to have to hold in this position for a really long time. What will that be like? What, you know, it sounded, you know, in theory, unpleasant but I was intrigued.

[Laughter]

Julie Packard: And in the end, I don't know. The time just flew by. And, and then, she just would do, you know, parts of me because also, 'cause she, you know, skills it up to a larger size and then she was, you know, placing me in; put, putting the pieces together with the backdrop of the help for so Steve

Hope Gangloff: I was not psyched out at all, drawing Julie Packard in front of a David Hockney drawing.

[Laughter]

Julie Packard: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. We have...

Kim Sajat: Julie has a David Hockney in her office?

Hope Gangloff: Oh yes! Right behind her.

[Laughter]

Julie Packard: See I, I'm so, I'm so lame at art.

Kim Sajat: So, David Hockney is a British artist who does really bright colors. Um, does portraits absolutely often of friends and family, but also does landscapes and still lifes. So, so you, you were talking a lot. There was a lot of laughing going on, chatting.

Hope Gangloff: Yeah. We were chatting.

Julie Packard: During the sit in, we, we were chatting about... Okay. Hope had spent her evenings painting the coastline in her area. So, she'd come in with some thing that she had painted that was awesome and we'd be chatting about what she had painted. And in one case was this these succulent plants that grow along the coastline, which she called icicle plants. She was like, so excited to paint my icicle plants. And then I informed her those are an invasive species that everyone in California is trying to eradicate.

[Laughter]

Julie Packard: But um...

Kim Sajat: But they're beautiful.

[Laughter]

Julie Packard: Which we chatted about that and camping in Big Sur.

Hope Gangloff: Yes. We both love Big Sur.

Julie Packard: And it felt like no time at all. I don't know what it felt like to Hope, but we were just yammering on about things and or when she needed to concentrate,

I'd shut up.

Kim Sajet: So, we talked a little bit about, um, this picture showing under the water and what Hope's portrait has done as to sort of reveal to us, for just a little second, the wonders of what we really don't spend a lot of time thinking about. I know that you've actually talked a lot about this problem in a way. With oceans, you really, a lot of us never get to see what you see and we don't understand what it is that we could possibly be losing.

Julie Packard: You know, without a healthy ocean, life on earth would not, could not exist. I mean, when you think about it, the ocean, aside from you know, covering nearly three quarters of the planet, you know, ninety nine percent of the living space on the planet is in the ocean. I mean, by volume, it's much, much bigger story than that. The ocean is our lungs. It's our pantry. It's our playground. It's our, it's, it's driver of vast amount of commerce. It's transportation corridors around the planet. Um, and of course, it's a huge source of inspiration and joy. So, at the aquarium, we've had a couple of really great exhibits one in particular at the aquarium that we call, "jellies living art." But it was our second jelly exhibit about jellyfish which we called jellies because they're not fish, but they're very artful is thing.

[Laughter]

Kim Sajet: Yeah.

Julie Packard: And we asked the public, you know, what do you want to learn about jellies? Because people were in love with our jellies exhibits and they said nothing.

[Laughter]

Julie Packard: They're just beautiful.

[Laughter]

Julie Packard: We just want to look at them and enjoy them and their aesthetics. So, the team, the design team came up with this concept jellies living art. That was the name of the exhibition and it and the tanks were framed with gallery frames. And, you know, surrounding people with the beauty of the bay and giving them exposure to the beauty of the animals and the colors of the farm of the school of sardines school. I mean it's so much art in nature. And we really celebrate that at the aquarium. And think of our ultimate goal really to be to get people to to know about and to care about the ocean and to act on its behalf.

[MUSIC]

Kim Sajet: So, uh Julie and Hope, would it be true to say that National Portrait Gallery has made a match with the two of you?

Hope Gangloff: Yeah. High five.

Julie Packard: Yeah. Yeah.

Kim Sajet: Yeah. You have a career.

[MUSIC]

Kim Sajet: A super huge thanks to Julie Packard and Hope Gangloff for joining me in the studio. You can see Hope's painting of Julie and on our web site: www.npg.si.edu/podcast. And while your online, head to www.SeafoodWatch.org and download the app. It's an amazing project that the Monterey Bay Aquarium started to help us all make ocean friendly choices when we eat seafood or when we're just looking for a new recipe. Our podcast team includes the remarkable Ruth Morris, the creative Jason Orfanon and the terrific Deborah Sisum and the insightful Rebecca Case-Meyer. Our theme music is by Joe Kye. Tarek Fouda is our engineer. Next episode, we talk to curator and author, and also friend, Paul Chaat Smith about a portrait of another change maker.

Other Speaker: Pocahontas was a player. She was important throughout her crazy short life. Died at 22. It was a real like "candle in the wind" situation.

Kim Sajet: Until next time, I'm your host Kim Sajet.

[MUSIC]