

HOW'S WORK S2 GALLERY FINAL

Voiceover: How's Work is an unscripted one-time counseling session focused on work. For the purposes of maintaining confidentiality, names, employers and other identifiable characteristics have been removed, but their voices and their stories are real.

[00:00:30] **Esther Perel:** Creative relationships are complex, multilayered and often intense. Whether it is an actor and the agent, a writer and their editor, or in this case, an artist and her art dealer, these relationships often straddle the dimension that is highly personal and intimate with business and professionalism. A line that can often be blurred, can even sometimes completely dissolve.

[00:01:03] **Gallerist:** I think we have a really great relationship, actually. We don't have any like points of contention, but sometimes when I'm going to work with a new artist, that can cause like a sort of challenging aspect because of our proximity.

[00:01:17] **Esther Perel:** And especially when the artist is just starting out and it is such a sense of being taken care of, of being embraced. The artist can say, "You saw me, you discovered me." And while she has felt deeply seen and understood, she lives in constant fear that she could be replaced by a younger, new, rising emerging artist.

[00:01:43] **Artist:** You know, in my, in my dark moments, there's a sense that she has 14 of me on her roster, and I have one of her.

[00:01:54] **Esther Perel:** The gallerist who invests deeply in her artists, she too is afraid of loss, of disloyalty, of betrayal. "You come to me when you're young and innocent, I help you rise. And then you go to the bigger ones."

[00:02:14] **Gallerist:** She does have other gallerists and will have more gallerists. Eventually there'll be three of us across the world working with her. But I see the relationships with my artists, I am extremely close to some of them. There's like a handful that are really some of my best friends, including her. I think it's an interesting thing to explore that she has this feeling because I don't feel that way.

[00:02:37] **Esther Perel:** This dynamic between jealousy and the fear of loss is at the heart of their conversation.

That is not surprising that you would have a different experience of this. You know, the experience of one artist with many gallerists, but you are for her the first one that she has known and on some level, what I'm hearing, what I add [laughs], what I added to your sentence when you spoke was, "And I would love it if you were all to me [laughs] and I didn't have to share you." And of course, when I hear a sentence like that, my next thought is, tell me about your experience with sharing.

[00:03:29] **Artist:** Hmm. I mean, I, I feel like I should immediately say that I'm, that I'm not an only child and that I feel like that would be the, the ultimate stereotype for someone who doesn't quite know how to share. But I'm not, I'm not entirely sure I do know how to share. I'm not sure I can tell where sharing ends and me getting nothing begins.

[00:03:51] **Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:03:53] **Artist:** And I think, yeah, my brother and I growing up, we had very different childhoods, I think. I think we had a very different attitude from each of our parents. And, and I think a huge premium was placed on being special. And if not the only one, then the best one, the most clever one, the, the highest grades, the best of sport.

[00:04:15] And I, I jumped through those hoops pretty well. And I, and I wonder whether I came into, you know, this, which is my first art relationship, you know? Whether it was a real friendship and there was real work. I wonder whether I came to that expecting to be sort of treasured for, you know, jumping through certain hoops above, you know, these sort of pseudo siblings that we call the other artists.

[00:04:42] **Esther Perel:** This is an amazing sentence, sharing is the beginning of nothing.

[00:04:49] **Artist:** Yeah. Just like a hop, skip, and a jump towards eventually having things taken.

[00:04:53] **Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How did you meet and how did you choose each other?

[00:05:00] **Gallerist:** So, uh, someone who works with me has known her work and I had asked him, "Are there any interesting artists I should look at?" And he had recommended I look at her work. Um, I wrote to her and said, "I'd love to meet you for a studio visit." And I didn't hear back for like three weeks. And I thought, "God, that's so rude. Like, even if she doesn't want to, I think that at least she'd write and say, thanks, but no, thanks."

[00:05:24] Finally, she wrote back and said, "Okay, let's meet." And it was just before Christmas. And I went over to her studio and the way that I remember it-

[00:05:31] **Artist:** Christmas Eve.

[00:05:31] **Gallerist:** Yeah, Christmas Eve.

[00:05:32] **Artist:** On Christmas Eve.

[00:05:33] **Gallerist:** The way I remember it was that we just had this incredible, like immediate connection. We spoke for hours, and when we left, we were already like, "Let's do this." So I always describe it as like getting married in Vegas. Like for me it felt like a very instant, like, um, emotional and intellectual connection. I always think of it as we were both entering a new life for different reasons.

[00:05:57] **Artist:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:05:58] **Gallerist:** It's like we met at this really key stage where I had just finished a cancer treatment and had just broken up a 15 year marriage, and I was having to like, I don't know, rediscover my identity on so many levels. And I think she was in a similar place for different reasons. So I think that was also a really meaningful thing for me, that, that we started at this point together.

[00:06:24] **Esther Perel:** And for you?

[00:06:26] **Artist:** Yeah, I'll, I'll cop to the Vegas marriage style. I just, I mean, I had, I had a slot at rehab but when you came to the studio. Well, anorexia that morphed into a kind of anorexia bulimia, had just been getting steady steadily and steadily, steadily worse. I was drinking a lot of alcohol. I was using drugs. I was sort of stepping into the art world for the first time and couldn't believe how much free alcohol was there. And, uh, how many drugs I was being offered.

[00:06:53] I was incredibly unhappy, and there were sort of, you know, my work was being shown for the first time. I think, I think there's something about these dreams sort of starting to come true that completely freaked me. And I was, yeah, the professionals I was seeing at the time were putting pressure on me to go to rehab.

[00:07:10] And so we met, however that email got replied to. And I remember I texted you a week later or something, and I said, "So I'm going to go to rehab for 28 days." And you said, "Okay, well, I guess we'll just ship the work while you're not there and I'll see you in Brussels in March."

[00:07:33] **Esther Perel:** I'm amused to hear that the way she accepted this new job offer was by basically not saying, "Thank you, [laughs] I'm really honored," but by saying, "I'm going to rehab for 28 days. I'll see you when I come out." And for the employer, the dealer, the gallerist, to basically say, "Okay, take care of yourself. I'll deal with the work. See you when you come out." That in itself, frames something that is very unique to the relationship between the dealer and the artist and to the creative relationships in the art world altogether.

[00:08:15] **Artist:** Just that you were okay with that and didn't see it as this sort of inconvenience or, or some kind of extra drama that you didn't need was... And the, you know, and you'd really, really dug into everything I'd made, that was, you know, everything that was possibly available on the internet. And then more, that you've dug into everything I'd made, including my writing. And, and I, yeah, I just thought, "I, I have to work with this person."

[00:08:40] **Esther Perel:** Because she was deeply curious and invested-

[00:08:44] **Artist:** Yeah.

[00:08:44] **Esther Perel:** ... in really getting to know you and what you do?

[00:08:48] **Artist:** Yeah. And she was reeling off bits of my writing that I forgot I wrote that were written in, you know, 2011 or something. And, and she said, "What do you mean about that?" And I said, I go, "My God. I really don't remember."

[00:09:08] **Esther Perel:** Nothing beats feeling deeply understood, seen, and then also, supported. As an artist, it isn't just something you do, it is who you are. And so if you see my work, you see me. If you value the work, you value me. The degree of identification between the maker and the product, between the creator and the artwork is so intense, and that itself gets re-experienced in the relationship sometimes with the gallerist, as these two women are experiencing with each other.

[00:10:02] **Artist:** Yeah. If I hadn't have been so out of it and possibly drunk, I, I wish, I wish I could remember it more.

[00:10:09] **Esther Perel:** But maybe this is part of what she gets about you too.

[00:10:14] **Artist:** Sure.

[00:10:14] **Gallerist:** What is? What do you mean?

[00:10:16] **Esther Perel:** That you were not even fazed by the 28 day rehab. Maybe understood her fragility or battles.

[00:10:27] **Artist:** Yeah.

[00:10:28] **Esther Perel:** And how they intertwine with her artwork.

[00:10:32] **Gallerist:** Yeah, absolutely. And I think that for me, if you want to redefine some kind of like unconditional acceptance of someone, to me, that is it. When you see the person fully and you're like, "That's okay." So for me, I have, yeah, I work with different artists and have different sort of turmoil or whatever, but I, I'm not fazed at all, they can tell me anything.

[00:10:55] **Artist:** You're drawn to it.

[00:10:56] **Gallerist:** Yeah, I'm drawn to it [laughs].

[00:10:57] **Artist:** It's like they are your, these are your calories. You run on this stuff.

[00:11:00] **Gallerist:** That's not quite it. That's not quite it.

[00:11:02] **Esther Perel:** [laughs] You have food metaphors everywhere [laughs].

[00:11:05] **Artist:** Yeah. Expect, expect a, a few more. I mean, yeah, this is, I mean, it's still, it's still an issue for me. It's still, it's still annoying at the forefront of my mind.

[00:11:13] **Gallerist:** Yeah.

[00:11:13] **Artist:** But I-

[00:11:14] **Gallerist:** I just don't like the metaphor because it's not like I like, "Hmm, this is so delicious [crosstalk 00:11:18] I like it as a story." That's not it at all.

[00:11:20] **Artist:** It's not a thirst for drama and gossip. You know, you know what to do with turmoil. You know, you didn't take it all for yourself and sort of like delight in it. You just, you know what to do with it. You know what to do with mine.

[00:11:31] **Esther Perel:** Say more.

[00:11:34] **Artist:** I grew up with two doctor parents, physical doctors, you know, medicine. And when a mental illness occurred at the very beginning of my teens, I, they had trouble taking it seriously. There was a sense of like, you know, "Get an

illness that we can see." I mean, even though it is, you know, for all intents and purposes written on your body when you have anorexia, you know?

[00:12:01] But that I sort of grew up with cancer being, you know, the, the ultimate thing that befalls you and anorexia a product of a kind of, of a, middle-class like spoilt bratishness, that just gets taken too far. And that we both arrived to the relationship with, you know, with these bodies that weren't quite how they were supposed to have turned out. You helped me take my illness a little bit more seriously as an illness, you know, rather than some kind of a moral deficiency.

[00:12:34] **Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Connect this very personal, very intimate, very physical, granular relationship, with the fact that it also is a professional relationship.

[00:12:51] **Artist:** Yeah.

[00:12:51] **Esther Perel:** How do you go back and forth?

[00:12:53] **Gallerist:** Yeah. I always say that artwork cannot help but be an extension of the artist. When it's a good artist. They can't help it for the work to be an extension of themselves. And so for me, the, the way that I think about it now is that, you have two people who are just trying to find their own truth, like the artist, by creating me, by trying to connect those dots between what they're creating, what I'm thinking, what someone else is going to think when they look at it.

[00:13:19] And so I've accepted that, that there is no real boundary. And I think that the fact of it being this like third thing that holds you together, to me is not dissimilar to, like, if you're married and you have children, like, you're, co-creating something. For me, it feels like one more pillar rather than something that gets in the way. It helps hold up the relationship during those moments of instability. But it gives us motivation to like see it through.

[00:13:46] **Esther Perel:** Because we have a shared goal.

[00:13:49] **Gallerist:** Yeah.

[00:13:49] **Esther Perel:** Hmm. That is separate from just the two of us.

[00:13:53] **Gallerist:** Yeah. That's how I think of it. And the way that I work with my artists is, I really like to give them as much freedom as possible.

[00:14:07] **Esther Perel:** What she highlights in her role as the art dealer, is that there is the relationship between the artist and the dealer. But there is also the partnership, the joint project, which is the actual creation of the career of the artist, in which they are bought involved. The artist brings the work, the dealer sells the work, makes it known to the world outside. As she describes it so perfectly, "I connect the dots." But they need each other and they articulate it quite beautifully. And the project keeps them in check.

[00:14:52] **Artist:** I think where, where you see the project of an art career or this thing that we share as a, as a third pillar, that kind of keeps it together, I just see that as a kind of more pressure, more like, the stakes are raised. Because if I lose you, not only do I lose you, I lose the work that we've built together. And I think

because you've had relationships with other artists, you know what it's like to push through.

[00:15:15] **Gallerist:** I definitely do [laughs].

[00:15:19] **Esther Perel:** For you it's, "I have you, or I lose you."

[00:15:22] **Artist:** Yeah.

[00:15:22] **Esther Perel:** And in order to have you, I almost need to feel like I am the only one or I'm your only one, or I'm your special one. Because if it's not 100% of that, then I instantly vacillate to the other side, which is, "I'm not just one of many, I'm nobody."

[00:15:41] **Artist:** Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

[00:15:43] **Esther Perel:** You know? That's a very, very personal experience, very deeply personal experience to bring to what is also a very professional relationship.

[00:15:56] **Artist:** Yeah. What I, what I thought of as work, you know, growing up, especially, you know, with doctor, lawyer, real estate people, this is just not what I thought work was.

[00:16:06] **Esther Perel:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:16:07] **Artist:** The art world is really where you can, people can be very, very messy. People can lie, you know, we have kleptomaniacs, we have compulsive liars. We have people, you know, who probably should have gotten into therapy 25 years ago, but for some reason haven't, and used a lot of cocaine. Like, it just, it's a place that doesn't ask you to look at your problems and that, I think that's a blessing and a curse. And I'm not, and I'm talking about the art world in general, I'm not talking about your kind of microcosm of it.

[00:16:38] **Esther Perel:** It's a place that doesn't ask you to look at your problems, or it's also a place that actually sees those problems as sources of creativity.

[00:16:47] **Artist:** Yeah, that too. I mean, I, I think there's a, in some cases there is almost a superstition where you think that in order to, you know, be good at art, good at making things good in, good in this field, that you need to hang onto your, all the dark shit.

[00:17:01] **Gallerist:** But, you know, it's interesting because for me, I agree with the sentiment of what you're saying, but I see it from such a different angle. So there is definitely this story that people tell themselves about the tortured geniuses, whatever. But the way that I see it as the art world and art allows for more freedom than most spaces. And that's for every participant, it's not just the artist, it's also the collectors, the curators.

[00:17:23] And so for me, it becomes a place of like being able, holding space for any and every human condition, because we're all coming together around an emotional discussion via visual means. And then also, to the thing of like the personal and the professional, when you asked her to elaborate on having such a personal take toward a professional issue, like I feel the same, actually. I think that my take is extremely personal.

[00:17:50] Because I come from this... Like, I hate these mothering analogies that come up in the art world in the dealer-artist relationship. But if I'm honest, like ultimately, I have a belief that I'm enacting a sort of like what I think, if I had to define what like good mothering is. So I do also approach it from an extremely personal place. But for me in both those cases, it feels like a positive thing.

[00:18:18] **Esther Perel:** It's so interesting as you, as I listen to you, I'm thinking, we sometimes lack vocabulary or lack metaphors. It's like when people have an intense relationship at work, they say, "It's my work husband," or, or here you talk about mother. It's as if we have to go back to the primary sources. But it actually, it's a very ancient relationship. It has existed throughout history, in multiple different forms. It's a mentor, it's a doula, it's a teacher, it's a lot of things. Um, not everybody does it in as personal away as you do it.

[00:18:56] **Artist:** No [laughs].

[00:18:57] **Gallerist:** No. Most people don't. But for me, it becomes really important to be able to be all of those things, not just with their artwork, but with them, because I want to see them thrive as people. And when they thrive as people, they're, what they put out into the world to connect to other human beings also thrives. And so, I see it as part of the same thing, the same goal.

[00:19:18] **Esther Perel:** May I ask you something? Because the, the fear of loss was expressed on the other side here for a moment. Do you have it? I mean, many times when you find people at the beginning of their careers and they grow, there is this notion that you have to move on to the next agent, to the next editor, to the next art dealer, who is bigger, who has bigger access. And there is a whole experience around loyalty and disloyalty that I think is on both sides. Would you say?

[00:19:51] **Gallerist:** Yeah, absolutely. This artists that completely exploded, like exploded and went to work with, uh, one of the biggest galleries, but decided to stay with me as well. Which at the time, now some people do it, but it was really exceptional at the time and people would always use it as examples in the press. And he stayed with me because of our personal relationship. Um-

[00:20:13] **Esther Perel:** But if he hadn't, you would have felt like-

[00:20:16] **Gallerist:** Yeah. Because you know, you start working with these artists in both cases. Like he was still in art school when I met him and she was still in art school, like really hadn't done much at all and extremely talented people. But I think it's very easy to take for granted the role that the context that a dealer creates. Especially once you've kind of benefited from that context and suddenly see yourself as above it. Um, which I had a long journey with that, with this other artist. You know, having...

[00:20:44] And then eventually, after he settled into big gallery, finally came back to valuing what I bring. And for me, um, to be honest, like I think this, this experience of cancer really changed me. Because it forced me to have to accept uncertainty on such a fundamental level. How do I say it?

[00:21:03] I've had to develop a different kind of sense of self-worth that I know what I do, I know what I bring to the table. And of course, if an artist were to be

like, "Oh, well, I'm just going to move somewhere else now because I'll make more money or it's more prominent." Uh, I've got to a place now where I genuinely believe it's their loss. And if that happened to me, I think I'd be like, "Okay."

[00:21:23] You know, because I want to be in a relationship with someone who wants to be in a relationship with me. But I can see it is painful. Like, I, it hasn't happened to me yet, but of course, if, because I haven't experienced the disloyalty. But I'm sure that if I had, or if I ever do, it'll be very painful personally.

[00:21:39] **Esther Perel:** Like a betrayal?

[00:21:40] **Gallerist:** Yeah, definitely.

[00:21:41] **Esther Perel:** Yeah, yeah. But you, when you think about losing her, you don't ever think that she too could have that feeling? That she could also live with a fear of losing the artist.

[00:21:56] **Artist:** Um-

[00:21:57] **Esther Perel:** This is true for both of you. You can both find others and your relationship is one that is deeply voluntary and chosen.

[00:22:07] **Artist:** I guess, I mean, yeah, there are no, we always say that there are no, you know, there are no contracts or legal, legally binding parts. This is a world completely based on trust.

[00:22:14] **Gallerist:** Yeah.

[00:22:14] **Artist:** And the trust is key. And I just, I think there's when I, when I look at other dealer-artists relationships with friends, or, you know, when I go meet other dealers, I, I just think, "Fuck, she set the bar so high. She spoiled me."

[00:22:27] **Gallerist:** [laughs].

[00:22:27] **Artist:** "I'm never going to, I'm not going to find anything." I think, you know, that you've got the market cornered on deep emotional gallerist artists connection [laughing]. And you know that someone can go to a blue chip gallery where you, where you meet the owner once, when you first joined and never see them again for 10 years. And you do that, you do that closeness better than, better than any dealer I know.

[00:22:49] **Gallerist:** But the, the other side of that, that's true. Like I know what my place is and I trust that place. And so if they go to bigger, richer gallery, I know what I provide. But you do have other gallery relationships. And, um, of course, when she started working with them, I had a little like, "Oh, what if she likes them more than me?" Like, of course I did. But then I, I, the way that I pushed through it is thinking, "They have so many qualities that I don't have, but I also have qualities that they don't have." But, but the other thing I'll say is like, yes, I have 14 artists, but I'm not as close to all of them. You know? I have maybe three or four that I'm extremely close to. But-

[00:23:28] **Esther Perel:** Does that closeness help you in the business strategy? Or you've learned over the years that deeply personal and efficiently strategic, don't necessarily have to clash?

[00:23:46] **Gallerist:** If I can understand as much as I can about the way that they think or the way that they experience the world, when they need guidance or they're stuck on something with the work, sometimes I think I can be like, "I think I know the direction they want to go in." Not just with the artwork that they output, but the way that they relate to being in the art world.

[00:24:04] I know if it's someone who needs protecting and sheltering, I know if it's someone who's a total hustler and needs to be thrown more people for them to meet. And I, you know? So it's really, I find it really helpful to understand the human behind the work, because then each one needs their individual strategy for how to thrive. So I, it's almost like I don't see them conflicting because knowing them so personally, allows me to best strategize for them.

[00:24:28] **Esther Perel:** What do you think is her strategy with you?

[00:24:35] **Artist:** I think, I think I'm a, I'm a tricky one in some ways, because I think I'm good with people. But you know, not to, you know not to put me on a table full of 10 billionaires and be like, "Enjoy."

[00:24:48] **Gallerist:** [laughs].

[00:24:48] **Artist:** You know, you know how I love to talk to you and you, and she'll throw, she'll throw a dinner, I mean, this was a pre COVID era, which feels like a year ago now, but we have a dinner after each person's show and her seating plans are immaculate. It might sound a bit Machiavellian [laughs], but she knows who hates each other and who wants to talk and who is best, you know, after and who will get on better than them.

[00:25:12] And who should be sat where and who should go for a cigarette together. And just, I dunno, I think, I feel like that's sometimes where it comes together in a very literal way. It makes you realize how much I miss that kind of time.

[00:25:23] **Gallerist:** Yeah, and it's great 'cause everyone's always, like, "I had such a great time in your dinner." [laughs] I have a master plan here.

[00:25:28] **Artist:** That's all to plan.

[00:25:29] **Esther Perel:** It's great social psychology.

[00:25:31] **Gallerist:** Yeah [laughs].

[00:25:31] **Artist:** Yeah, [inaudible 00:25:33] I feel like it's like a mother bird pre-chewing the food, to then feed to me to the-

[00:25:38] **Gallerist:** Another food, another food one [laughs].

[00:25:42] **Artist:** Yeah. Yeah, there we go.

[00:25:42] **Esther Perel:** Do you even notice it?

[00:25:45] **Artist:** Uh, no, only when you [laughing] when Esther Perel and you laugh.

[00:25:51] **Gallerist:** [laughs].

[00:25:51] **Artist:** Um, but you are my protector is what I'm saying.

[00:25:53] **Gallerist:** Definitely.

[00:25:53] **Artist:** That you are a gatekeeper. And when that, you know, when I'm not always great at saying no to people, 'cause I, you know, I, every, every show I get offered, every, every person who's interested, I always slightly wonder whether they'll be the last and whether I should, you know, make hay while the sun shines or something. But I think you're very good at saying, "No, no, no, you've got a 60 year career ahead of you. We need to take things slow. This guy sucks. You should not give [laughs] him work."

[00:26:19] **Gallerist:** Yeah. But I also never say no like for you.

[00:26:23] **Artist:** No.

[00:26:23] **Gallerist:** I'm always like, this is what I think, but do what you want to do.

[00:26:30] **Esther Perel:** What I'm hearing her say here is that she's emphasizing the longevity, the lifespan, the decades that it takes to cultivate the body of work of an artist. But the young artist is sometimes very hungry and not easily satiated. And with her history of anorexia she's prime for that. And so her galleries tells her, "Don't drink yourself to death. Don't starve yourself, maintain your complexity, bring it into your work."

[00:27:38] **Gallerist:** You know, it's a very gendered thing also, to be, uh, a woman in the art world. Like we've both suffered at the hands of that. And there are things that you need to protect also from like the way that people want to portray the image of an artist, especially if it's like a younger woman.

[00:27:53] You know, like you'll often see a studio photograph of a good looking woman artist, they always want to include her in the photo, you know, in this way that they don't do with male artists. So it's a lot of these people that try to circumvent. And it comes from a really misogynist place of like, "Let me teach you how to do this." You know? And, and they can't tolerate the idea of like a female artists saying no to them. You know, I that's the buffer that I think I, where I come in and the more sort of protective, like saying, "No way." Because I know, I think I know what she wants.

[00:28:24] **Esther Perel:** I hear us talking about boundaries. I hear us talking about gender. I hear you, the artist, talking about satiability. Is there enough? Is there not enough? Will I be enough? Will this be the last? Will there be more? Am I the only one? Um, I hear jealousy. Um, those are the main ones that kind of, they've not been necessarily said out loud, but they are the ones that are resonating for me.

[00:28:58] And of course I tie some of it with the eating disorder, because what you described in the beginning. Yeah, it's, it is a physical way to, to discuss, somatic language, to describe, you know, the ill being on the inside. "Here it is, inscribed on my body. Don't you see it?" And you're a visual artist and it's all about seeing. You know, seeing connecting, interpreting, internalizing the work, the artist, the creation.

[00:29:33] **Artist:** We talk about this never enough thing a lot.

[00:29:35] **Gallerist:** Yeah.

[00:29:36] **Artist:** Both in terms of this like, very abstract idea of like success or like money that, you know, even if, uh, accomplished everything I want to in my art career, it's still like a bit of a void.

[00:29:48] **Gallerist:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:29:48] **Artist:** And I guess I never really, I never really got a handle on what it is to have an appetite. I definitely know what hunger looks like, but I'm not really sure what fullness looks like. Endless food metaphors aside.

[00:30:01] **Gallerist:** Yeah.

[00:30:01] **Artist:** It is, it is less and less to do with food. As I kinda move through life, it's really about, you know, getting everything while I still can. And then getting rid of everything when it gets too much. My, my, my, you know, my workaholicism, my, you know, my need to create every day, 9:00 to 5:00, um, without fail, has both, you know, replaced all of the drives that it took to, you know, to starve myself for so many years. And also, I could be depleted, I could be drunk, I could be high, I would always, always, always work.

[00:30:39] But I, you know, I, with, with these other artists, I mean, not so much the one that we've been mentioning the most, but, uh, but a newer one and equally young. And I think youth has a lot to do with it. Because I've, you know, I've been the baby of the gallery ostensibly for, for a couple of years before this guy came along. And he's just a little bit younger than me.

[00:30:56] And, and I know, I, I, you know, I often turn it into joke, the idea of like, you know, cutting him down or, you know, insulting him or something. But I, you know, I hate that side of me. And who, you know, who, if he, you know, if he lived in the same country as us and, you know, I've met him more, I'm sure we'd become, you know, a sibling, just like some of, some of the other artists are.

[00:31:18] But there's something about how far away he is and loads of ways and how mythologized that his character has become and how, and how jealous I get. It gets to me. And I guess when you have an eating disorder, you can kind of already tell, what's getting to you. The disorder tends to know what, what's getting to me before I do.

[00:31:38] **Esther Perel:** Which is?

[00:31:40] **Artist:** This guy is going to crowd me out. He has a, you know, a more remarkable technical ability than I do. I don't know just the idea that he might be more amiable and, you know, less, less cruel, less, you know, less of a liability maybe. Um-

[00:32:00] **Esther Perel:** And basically would replace you. I mean, that is the notion, right?

[00:32:05] **Artist:** Yeah.

[00:32:05] **Esther Perel:** He would be visible, you would become invisible.

[00:32:09] **Artist:** I dunno. I dunno. That was, uh, the first instance of seeing his work when you first showed it, um, someone mistook it for mine and that was like a kind of deep, uh, cutting of, "Oh my God." Not that, not that originality is any kind, any worthwhile sort of target to aim for in the art world because everything's been done. But it just, you know, just my, my thing, my sort of my idiosyncrasy is in, in jeopardy. Yeah, and it was hard not to resent you slightly for that.

[00:32:50] **Esther Perel:** She echoes an old contradiction, right? On the one hand, everything's been done in the art world, and on the other end, God knows what this new person may do that hasn't been done yet. There is nothing to be unique about, and yet I am so jealous that you would be more unique than me. And while she talks about her jealousy, I'm also aware that the dealer is thinking about her loyalty.

[00:33:30] Because you give so much as the dealer, as the adult, as the validator, I can imagine that loyalty, trust, reliability, transparency become essential for you. Because one day you will say, "It's unbelievable what I did for this woman. I was there at 3:00 o'clock in the morning when, I helped her with that, I protected her. I made sure that she wasn't taken advantage of I, and I really think this is even beyond the word mother."

[00:34:11] **Gallerist:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:34:12] **Artist:** [laughs].

[00:34:12] **Esther Perel:** It's, uh, it's more than that. It will be like, I thought she would do this to others, but not to me, because of how I treated her.

[00:34:23] **Gallerist:** Yeah, absolutely. What you've described, the words you listed are exactly where my boundary is. It appears that I have no boundaries, but those are exactly my boundaries around trust, honesty, loyalty. Like that is my boundary. And I can guarantee you as the artist, that I will put your interests ahead of mine.

[00:34:43] **Esther Perel:** And in return?

[00:34:45] **Gallerist:** Yeah. And return, see what I do and with how much like love and care I do it, and how, how competently I do it, and to value that and appreciate that and respect that. And so to not do things that take that for granted.

[00:35:06] **Esther Perel:** Such as?

[00:35:08] **Gallerist:** Not communicating clearly and doing something in a sort of hidden or dishonest way, or this is not specific to her at all, I just mean in general in a, in a relationship to an artist. Like it can be anything from, you know, not being acknowledged on, on the wall museum label to, you know, in the case of this other artist that I work with, who I worked with from the very beginning, like he will give his other dealer, like many, many more times the number of works than he'll give me, but I'm the one who will help him resolve the ideas, or I'm the one who really cares about like where the work is actually going. And so, I'm trying to think of other examples when I felt that way.

[00:35:53] **Esther Perel:** What do you bring with you? What would you say from your own history, enters into your relationship with your artists? Your relationship history from early on for that matter?

[00:36:06] **Gallerist:** Um, this is something that I've been toning down in the last few years, but I noticed this a lot with like say my marriage and, and I do with the artists also where like I, I find it very hard to understand that I'm wanted. So, I had a tendency, which I have less now, but to create situations where I'm needed. Because if I'm needed, then I know that I'm there. But then of course the irony of that is that, when you're needed, you don't know if you're wanted [laughs].

[00:36:37] Um, and the other thing is because some of my artists are my best friends for some years. Uh, I would always put myself in the position of serving and if I needed something personally, I wouldn't even ask them. And over the years, I've learned how to be more vulnerable in that way. And it's been so nice to see how they are so happy to meet me in that place. So that's something that I'm really trying to change, but it comes, I think it comes from a place of, you know, wanting to be this absolute. Which I do associate with this idea of mother where like, if you can be the absolute, they can never leave you.

[00:37:11] **Esther Perel:** Right. If you're totally dependent on me, then you won't leave me and I won't have to worry about not being wanted. And the thing, the theme that actually joins both of you in the way that you've structured your relationship, it is many things. But one thing that just springs at me now, emerges here is, the protection against the abandonment.

[00:37:35] **Gallerist:** Oh, totally.

[00:37:36] **Esther Perel:** For both of you. And before your marriage, this wanting and needing that was established before you got married, right?

[00:37:45] **Gallerist:** Yeah. I mean, I just had a, a completely, completely emotionally absent mother, um, completely. And issues of some fundamental sense of like not deserving and no self worth and like desire, you know? Being desired is like a theme that comes into my life in many different areas. Um, that I've had to learn and accept the idea of desirability and understand that desire is something that fluctuates, you know? It's been a big thing for me.

[00:38:20] **Esther Perel:** Do you know that?

[00:38:22] **Artist:** Oh yeah. I just, um, I think you, you assure me that three years ago, five years ago, you know, but just before we met, you were a lot, you had much less of a handle on yourself. You were much more controlling, you were a lot more anxious. Whereas I, I see someone who has mastered this, this kind of all or nothing like abandonment or everything, as true to the world. That you have a much more measured idea of it than I do.

[00:38:52] **Gallerist:** Yeah. It's just because I see myself in you.

[00:38:56] **Esther Perel:** She's a younger version of yourself?

[00:39:00] **Gallerist:** Not quite, but in some ways in this abandonment way. And then I really associated it also with evolving femininity, this question of femininity.

[00:39:08] **Esther Perel:** Let's talk about the femininity. 'Cause I, you both know what that refers to, and I don't.

[00:39:09] **Artist:** I mean,-

[00:39:20] **Gallerist:** I'll go first because it's like a weird [laughs] topic. But it's like, there is already a relationship to understanding and trying to fit into a system of femininity that I find difficult. And then the way that I think about it is that, we both had these complicated relationships with our body, mine through cancer, yours, through eating disorder. Where, for whatever reason, whether it was chosen or not that the body was refusing to like comply.

[00:39:52] And then my marriage fell apart. I, I also relate this to a sort of sexual place where it took me like a couple of years to get back to an understanding of myself as a sexual body, uh, myself as a woman in that way, like my own desires. And so, I feel that a lot of our conversations that I really enjoy and I find so enriching are around us trying to negotiate what those different things mean.

[00:40:18] **Artist:** Yeah. And I think, I mean, you were also my first female friend, really. I only, I only hang out with boys and you you've helped me see the value and what it is to be friends with women. Um, just having friends that are women puts me a step in the right direction of what kind of woman I want to be.

[00:40:42] **Esther Perel:** I know you both think that your relationship is very deep and very personal. Are there taboos, are there things you don't talk about? Are there things, you know not to touch?

[00:41:01] **Artist:** This idea of having children, whether I might want to do that at some point, and I can't help feeling like that you would have total disdain for me if I did that.

[00:41:13] **Gallerist:** [laughs] But it's funny because I feel the same way about you. That if I had a child, you would have absolute disdain [laughs]. But I also know that ultimately you would be supportive. But I don't know if you know that about me.

[00:41:28] **Artist:** Yeah, just I, this, some part of me that doesn't want to be, I don't want to be seen by you as, you know, conventional or that maybe, you know, that something that you don't, you maybe don't consider the most worthwhile use of time or that it's society's will bending me as it, as it chooses that I may, that I may want to give in to that.

[00:41:51] Even, you know, if I got married, because I feel like you've, you know, you've sort of pulled, you've had the curtain pulled, pulled up from, from marriage and you, you know, the, you know, you know, what a, what a divorce looks like and you... And I don't think, I don't think you care for it. And I just, I suppose I always hope that you would be okay with that being something that I would want.

[00:42:19] **Esther Perel:** As personal as their conversations and their friendship has been, it's kind of astounding that the subject of children has been so silenced. As well as the subject of having a partner. "If I have a child, will you think of me as lesser as not serious as not a real artist?" Brings up one of the oldest prejudices, stereotypes that a woman cannot be a mother and a serious artist or a serious anything else for that matter. That if you have children, it will eat up your identity

and your pursuits will forever be compromised. For two women who are engaged feminists, fighting supposedly against misogyny, they have internalized that very ideology they're trying to resist.

[00:43:29]**Gallerist:** Because I choose to live my life in one way. Doesn't mean that I expect my friends to choose, make the same choices. You know? So I can be very direct about what my position is on certain things. But, you know, I, some of my best friends do live a very conventional life and I don't always look down on it [laughs]. Um, I question it, but I've done it, you know? So I wouldn't look down on it at all. I would support you in whatever you wanted to do.

[00:44:02]**Esther Perel:** And this is so interesting, right? This is not about femininity or the female body. But this fear of the criticism of the best friend or the girlfriend is very, very powerful in relationships between women, friends, gallerists, and artists, all included. "You would respect me less. You would think I gave in, I sold my soul. I was weak. I became a conformist. I'm a bourgeois. I'm not a real artist. I was just dabbling." I mean, the list goes on, right?

[00:44:41]**Artist:** We often talk about how, you know, we worry that maybe motherhood is a way of filling a void that could maybe be filled with other forms of intimacy. And that it is grasping for identity where, by having a child, you become a mother and you're kind of, and there's your identity for the next, you know-

[00:45:00]**Gallerist:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:45:01]**Artist:** ... 18 years or something.

[00:45:03]**Gallerist:** Yeah, it's interesting. I think it's a really powerful construct to have to grapple with. I, I probably feel the same, like, wonder if you would respect me less if I had children or particularly like in relationships, like a male partner.

[00:45:21]**Esther Perel:** Meaning? If you have a male partner that, that, what? That that too is a throwback to an older image of what it means to be a woman in this world and what one needs as a woman in this world?

[00:45:35]**Gallerist:** Uh, it's just, I, I glimpsed this idea of like, if, if I had a committed relationship with a man, how would that feel to you? Like, would you also lose respect or would you feel that my attention was being taken away from you? Or would you feel, you know?

[00:45:55]**Artist:** I mean, almost definitely that [laughs]. It's just enough to pull this, just...

[00:46:01]**Esther Perel:** But that should not be a reason for her not to [laughs].

[00:46:04]**Artist:** No, absolutely not. Absolutely not. And I think the difference is, is I don't think any criticism you might get from me, would, would stop you. I'm worried that perceived criticism from you would actually stay in my life. Because I'm, I'm s- I'm so unsure of myself.

[00:46:24]**Esther Perel:** I mean, I think that when you talk about, "I would lose respect for you," or "You would lose respect for me," or "I'm afraid of that." I'm thinking this language of losing respect that is critical and judgmental is a, is a veiled way of talking about, "I'm threatened."

[00:46:40] **Artist:** Yeah.

[00:46:42] **Esther Perel:** Instead of talking about how that makes me feel, I tell you what's wrong about what you're doing. You know? That form of, uh, women criticizing other women's choices because it actually throws them back on the choices they have or have not made themselves is a more honest proposition.

[00:46:59] **Artist:** Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:47:02] **Esther Perel:** Does that make sense?

[00:47:03] **Artist:** Yeah, I bet it does.

[00:47:04] **Gallerist:** Absolutely, yeah. So much [laughs]. I think so much of our relationship is like us battling misogyny, like us having to deal with all these misogynist, female artists, female dealer, and we're together, and we're like... And then suddenly it was a reframe where I thought, "What are the ways where we're like, perpetuating that on each other?" A discomfort with femininity that I hadn't really thought about the ways that we might direct it against each other. Because I was feeling like we're united against it, and I was like, "Oh yeah, that's true. Like, we really need to think about that." Or, or be able to talk about it really openly.

[00:47:38] **Artist:** And that, that might be true freedom.

[00:47:40] **Gallerist:** Yeah. And I guess the whole point is that we may never make those choices, but to feel that, that we are free to make those choices, should we want to.

[00:48:07] **Esther Perel:** As part of their friendship and collaboration, they have often joined in thinking that they are resisting what they call misogynistic notions about women. But what emerged is their understanding of how much they had actually internalized those very same ideas that then become powder keg of judgment from one woman to another.

[00:48:37] If you are to be a true artist, you cannot be a mother. You cannot be a wife. You have to prove that you are serious and committed. You will have to forego those other roles. And maybe the true freedom, as she says, is the multiplicity of roles and the freedom to choose which roles to live.

[00:49:16] **Voiceover:** Esther Perel is a therapist, best-selling author, speaker, and host of the podcasts, *Where Should We Begin*, and *How's Work*. To apply with a colleague or partner to do a session for the podcast or to follow along with each episode's show notes, go to howswork.estherperel.com. *How's Work* is produced by Magnificent Noise for Gimlet and Esther Perel Productions. Our production staff includes Eric Nuzum, Eva Wolchover, Hiwote Getaneh and Kristin Mueller.

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