

## JackieDee

One thing that I always think it's really funny is like, people always like talk about Klimts' art 'the kiss', but they don't know that that was based off of Munch's art called 'the kiss,' that was based off of like, Rodin statue called The kiss. Like, that's the same damn thing. It doesn't exist in a vacuum.

Don't worry, we'll get to who this is in a bit.

When I first heard an artist point out the history of fan art, it really floored me. Of **course** artists are all about taking inspiration from the work that came before. Of **course** you start learning to define your style and interests by mimicking established work. Heck, most frescoes in Italian churches are basically fan art based off scenes described in the Bible!

Yet we tend to treat modern fan art as somehow divorced from this history. Well, not today!

I'm Sadie Witkowski and you're listening to In Defense of Fandom.

Since the fall of 2021, I've fallen into the rabbit hole of one of the biggest, most active fandoms that you maaaaaaaay have never heard of. It wasn't prestige television like The Sopranos, and it wasn't a wildly popular YA series of novels like Percy Jackson. No, instead I found myself in the diehard fandom of Supernatural.

But this podcast isn't about the CW's Supernatural. At least, not directly.

In Defense of Fandom explores the creative output of the SPN Family, as Supernatural fans call themselves, and illuminates the ways that fandom can be an incredibly positive influence in our lives.

I really do feel like Supernatural is THE BEST lens for this topic because of its underground popularity: it's an extremely popular show, but has never felt truly mainstream like other fandoms.

I'll be focusing on Supernatural, but I encourage you to listen for similarities with the fandoms of other shows or movies or games. And if you like what I'm doing, you can throw a 5 star review my way on apple podcasts. That really helps get the show's name out there and to other potential listeners!

So last episode, we entered the written world. And I have to admit, it's an area I'm much more familiar with than today's topic... And I really do mean that. I used to joke that my doodles were so horrible in high school that I just wrote lists of favorite books or characters in my notebook margins. I was just that bad at drawing, or at least that's how I felt.

But don't worry, even if I'm out of my element, I spoke with so many lovely artists that inspired me to want to try my hand at it again.

So welcome to the world of visual art, particularly art inspired by Supernatural.

**Liz**

People have asked me to sell my Misha poetry doodles. I won't do that. Because I'm afraid of being sued by him. I would cry forever. But also because it feels wrong. And it's very close to my heart.

Liz, or By Liz Hand on instagram, who you might recognize as the artist for this humble little podcast, has also made quite the name for herself with her line art 'doodles' as she calls them.

Liz has always had an artistic interest and eye. She used to work as a photographer and graphic designer before taking on the demanding role of full-time mom. So it makes sense that her minimalist line art would match her graphic design training in the way she structures her images. But for Liz, this all actually seems to come much more organically.

**Liz**

Most of my artwork, my ideas come to me in the middle of the night. Like I'll wake up and just be hit with weird inspiration out of nowhere I don't know. It's very strange kind of annoying, but [laughs]

I just pray that I remember it when I wake up in the morning

Assuming that Liz does remember the idea the next morning, she usually creates a black and white or sepia-toned image that she posts online and promptly ignores.

**Liz**

I throw my phone across the room after I post something.

I had the pleasure of meeting Liz in person at the 2022 Nashville Supernatural con and hearing this was completely unsurprising. Liz works really hard on her art, but hates to see people's responses. Even when they are overwhelmingly positive.

I think it has something to do with being shy, a trait I have NEVER been able to claim.

So let's jump to another artist, Jackie Dee, aka Winchester Reload on tumblr and twitter.

### **Jackie Dee**

I'm not a trained artist, I'm self taught mostly. I do have a little bit of art classes that I took in college. But it wasn't my major or anything like that. So I hadn't done art, probably for about 10 years or something. And then I started to watch supernatural. And I was very inspired by the characters, in particular Dean and Cas. I don't think that that's going to be a secret from anybody. That's, that's kind of the art that I do is, is Dean and Cas the majority of the time, I was very inspired by them.

But rather than just the show pulling her into the SPN Family, it was actually the meta conversation that was happening at the same time on tumblr that made her start creating.

### **JackieDee**

I call myself a high profile Lurker now, because I do spend most of my time still lurking behind the scenes. But people just sometimes know my name, or they or they've seen a post or some art or something from me. But I found Tumblr after I started watching and I was sucked in by the meta the like, the meta posts about it and the discussion with it.

Now, we can't really talk about fan art or even modern day fandom without addressing Tumblr... And I'm gonna have to be honest here, I've never really spent much time on the site. I was more of a deviant art kinda gal.

Tumblr is often described as a microblog site, but it's not really like livejournal or twitter or the other sites you might think of. It's more like a weird hybrid between meme and gif sharing and forum post style responses to other posters and lots and lots of visuals.

When Jackie says she was "sucked in by the meta," she's referring to the experience of seeing memes and fan art and fan responses to the show, rather than the actual show itself.

The average tumblr user tends to skew younger than other social networks and it really has engendered a culture all its own. If you want to learn more, I'll include some links in the show notes.

For the purposes of this podcast, all we really need to know is that it's the major platform that basically all the artists I spoke to mentioned as a place where they either first discovered fan art or built their fan art audience.

That was certainly the case for Jackie.

### **JackieDee**

Yeah, people know me now. But when I started posting art, nobody knew who the hell I was. I would, the art wasn't great to begin with, like I was pretty rusty. So I would post stuff. And you'd get like a couple notes. Maybe if you were lucky. But I also didn't really have any followers or anything like that at the time. So you kind of have to rely on that. You have to rely on yourself to just keep posting it and hoping that people will see it.

Even though Jackie has become a pretty well-known artist, especially in the Destiel segment of supernatural fandom, she remembers how hard she worked on her art and the time it took to develop her skills. That's why she likes to use her platform now to pay it forward.

### **JackieDee**

Every October, I host a supernatural themed kind of Inktober challenge.

[Sadie cuts in]

Inktober is a month-long unofficial art challenge started by artist Jake Parker with the goal to create an ink drawing every day of the month.

### **Jackie Dee**

That's called Sup-Tober, or Supe-Tober, or whatever. And so I would reblog or I do reblog all of the things that everybody makes to fill the prompt each day throughout the month. And my hopes in doing that was because I have a larger platform now that artists that don't or fic writers that don't, would get their things seen by, you know, more people. And I think it does help. I am overwhelmed by the amount of people that participate in that event. It's a lot at this point. And it's, people always look forward to whatever your, I think I've done it for five years now.

Her last Sup-tober had something like 2000 posts over the course of October. Artists don't \*have\* to submit a piece every day, but the goal is still to create as much as possible and for artists of all levels to build their skills.

### **JackieDee**

The goal is to do it every day because the things that you, the skill and stuff that you build with doing a challenge like that is kind of unmatched like because you kind of have to fight yourself by the middle of the month. And that's really the skill that you're trying to build there, you have to like, learn to push through the wanting to make it feeling, you know, or being motivated to make it kind of feeling.

Jackie clearly knows what it's like to struggle, whether that's with learning adobe photoshop or the procreate app, or even just nailing how to draw body parts like hands or eyes.

For artists, the craft isn't something you ever really stop learning, which is both fun and a massive challenge. But it takes time to build up to expertise and getting exposure to actually turn art into a career.

### **JackieDee**

I am a freelance artist. By trade. Now. That's how I make my living. I wasn't at the beginning. I was very fortunate that I got enough support and stuff from the fandom but I was able to build enough skill that I now make art for a living.

Through her experience in fan art, Jackie was able to make the transition from another career into a full time artist, while also trying to keep up with her fan art. And she isn't the only one balancing original and fan work.

[music plays]

While she moonlights making web comics, Lizlee is actually a graphic designer in her day job.

### **Lizlee**

I'm actually a designer by, by training, illustrator by passion. So like I kind of married the two and became a graphic designer.

She also first joined the SPN Family after seeing art that was being posted to tumblr.

### **Lizlee**

there's such a strong response to it on Tumblr, and that's where I would post it mostly. And there's such a huge, like, there's such a huge and powerful community behind it.

As a millennial, I'm quite comfortable online. But I had to ask Lizlee how the heck she knew to navigate tumblr, when it just seems so chaotic to me.

### **Lizlee**

Tumblr is one of those weird archaic things. It's really not like, it's not that you're not a digital native. It's just like its own beast, because it's definitely not like, one of these normal social media platforms. You know, it's like, it's kind of antiquated in some ways, because it's not profit driven.

So I do feel a little reassured. Anyways, Lizlee is no newbie to fandom culture and fanart. She's been drawing and selling her work at comic cons for years. But it did take an extra push from her partner to get into drawing Supernatural art.

### **Lizlee**

I've always table that Comic Cons just selling fine art like that. I do. And he's like, you know, people have been asking, like, Why do you never draw Supernatural? Like, you really liked the show. And we used to watch it together all casual-like unsuspecting, innocent people.

Since she made the leap, Liz has set herself apart with her distinctive greyscale short comics that use very little color.

### **Lizlee**

I've always really been drawn to grayscale as well. I really like sort of the monochromatic thing with like, little pops of color to emphasize mood or emphasize like, what the intent or what's going on.

When I asked Liz if her experience drawing Supernatural fanart changed or improved her artistic skills, she pointed to the technical skills that she's built over time.

### **Lizlee**

I've learned a lot about pacing. In terms of actual comic making. I've learned a lot about paneling and pacing. And, you know, really kind of boring technical things. But like things that if you don't do it, like you'll never get kind of a feel for it. Because when you're making comics, there's like a whole art of like, how to panel how to, how to emphasize your text, how to how to, like, I'm not a pro at this by any means. But some of those skills have definitely translated over to what I do.

So while she's not exactly creating comics in her actual job, those same principles have been really helpful in her design work.

But perhaps the best part of being a fan artist is hearing from folks who see and love your art. When Liz gets feedback from people who appreciate her art, it tends to blow her away.

Liz says she sometimes gets comments like this:

**Lizlee**

I was having this terrible day and seeing your, your comic just made it everything better. And, like, how are you...? Like, how do you stay human after reading something like that? Like, it's so it's, it's what every artist wants really is to make an impact.

Liz joked to me when we were talking about fellow fans' reception of her art that she didn't want to seem like she was giving a big academy awards speech or something, but that hearing those comments made her feel so humbled by all the support.

And if you were wondering, Liz has thought about taking her skills as a comic artist and trying to go for it as a fulltime career.

**Lizlee**

It was always my dream until I realized how much work it was. So I stick to like, short comic strips now because that's, I think that if you have a task that seems so monumental, and you have executive dysfunction, it's very discouraging. Whereas if you're doing like little comic strips, it's more of a digestible munch.

So while Lizlee is happy to spend at least an hour a day on her fanworks, she's still eyeing making a break into the comics world full time. At least if she ever does decide to make that leap, she'll have spent several years building up the skills to smooth her journey.

[music break]

Let's meet another comic artist, shall we?

**Scout**

I was in that golden age, that perfect chunk of Tumblr, where fans were. It was truly like a fan kingdom. Like that's what that was. It was like a bustling street. And that's where I

started to like, I was like standing. I felt like I was standing in the middle of, like, a street like one of those little little buzzer boys, but I was holding up comic books. And I was like, get your comic books.

Although she really covers a lot more art forms than just comics. If you're in the SPN Family fandom, I can almost guarantee you've seen some of Scout's art.

### **Scout**

I'm totally self taught. But I started teaching myself like I was a traditional painter first for a long time. And then I started doing digital and it was because of fandom that I was really, really interested in doing digital because the artists and fandom introduced me to just digital art for fun. And so,

I've done a huge paintings down to small, small books. I've worked with like the cast of the show, I've gotten the opportunity to do that I've gotten so I've worked in every single medium.

Scout, or Scoutstiel as her handle states on twitter, has been in some sort of fandom or another for decades. But it was through SPN and the Supernatural conventions that she was really able to break into doing both commissioned work as well as fan art.

It was through the conventions that the actors from the show first started to notice her art and put in requests of their own. Matt Cohen, an actor who played a younger version of Sam and Dean's father, commissioned Scout to help him promote a short film he made.

### **Scout**

Matt Cohen. He had me do a comic book for he had, it's called Mama Bear. It was something it was a project he worked on. wrote and starred in. It was a whole, that was it's awesome.

And even more exciting for a music nerd like Scout, she was asked to design a few of the album covers for the band Loudon Swain. We'll be hearing a lot more about Loudon Swain in future episodes, but to provide some context: they're a band who play at the live shows at every Supernatural convention. They perform a mixture of covers and original songs, with their big Saturday Night Special turning hotel lobbies into rock concert venues.

You actually heard them at the very beginning of the first episode in this series, but I don't want to spend too much time talking Loudon Swain here, when we'll be hearing from them, next episode. Anyways...



## **Scout**

as a kid, I always wanted to be a musician. Like, I was like, I want to be one, or I want to work with one. I want to be in the music space, somehow. So when like, super incredible musicians approach me, and they're like, We I really liked your work. We really like your work or whatever. My brain explodes, if I hadn't have gotten into this fandom that would have I would have never gotten to see that inner child happy like that.

It's kind of a funny line to walk for Scout, because she gets to collaborate with actors and musicians that she's also a fan of. And they got to know her \*because\* of her fanart.

## **Scout**

They know I'm a fan artist. So there's also that sort of element to it, too. I have a parasocial relationship with this person. How am I supposed to look through their lens? I can't do that. That's wrong. Wait, I'm supposed to. It's my job!

But Scout is thankful that because of her fanart, she was able to build her skills, start taking commissions, and become an artist full time.

## **Scout**

The reason I have a home right now is because of fandom and because of fan art.

That's not to say that she doesn't sometimes get burned out from all the commissions and work that people request. The downside of becoming a fulltime artist means she has to create whatever her clients request. And that means less time for her own art.

## **Scout**

At the end of the day, fan art is still the love of my life. And if I didn't have the other pressures of like, being alive and stuff, oh, fan art is all I'd do.

I would be a fan artist living in the woods. You aren't going to find me. You're just going to find little comics, like the Blair Witch. But instead of little things in the trees, it's little comic strips, and tiny paintings.

[music break]

To be honest, there are so many amazing fan artists in this community that I couldn't possibly represent them all. But I do want to try and at least display the variety of creative artistic talents within SPN Family.

And one core aspect of visual arts that we haven't even touched yet is photography. This is one of those fan aspects that I do think is rather unique to Supernatural fandom. DC comics or Star Wars fans create their fair share of fanart all the time, but I can't think of another fandom that has a whole group of photographers that attend conventions and try to nail the perfect shot of their favorite actor.

Granted, I don't know many fandoms that have such regular conventions, either. Like, a con nearly every month in the states? Plus occasional cons in Europe or Australia?

But we're not here to talk about the conventions, we'll hit that topic later. No, the point I'm trying to make here is that with regular panels hosted by the Supernatural actors, the SPN Family has fostered a regular group of photogs.

Take Jen's experience for example, aka Wayward Girl Photography, at her first convention getting bit by the photography bug. [quiet aside] I told you there's a bunch of Jen's in this fandom....

### **Jen (Wayward Girl Photog)**

I took some, took some photographs, but they didn't turn out great. So I was far back and I didn't have a good lens. And so literally at the airport coming home from that first convention, I was buying my ticket to Seattle's convention. So I'm like, I have to do this. I'm now. I've now been sucked in.

Before getting into con photography, most of Jen's photo experience was with outdoor scenes and long exposures, basically the exact opposite of the convention setting.

### **Jen (Wayward Girl Photog)**

Most of the, you know, like Astrophotography is 15 second exposures. And so it's very much just sitting there turn, like hit the button, let your camera do its thing, and then going back and editing. And with the like waterfalls, same kind of deal.

Jen enjoys outdoor photography for the beautiful natural scenes that she can capture, but in some ways it's more low stakes. A waterfall isn't going anywhere. Actors answering questions on a stage however...

### **Jen (Wayward Girl Photog)**

Panels are so much harder because some people like to sit and some people meander. Misha is very much a meanderer. He can be hard to get because the lighting is so

different off to the sides versus right in the center. So it's, it's a challenge to get anything usable.

Thankfully, Jen isn't struggling through her challenges alone. The SPN Family is nothing if not communal in sharing advice and resources.

### **Jen (Wayward Girl Photog)**

And I'm still asking questions, you know, at conventions with the friends that are there that are shooting, and I'm like, Hey, I'm having trouble, the light sucks. They generally always do. But how are you compensating for that?

Jen also does her best to pass the kindness along. She and other con photographers are generally really open to offering advice so that everyone can all feel proud of capturing a photo of their favorite actor or performer.

### **Jen (Wayward Girl Photog)**

Come up and talk to us and ask us questions or you know that there's a lot of people that are taking pictures and need, sometimes, a little bit of help. And that was actually something I got to do it in Nashville there was a friend that got to me that was one of our roommates in another room and she was just learning than sound like here's some tips these are the kind of the settings you want and that's why we kind of created our little group chats to help each other but also to help you know the people out there because everybody wants to take good pictures of their face you know, they you want that picture of Jensen or a picture of Misha or picture of Kim and Bri to look back and be like I was there and I took that.

And as Jen mentioned, many of the con photographers have created their own chat groups on twitter and discord to coordinate and discuss everything from lens to sharing pics of their pets.

It's an especially fun chat when many of them attend the same convention or other event and get to compare how they each approached it.

### **Jen (Wayward Girl Photog)**

Many of us were at the radio company show, probably at least a dozen or so, photographers slash con photographers and seeing all of our different angles that we had. But then how we each edit it, edited it, to how we saw it. So there was a lot of the same kind of shots, but everybody edits a different way. And so just seeing the creativity there was really cool.

In this case, Jen is referring to a concert by the band Radio Company that was held right after the 2022 Nashville convention. I definitely have a lot more to say on the band and that whole experience - yes, I was there - but I'm saving that for the next episode, which focuses on all things audio.

Anyways, when I was asking Jen about the camaraderie of fellow photogs and others who have branched out within the medium, she immediately mentioned Chris. Better known by her handle, DitchLilyTiger.

### **DitchLilyTiger**

And I found out that there were cons and I'm like, I just I have to go there are people that are that I, I want this. There are people that, that feel about the show the way I feel about this show.

She was particularly inspired by the images she was seeing on social media by other con photographers like Monica or Melancholy and Stardust. So, she decided to take the plunge and attend a con.

### **DitchLilyTiger**

It was like a tent revival. It was so and I'm not religious, I don't follow any of that stuff. But I like the pageantry of some of that stuff. Like the, the theater of it.

But back to the photography of it all... Her first photos from 2016 were a blurry mess from that convention's karaoke night. Seeing the pictures she had managed to take, she decided that she needed better gear and better training.

### **DitchLilyTiger**

I was like, I am getting a real camera. I am, I am figuring this out. And because the pictures that were coming back from the cons were amazing. They were beautiful. And mine was just, you know, blurry.

I was like, I am taking a class, I'm gonna take a digital... because I work at Ohio State and I can take classes, you know, for, for whatever if I want to I can take a class. And so I was like, I've taken a digital, I was like, I'll take a digital film class.

And by that next year, she could already tell how much her skills had progressed.

### **DitchLilyTiger**

And I took a class and I was like, the final project was whatever you want. And I was going to Seattle for 2017 supernatural con, and I was like, That's whatever I want. So I went to 2017 and with my camera and my little camera. And I had like I think I had like

silver seats again back when it was reasonable. And I I took, I don't remember how many pictures I took. But it was I like I like to look at him because like the ones that I took recently, I like to compare like a glow up.

This isn't to say that all Chris takes photos of is con panels. She was taking photos long before she fell into the SPN family, although she never really took it seriously until then.

When it comes to photos outside conventions, she's actually not drawn to humans at all. She prefers the empty spaces that feel transitional in nature. A space that she considers liminal.

### **DitchLilyTiger**

I'm a big fan of liminal space. And so I will take pictures of parking garages. That's the other thing that I do when I'm not taking comic con panel pictures. My other thing is I'm taking pictures of buses and buildings. I mean, and trees, like love trees.

She even told me that some of her best work of these empty spaces is when she's riding shotgun with a friend, driving through the Kentucky countryside.

### **DitchLilyTiger**

I will tell you it. It sounds crazy. But my best work is done. Hanging out of a car at 50 miles an hour. And that sounds crazy. Like my best friend, I'll drive and I will hang out the window and shoot along the highway when we travel. Because my best friend's, like, deep into bourbon. So we go into bourbon country. And as we're flying through Kentucky hills, I'm taking pictures of hay bales and cows and stuff.

Chris went from being a person-who-owns-a-camera to someone who now experiments with film in the darkroom and has even started playing with cyanotypes: that's a slow-reacting way of developing images that uses ultraviolet and blue light. And to some degree, that's the fault of Supernatural.

### **DitchLilyTiger**

Supernatural, I guess did technically put me into a dark room. It put me into a dark room. It made me take better pictures. It made me want to take pictures, you know what I mean? It was like, in order to be good enough.

[music break]

Look, as I said at the top of this episode, I'm not really a visual person. Like, I can appreciate the hard work that goes into drawing or painting or photography, but it's not really my wheelhouse.

In case you can't tell from the format of this whole series, I'm much more of an audio kinda gal. So I'm going to do what I do best, and let the real experts leave us with their final thoughts and advice.

[music plays under all these quotes]

### **Lizlee**

And frankly, like, when, when the world quote, unquote, ended with COVID, who did people turn to first? Like art, they went to art, they went to video games, they went to books, they went to getting back in touch with their creative sides. Because they were suddenly allowed the time and the space. Like who's like, Who defines what, what's valuable, quote, unquote, in terms of your, how you spend your time? You know, like, it's a very capitalist view to say, like, if you're not making money, if you're not progressing, like you're not valid in how you spend your time.

### **JackieDee**

If you're good at it, if you are going to be good at it, then you've spent your fair amount of time being frustrated to hell and back doing it. You know? Like because you have to learn like there's only one way to learn to do it. There's no shortcuts.

### **Scout**

Other fans are, they are happy and willing to help especially if you feel like you have something in you that you wish that other people would nurture. They are there to do it. If you believe in what you are making it, like if you believe what you're making is truly funny. If you're, if you're putting something out there that other people will truly believe that too.

### **DitchLilyTiger**

I'm now so used to experiencing events through the barrel of a lens that I can't experience in any other way. I feel like I should be taking pictures when I'm at a thing. Like I need to be looking at it through a viewfinder and not with my own eyes. And yeah, it's Supernatural, put me into this position.

And finally, I want to share this thought from Jackie when we were talking about how artists learn to draw by first copying what others have created.

## **JackieDee**

There's kind of this idea that it's like lesser, like fan art, fanfic, that kind of fan creations are like a lesser thing, because they are based off of something else. But I mean, like, everything that we make is based off of something else. And really, the interaction of the fandom is what keeps that original source alive. Otherwise, what would they have? I, I really think that creators should embrace the kind of fan interaction that really I have to give supernatural credit for.

[music ends here]

I told you we'd be focused on community, creativity, and collaboration within the fandom. Our first stop on this road trip was writing, and our second was visual art. So what's next?

Well, it's probably the world I'm most familiar with- let's listen to some audio creators talk about creating... audio.

[outro music]

Thank you to everyone who took time to speak with me and share what motivates them to create. There are so many wonderful artists that deserve to be included here, that I wasn't able to reach for this episode. I definitely recommend checking out the show notes where you'll find links to the awesome art created by our guests.

Editorial support was provided by Dr. Anna Funk.

Music was composed and performed by Chris Scott. Audio production help from Sean Ellis Hussey.

Cover art was designed by Liz.

Thanks to Rupert Gayes, Dani, and Marissa for supporting the show through ko-fi.

In Defense of Fandom was made possible through an unhealthy obsession, and your support via ko-fi. If you're not already supporting the show and you'd like to, you can find a link in the show notes to our ko-fi. Your support is deeply appreciated.