

On conversations with friends a source of inspiration



Artist and writer Marlowe Granados discusses processing her life through fiction, traversing various artistic formats, and the role of friendships in her creative life.

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As told to Celeste Scott, 2234 words.

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Your book *Happy Hour* is written as a series of diary entries in the voice of the main character, Isa. I'm curious what your own relationship to journaling looks like?

I was a really big keeper of diaries when I was a teenager. Not in a reflective way, but mainly just to kind of document my movements over the course of wherever I was. Obviously when you're a teenager, the way that you write in a diary is so specifically affirming your personality and what you believe your personality to be. In a way, that was helpful for me just to kind of get things out there, and also deal with my angst I guess *[laughs]*. I have quite a lot of friends that journal now, and I don't necessarily do it regularly at all. I think the only way that I am able to process my life is often just through fiction, and that's always been the case for the last, I would say, decade or so.

Because you're kind of processing your real life through fiction, do you find yourself infusing your real life stories and moments into your fiction?

Yes...? *[laughs]* It doesn't necessarily have to be actual, real storylines that have happened in my life. It's kind of trying to synthesize certain emotions and particular feelings that I can't really access in other ways. Sometimes things will happen in my life that are almost too obvious for fiction. It will sometimes be a little bit too unreal for it to make it into fiction. Just because it's too on the nose. And it is very funny when that happens in real life and you're like, I wouldn't even be able to put this in a book because no one would actually think it was very believable. But yeah, I think that it often has to do with getting closer to certain feelings. I have millions of conversations with all of my friends all the time. That's such a huge part of my process, having those extended conversations with the women in my life. I feel like that's always been so imperative.

What are you interested in exploring thematically through your writing and art right now?

I've been coming more to terms with what is expected of me as a woman. And also what is kind of allowed for me as a woman who's also an artist. Right now, as I'm in my 30s, I'm often like, Okay, what are the different available options for me? How does time feel different in my 30s? And also my relationship to domesticity—how do I negotiate that with the way that I've lived my life? Which has always been kind of out and about and kind of all over the place.

I'm interested in women's relationships with each other, and all the different ways that women get kind of forced to be caregivers. And forced to be the ones that are carrying the emotional weight of a partnership a lot of the

time. And also the ways that being an artist is in direct opposition to a lot of that. Being an artist I think often you have to be the most selfish person ever.

I was in a situation with my grandfather in the last year where I was a primary caregiver for him. It was an interesting thing because it was like, I feel so young to be taking care of someone who's an elderly person. There is an interesting dynamic within my family of being like, okay, well you live this life where you have a flexible schedule. I was put in a position where I was like, 'Well, if no one else does it, who's going to do it?' And I think that women are often put into that position.

Do you think of yourself as a writer or an artist and does the distinction matter to you?

I've always thought of myself as an artist. I think people think of themselves as writers in a very strange lifestyle way. I don't know. I've always been someone who is very project-based. So, even when I was writing my first novel, it was like, this is just a really long art project that I'm doing. And then the next thing, who knows what form it's going to take. When I was much younger, I was a photographer. I liked the feeling more because I would take the photos, I would develop them. And it was a body of work that was so fast. With fiction, it's just this slog of getting to it, having the discipline, getting eyes on it and then getting it published. Then it's five years later and you're like, I'm kind of over this now [laughs].

I think I have more of an artistic temperament. I used to joke when I was in university, I always made them put me in the class with the poets instead of the fiction writers. I got along so much more with the poets for some reason. I think someone who really identifies as being a fiction writer is more tied to the form. I think that I require a little bit of abstractness to be able to work freely.

When you're interested in an idea, is it always clear to you what medium you want to explore it through i.e. a novel or some sort of visual art form?

Yes. I've always found that the dynamics between women is much better served in fiction. I have always thought this, and my idea of it has been more solidified as I've gotten older: I think romantic relationships are much better served visually on screen and in film than, for me, writing about it. Something about writing about relationships in fiction makes me feel very... you know what it is? I think it's the weight of - let's say in a heterosexual relationship - the weight of a man's presence in fiction feels so much more heavy or present, and it's almost like an imbalance with the female characters. At least, on screen, there's an equal amount of visual time spent. You don't feel that kind of like, oh, we have to think about what this man is going through. I feel like it's a little bit more balanced in that way.

And then when I'm painting or something, I'm just like, I really want to use these pinks and greens together because it makes me feel a certain way. And that's such a completely different way of thinking about something when you have to sit and write fiction.

I recently watched your short film, The Leaving Party, and I love it when I can see something like a visual piece of art that an artist has made and it reminds me of something else that they've done in a completely different medium. Is there anything that filmmaking offers to your creative process that novel writing doesn't and vice versa?

I mean, the collaborative process of filmmaking is so different. It's funny because when I write fiction, I know the parts that I'm being lazy about that I'll just return to later. In filmmaking it's always such a struggle to get it done with whatever budget you're working with or the people that you're working with. But it's kind of like, this is the best that I could do with what I had. I feel like there's more of a sense of playing around in filmmaking. There's less of a consequence because it's spread across a bunch of people who have agreed upon this being an interesting point of view to shoot, and all these different aspects of it that have come together. With fiction, it's really just me sitting at a desk, terrorizing myself over time and being like, "I need to get to this word count today!"

For me, the fun part about fiction is sending the bits and pieces that I have to friends and getting feedback on

what we've been talking about. Because a lot of what I put in my fiction are the topics of conversation that are very present in my female friendships, what we go over and over again in our lives, trying to parse it out. And hoping when I send it out that I'm giving a shape to these concerns in a way that is only possible in fiction, I think.

What was it like for you to act in *The Leaving Party*? Did you find yourself altering the script in real time at all?

It's funny because I acted in a film that premiered at Berlinale. It's called Matt and Mara by Kazik Radwanski. They just sent me a deleted scene. The way that Kaz films, he has beats that he wants his actors to hit in conversation. There's no real written script. So we just kind of talk and the takes are like 20 minutes long. And with me acting, it's very funny because I think I put myself in *The Leaving Party* because this particular scene had a monologue that goes quite long. It always feels like karaoke when you're doing a take because you're just trying to get the notes right. And then afterwards immediately you're just like, I want to do it again, like in a fun way. For me, I was really like, okay, I'm also directing. I wrote the script. I'm kind of having to remember this really long thing and my memory is not great, to be honest. And that's why I think when I was improvising on Kaz's film, I was like, this is much better. It feels much more off the cuff.

I'm not a really precious person. I don't need perfection every time I do something. I just want to be able to do it in a way that feels to the best of my ability at that time. Again, I'm not very strict. I would be the worst stage mom. I've only done on camera stuff a few times, but I think it's another interesting way to see how certain aspects of how I am are translating into a different medium. And if I'm collaborating on someone else's project, how that is aiding in their storytelling. That's an interesting dynamic as well for me.

Do you have any rituals for carving out mental space to write and/or connect with your creative self?

Oh my God, I wish. I mean, okay. I really just started having a little bit more of a disciplined studio practice. Before, I had a home office, and so I was really precious about how I started my day. I'd listen to a podcast and all these things. And then I realized that actually I just need to walk a little bit. So once I got my studio, the walking and just kind of being able to be in my own world a little bit more is a good run-up to me being able to sit at my desk and work for a few hours straight.

I have a lot of books that I have on hand all the time that are references for me. I like to poke around at those over the course of the day, depending on what I'm struggling with. I'm also in constant communication with people all the time. I'm always texting my friends or emailing people and just kind of trying to parse things out. So usually I'll leave my desk to talk on the phone with someone or just catch up with someone and figure out what's going on in their lives.

What I've actually been finding very interesting is revisiting old work and just rereading things. I don't have that kind of embarrassment, actually. It's helpful for me to kind of go back and look at things that I had written years ago and never really published or did anything with, just to see where I was at. Often I think I'm reinventing a wheel when I'm writing something new, but I'm actually just echoing something that I wrote five years ago.

In *Happy Hour*, Isa has a lot of rules that she lives by. Do you have any personal rules that you are currently living by?

I always like to make sure that I'm tending to my friendships in a very devoted way. I want to make sure that no one feels like they're being forgotten. I always try to keep checking in on different people all the time. And it's obviously harder now because a lot of my friends are living all over the place. But I think that's just kind of something that's good for yourself. And also, I think there's also a part in the *Happy Hour* that I recall where it's like even if you've been away from your friends for so long and you come together again, there's still that exact warmth still present. I think that that's something that I'm always striving for within my friendships.

Marlowe Granados recommends:

Talking to strangers

Cherry Coke Zero

Fig, my Pomeranian (Everyone who meets Fig wants a Pomeranian and that is a mistake)

Buying flowers for your friends

Long, roving phone calls

Name

Marlowe Granados

Vocation

artist, writer

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