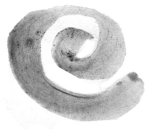
On why art is easy



Artist Hannah Tishkoff discusses wanting to win people over, how the beginning is also the middle and the end, and the power of the beat drop.

May 15, 2026 -

As told to Claudia Ross, 1950 words.

Tags: Art, Inspiration, Creative anxiety, Education, Beginnings, Independence.

What was your process for creating the works in your recent show?

A lot of the show was driven by exploring new materials. I started using Flashe and oil. The title of the show, *Beginning of a Poem*, is this homage to having a beginner's mind and the exploratory experience you have when you are trying out a material, which I feel like is also a metaphor for a loosened approach to living.

Your show makes the beginning feel like a place.

The beginning is also the middle and the end. And the middle and the end are the beginning. The materials are my entry point. I'm specifically using found materials and materials that I don't feel like I have mastery over; I am able to access a level of freedom with them. It's more challenging to access otherwise, so it's like I am playing a game with myself, where I say, "Well, I have nothing to lose." And then you're in the thick of it, and you become invested. Through that process, I become excited and satisfied.



Hannah Tishkoff, *L.I.F.E. (Line In Forward Exploration)*, 2026, acrylic, oil, flashe, and collage on found wood, 15 x 27 x 1 in., 38.10 x 68.58 x 2.54 cm.

I like that it's a trick for yourself.

It does feel like a trick. I mean, there's so much muck in your mind that you have to get through to make art. In the fall I felt a lot of pressure—I was starting grad school—to make nice, new, successful things, and it really dulled me. It felt like I was trying to produce from the front door of my mind. I felt stuck and uninspired. And then I got sick over winter break and I was home a lot, laying low for a couple weeks. During that period of time, I let go of everything, and right after that I made basically all the work in the show.

I felt that in grad school as well: I was trying to make work that was more grown up and complete than I was. And then I had to unlearn that a little.

The creative process is completely mysterious and requires a lot of self-trust and surrender, but I think wanting to win people over is also an important part of the process. And in some ways, I think art should be about winning people over. I don't want to alienate people. I feel like if I happen to be in a position where I, for whatever reason, can be hopeful, then it feels like a responsibility to express that. It's like the waves of the ocean. You get tangled up and stressed out, and you want to please everyone, and then you go crazy, and say, "Screw all that. Cut me loose. I want to be free." And then you do it all over again.



Hannah Tishkoff, *Beginning of a Poem*, 2026, colored pencil on found wood, 9 x 9.5 x 1 in., 22.86 x 24.13 x 2.54 cm.

Does the work come out of both sides of that cycle?

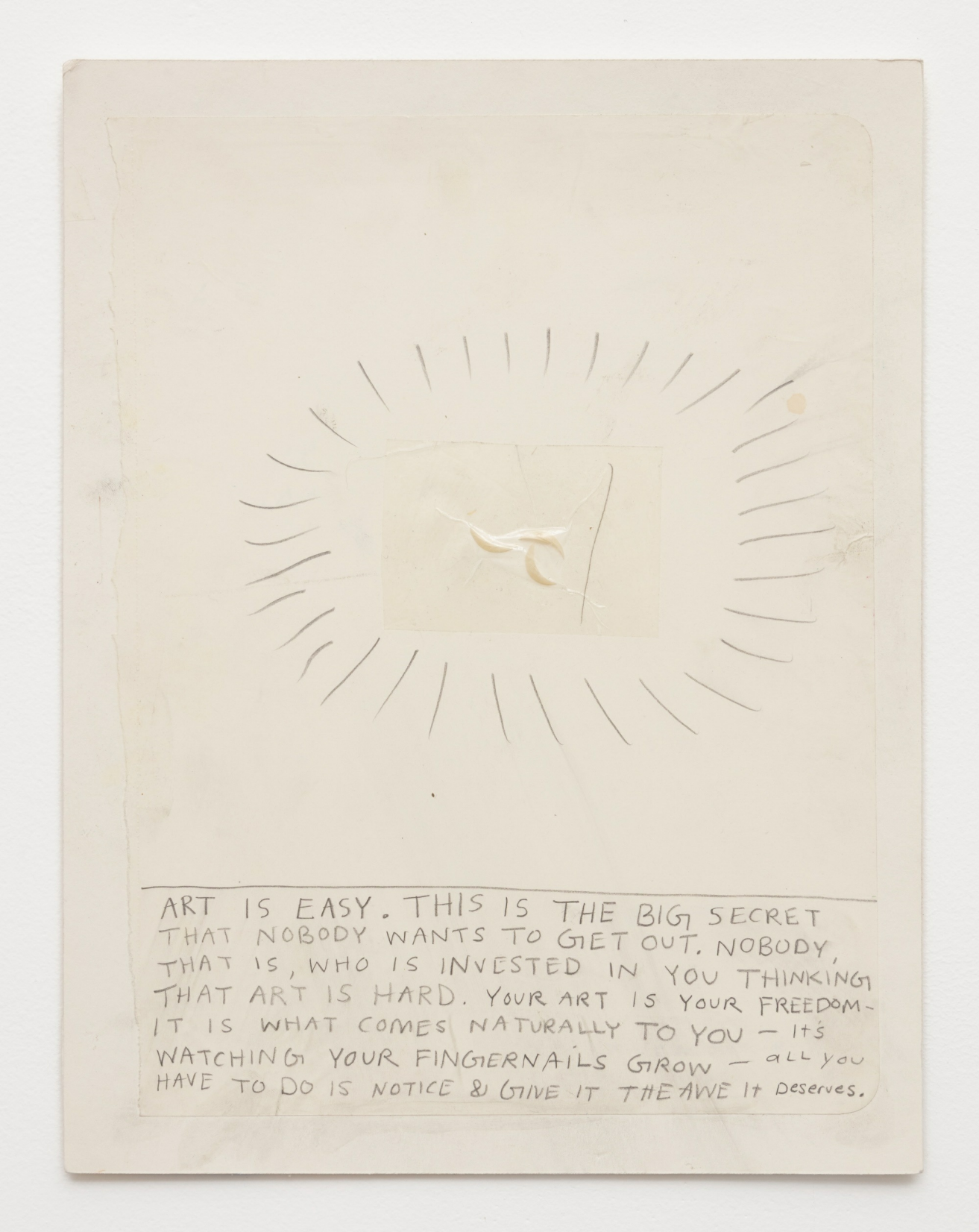
When I wasn't sure if there was going to be a show, I was able to just have a good time and amuse myself. I have to play these games with myself to stay entertained. And then, once I'm there, I can keep playing games forever. I never want to go home from the play date.

What do the games look like?

One of the games is using found materials. I use a lot of canvases that I find. I tell myself, "The stakes are zero because this is garbage; it can only go up from here." Sometimes I'll incorporate elements of the previous painting into what I do, and that feels like an instruction or a map. Color is a big way that I play games because it's so satisfying to try to figure out which colors look good together. It feels like being a

hummingbird, tapping into this instinct that's like, "My survival depends on finding the prettiest flowers with the closest proximity to each other, and I need to drink from them."

I want the fun and expressiveness to be central to my work. It's like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of paranoid reading versus reparative reading. I want my work to invoke a reparative reading: the pleasurable experience that I'm having while figuring out how to be alive. I want the pleasure I take in delivering that experience to be transferable to the viewer, so that they can have a sense of participation. I don't want to alienate people. It's a conversation. I think that's why language is important to my work. Language is extremely specific and comes from inside of your body, but it's also a communal resource that we all share.



Hannah Tishkoff, *Art is Easy*, 2026, graphite, fingernail clippings, tape, and cardstock on paper, mounted on panel, 20 x 16.5 x 1.75 in., 50.80 x 41.91 x 4.45 cm.

Words are a huge part of your artwork.

I'm obsessed with words. Words are a big way I play games, because words are so evocative, and I like to take them out of context. Another game I play with myself, which is a game I've been playing since I was probably a 7th grader, is playing music I really like and then writing down the lyrics and drawing them. I love song lyrics. I was just talking to my friend about how we want paintings to feel like beat drops. I love the accessibility of pop music of all kinds. Any genre of music can be considered pop music if it has that zing.

A painting is a moment. Painting happens in the moment of encountering the artwork. It has the potential for the "beat drop" feeling. There are lines in a short story or a novel that are "beat drop"-adjacent, too. One of the works in the show has a line from one of Kenneth Patchen's picture poems where he writes, "Beyond love, there is no belief," which is the most beautiful sentence I've ever read.

It's a translation.

Yeah. A translation of this syncopated, emotional quack science that I formulated in collaboration between myself and reality.

Sometimes the response will be that my work is very playful or childish, and I think that's always something I'm negotiating. On the one hand, what comes out of me looks like this and I can't think about it too much. Still, I have this paranoia about childishness being opposed to rigor. But really, I think there's nothing more rigorous than trying to be free. What could be a tougher job than trying to reach a free, preverbal flow state?

Ultimately, my work comes from a place of need. I need to figure these things out. I need to understand how to live. I guess there is a pedagogical bent in that orientation because I have a background as a teacher.





Hannah Tishkoff, *The Shape of Things To Come*, 2026, flashe, acrylic, oil, and paper on Masonite mounted on panel, 36 x 24 in., 91.44 x 60.96 cm.

Are there connections between your teaching background and your art?

I think there's a generosity in a teacher's understanding of what art is and what it is capable of that resonates with me. I think art is a practical tool to teach people about the world.

I feel like I see that coming through in the work, especially in one of my favorites, "Art is Easy." It felt like a beat drop in the show. But is it always true that art is easy?

I think what I mean by "art is easy" is that art is natural. So much of being an artist is paying attention and being attuned to what is already happening materially and socially. One of my favorite essays about art is by John Berger. It's called "The White Bird." He writes that the artist tries to imitate these fleeting moments of nature and turn that moment of attention into an unceasing experience.

Is it ever not easy?

It's not easy if you're judging yourself and putting pressure on yourself and having a certain expectation of what the outcome is. Then it's impossible.

Art is easy, or it's impossible.

It’s a tragedy when art becomes impossible because it’s also so easy. Art is so normal. It’s the least crazy thing to do. It’s hard not to make value judgments between those two experiences when you’re thinking, “I’ve hit my stride. I found my way. This is better than when I was lost in the dark.” But you only know what light is in relationship to that darkness.



Hannah Tishkoff, *Things Fall Back*, 2026, oil, flashe and acrylic on found wood, 10 x 13 x 1.5 in., 25.40 x 33.02 x 3.81 cm.

I see echoes of LA art in your work: Mike Kelley, John Baldessari, even a little Chris Burden. We both grew up in Los Angeles, in the Valley, and we live here now. How does LA filter into your work?

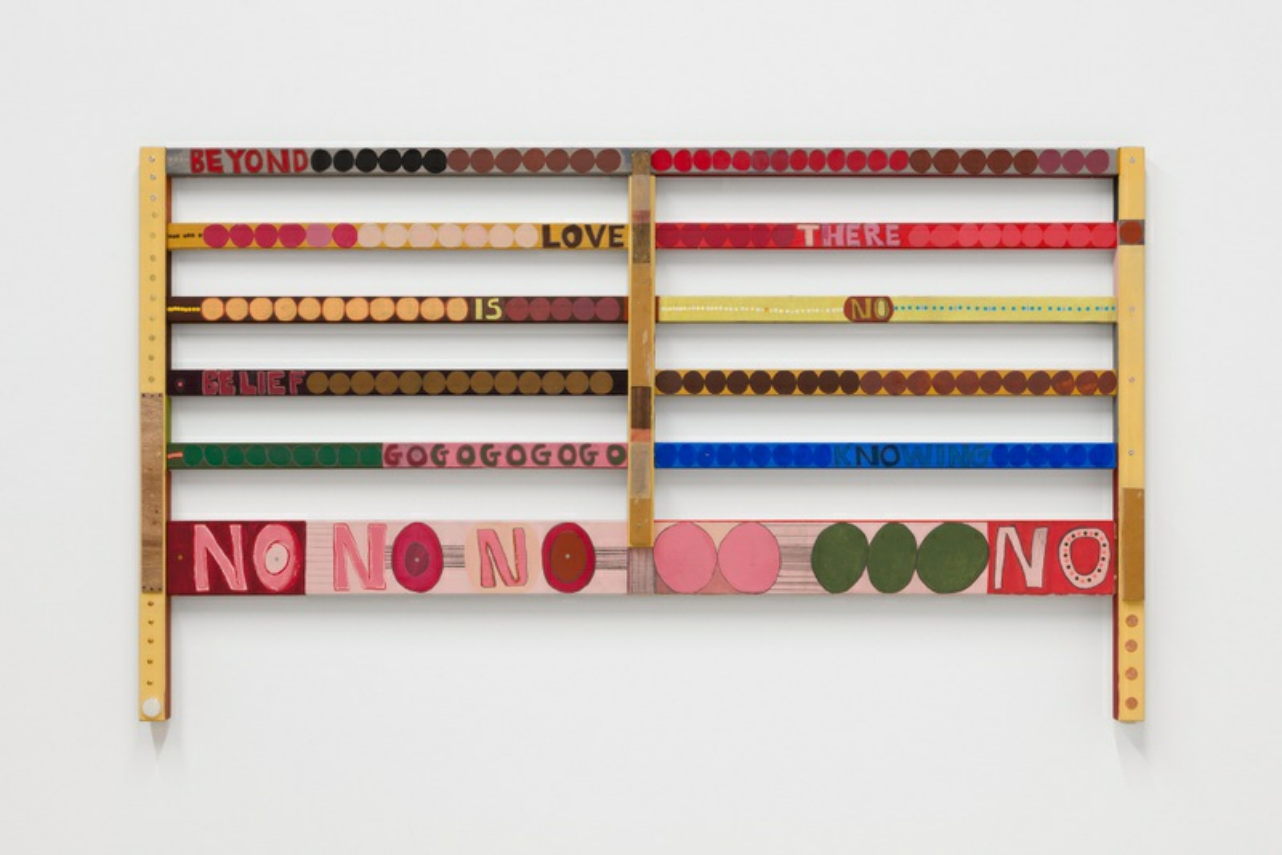
LA filters in at every single level. When I was a senior in high school, the Mike Kelley retrospective came to MOCA. Honestly, I don’t think I would be an artist if that show didn’t plant ideas in my head about using language, being anti-institutional—all from a place of a deep love of life. I think a teenage part of me is still trying not to lose that magic.

I’m a third-generation Angeleno. I’m inspired by the patchwork spirit of the city. LA is so loose and weird. All the loose marbles roll down here, and I come from a lineage of loose marble people. Those are my people, that’s my audience.

In LA, artists are also rebelling against the sheen of the entertainment industry.

It’s really formative to how I grew up. If you’re a kid growing up in Los Angeles, you always feel a little pissed

off that you're not being discovered at the mall. After that it's easier to say, "Screw all of this. I'm going to make art. I'm not going to be in a commercial." But at the same time, LA is a site of reinvention. Being ahistorical is the game that we're all playing. The truth is this nimble, moving target.



Hannah Tishkoff, *Beyond Love There is No Belief* , 2026, acrylic, oil, and pennies on headboard 36.25 x 63 x 2 in., 92.08 x 160.02 x 5.08 cm.

Do you have any dream projects?

Beat drops. I want to be in a rock band. I love rock and roll.

Musicians are the most powerful artists. They're the ones that I'm the most jealous of.

Music is so powerful. You can't sing along to a painting.

I think you could be a pop star.

I want to be a pop star.

Hannah Tishkoff recommends:

Swimming in the ocean on New Year's Day

The Bonaventure Hotel, a brutalist maze in Downtown Los Angeles

"Nothing good gets away," John Steinbeck's 1958 letter to his son in love

Maggie’s Organics cotton socks are the best socks ever

Poto and Cabengo, amazing documentary about identical twins who invented their own language

Name

Hannah Tishkoff

Vocation

artist