

Tim: Good evening, and welcome to Life After with Amanda Palmer, here at the Rubin Museum of Art. I'm Tim McHenry, and I'm a Deputy Executive Director here at this global museum for Himalayan art. Well, what does global museum mean? Well, other than you joining us here in the foothills of Chelsea, we also have representation in university galleries and museums around the States, we have a freestanding installation at Canary Wharf in London right now, representation in Nepal, and of course we inhabit that digital world, online, in a big way, with a project called Project Himalayan Art.

And this museum does an exhibition, a big exhibition, once a year, and this exhibition that we're exploring together tonight is called Death Is Not The End. And it's about the afterlife. And we are comparing Tibetan Buddhist concepts of what that might mean with Christian concepts of what that might mean, and we have called upon a number of different friendly institutions like the Morgan Library to compile a comparison and an experience about, okay, so we know that there's a break in consciousness when we die, but what happens thereafter? And wait a moment, death is not the only break in consciousness that we experience while we 'live'. So in this series that Amanda Palmer has curated, we're exploring life after... what, COVID? Divorce? Change of job? All those transitions that we have to cope with, and learn to manage, and change our perspective in relationship to.

And tonight, Amanda has invited the author Sophie Strand to be her guest. And with Sophie, they're going to explore life after being exiled from the kingdom of the well. What is it like to receive a diagnosis that changes your perspective of yourself in relation to everything else? It's a big question, and I'm glad you're here tonight to experience it.

So Amanda Palmer probably needs very little introduction. Just let me say why I think she should be on this stage tonight. Amanda, as you know from podcasts, from her music, from her on-stage appearances, doesn't shirk from the truth. She has this extraordinary audacity and daring to lay bare her truth for us, to perceive our truth in her experience. And that is cathartic. It's necessary. That is what art is for. And she does it so amazingly well. So that's why she's on stage.

And she's no stranger to the Rubin, she's featured on our Awaken podcast, in a conversation on time with David Eagleman, we're just very happy to have her back.

Sophie Strand, however, is coming to this stage for the first time. And the best way to I think introduce a novelist is perhaps share a little bit of their work.

Sophie has just brought out a new book called *The Madonna Secret*, and it's in a way a biography. It's a biography of Mary Magdalene. The biography that no one of us has had yet the privilege to read, and I hope you will be reading it after tonight. It's a work of historical fiction, sure, but it draws upon sources that have been, shall we say, suppressed over the last millennia. And it's such an evocation. It's in a way a story of exile, of when you're taken away from the central narrative of what should be rightfully your story. And so, with Sophie's permission, I'd like to just read a passage. Mary Magdalene is Miriam in this case. She's 18 or 19. She is kind of betrothed. But this passage leads up to her first encounter with a man who's going to change her life, and in fact has probably changed all of our lives.

A storm. I swear I could feel it. The sky was blue, but one long sheer cloud divided the heavens like a thread that has escaped from my spindle.

I set out early and the springtime swallowed me. Early violets crushed underfoot reminded me that the Earth could sweat sweetness. I knelt beside the path and plucked one, gazing into its tight purple eye.

The colors were so bright, I could almost hear them. The new tufts of green grass lining on the path chimed, bell-like, the pale red roses climbing the gate to Amos' house was breathy and low, as a lover's moan. Tendrils of wind scented greenly with almond blossoms tangled me in their embrace.

What is this? What am I feeling? I whispered, the words seeming less like a question, and more like a prayer.

I think that when we grow very close to our fate, the world tightens around us, like a skin. There will be no deviation, no escape. The shape of our lives finds us, fresh and unformed. When our fate arrives, we find that we are only able to walk in one direction: directly into the storm.

Inside the house I felt like a dove on the marketplace, wings beating against a wicker cage. I paced the halls and escaped out a side door into a night that was so dense with pollen, with perfume, with moonlight, that it was less a color and more a material. It was a skin I walked into and felt smoothly adhere to the curves of my body. The garden was a vibrating purple mass against the sky. The moon was so low and so swollen I felt I could reach out, dip my fingers into its bowl, and remove a droplet of golden honey.

Glinting from between the trees was a star I did not recognize. It hung alone, bright and almost red. A pinprick of blood under the moon. I let the star pull me. I needed to get up higher in order to see it clearly. With some mercy, I managed to get up to the roof without falling to my death, but once on top of the house, I could see the whole violet ocean of the sky awash with stars. I looked down upon the bustling feast below, and the candlelight merged seamlessly with the stars and the silver olive leaves. I could not tell where the heavens met the land.

And there, below the moon, was the strange star. I gasped to see it so clearly. Where had it come from? I swore I'd never seen it before.

So, you've noticed it too. The voice was low, yet bright. Someone else had made it up onto the roof before me.

Now on stage, Amanda Palmer.

Audience: I love you.

Amanda: I love you.

You'd think I'd shot their children

*From the way that they are talking
And there's no point in explaining
Cos it will not make them stop*

*And I am tired of explaining
And of seeing so much hating
In the very same safe haven
Where I used to just see helping*

*I've been drunk and skipping dinner
Eating skin from off my fingers
And I tried to call my brother
But he no longer exists*

*I keep forgetting to remember
That he would have been much prouder
If he saw me shake these insults off
Instead of getting bitter*

*I am bigger on the inside
But you have to come inside to see me
Otherwise you're only hating
Other people's low-res copies*

*You'd think I'd learn my lesson
From the way they keep on testing
My capacity for pain
And my resolve to not get violent*

*But though my skin is thickened
Certain spots can still be gotten
It is typically human of me
Thinking I am different*

*To friends hooked to hospital machines
To fix their cancer
And there is no better place
Than from this waiting room to answer*

*The French kid who sent an email
To the website late last night
His father raped him and he's scared
He asked me, how do you keep fighting?*

*And the truth is I don't know
I think it's funny that he asked me
Cos I don't feel like a fighter lately
I am too unhappy*

You are bigger on the inside

*But your father cannot see
You need to tell someone, be strong
And somewhere some dumb rock star truly loves you*

*You'd think I'd get perspective
From my view here by the bedside
It is difficult to see the ones I love
So close to death*

*All their infections and prescriptions
And the will to live at all in question
Can I not accept that
My own problems are so small?*

*You took my hand when you woke up
I had been crying in the darkness
We all die alone
But I am so, so glad that you are here
You whispered*

*We are so much bigger on the inside
You, me, everybody
Some day when you're lying where I am
You'll finally get it, beauty
We are so much bigger
Than another one can ever see
But trying is the point of life
So don't stop trying
Promise me*

And on that cheery note... I would like to welcome to the stage, my conversation partner for this evening, Sophie Strand.

You know your friend is a good friend when you're hoping they cry at your song.

Sophie: I've been doing it for a long time, Amanda.

Amanda: Good.

Sophie: Before I knew you.

Amanda: Before we get too deep into it, if you don't know too much about me, or Sophie, I'm a musician, I'm a songwriter, I'm a singer, I've written words. Sophie's more of a word and a book writer. But we discovered each other while I was waylaid... was anyone here last week actually, I wanna ask? A couple people. So we can get into that story later. But I wound up waylaid in New Zealand for a couple of years because of COVID. And it was there that we found each other, through the internet. And being able to be here in flesh-space is something that I am not taking for granted, ever. I don't know if anyone has gotten to the point where we're not taking flesh-space for granted.

But maybe before we dive into it, do you wanna... I'm gonna put you on the spot, we didn't talk about this, how did we meet? What do you remember?

Sophie: How did we meet? Well I remember, because it had... I had had my novel, which you guys heard an excerpt, that was amazing to hear that in Tim's voice, thank you.

Amanda: Good reader.

Sophie: I had my novel rejected 27 times. And I have an incurable genetic illness and a host of health issues that were all cascading. I'd written another book online. I was in a dark place in quarantine, and sharing my work freely online, all the time. And somehow it made it to Amanda, and one of my favorite musicians and artists reached out to me in a DM on Instagram, and I do think I screamed pretty loud. Yeah. I mean, I had read *The Art of Asking*, I had been following your work, and it had been keeping me alive for a long time.

Amanda: What's important to point out though – and Sophie's heard this story, but it's a good story and a true story – I think at the time maybe your bio pic on Instagram was a tree.

Sophie: It was a tree, and I was posting all of these, a lot of people always criticize me- not criticize me, they're curious as to how my work spread when I posted 2,500-word essays in captions on Instagram, with no pictures of my face. I broke every rule.

Amanda: Someone had linked me to Sophie's work, or maybe a couple people linked me to Sophie's work, and I assumed that Sophie was a person in their 70s or 80s. I just assumed that from how wise the work was. And then I was kind of flabbergasted when it was this person in their 20s. But also one of the things that piqued my interest was that in the bio, in Instagram, Sophie lived in Woodstock, which is technically the home to which I was going to someday be returning, if I ever returned to the United States of America from New Zealand, where I was living waylaid during COVID. I was going to be returning to a home where I knew almost no one, and so I dared to reach out. And I was actually scared, because I thought I was reaching out to an 80-year-old crone, who was going to dismiss me with her broomstick. And then I screamed when I was like, oh my god! It's a young person! Who's read my book!

Sophie: Who acts like an 80-year-old, and now you know that.

Amanda: Yeah, that's true.

So this series is called Life After... and we kind of bungled the PR rollout, all of the talks were called different things at different times, and this talk began as Life After Diagnosis, and then turned into Life After Wellness, but then tonight it was described as...

Sophie: Life After Exile From The Kingdom of the Well... to summon Sontag.

Amanda: Its final title. What does that mean?

Sophie: What does that mean? Well, we're force-fed this Hollywood narrative, or this capitalist narrative, about becoming a good worker again. Which is you get sick, you take the right pill, and then you get back to work. And for many of us, that never happens. And yet, our stories, our narratives, the memoirs, the talkshows, tell us that we have to have our recovery, our victory story. So we feel like a failure when we are terminal, or incurable, and we can't integrate the abuse, or solve the cancer, or figure out the condition. So what happens when you never return to the Kingdom of the Well? And do we really want to be well? What does it mean to be well within a pretty sick culture?

Amanda: And Sophie and I did a talk together in August. I held a retreat for my patrons called Campersand, and Sophie and I did a long discussion and Q and A with some people that, some of the people here might have even been there. And one of the things that came up, and I'm gonna call back to one of these questions that came up in the Q and A, and we'll have time for a long Q and A tonight.

It struck me so deeply that I found myself repeating this story again and again to a bunch of friends that I would then go on to see over the next few months.

There was a woman at the retreat with a stutter. And we had been talking about what it means to be 'better', what it means to be well, what it means to be whole, what it means to be healed. And this woman brought up this stutter that she's been struggling with, 'struggling to fix', struggling to integrate even, or manage.

Sophie: She was apologizing as she was asking the question. She was apologetic in the question-asking.

Amanda: And I would just love you to relate the answer to the question, cos it blew me away.

Sophie: I'll do my best to recreate it, but what I said was that in a culture where human voices dominate, where the anthropocentric narrative is the only narrative we give our attention to, our ears to, we are not very generous with our listening, and with the space we give to other voices, to plant, to vegetal voices, to ecosystem voices. And that the stutter, her stutter, was actually a profound generosity. It was an opening up in her speech to allow space for other stories to interrupt. And we're so good at filling up the space with our words, I'm the best at that, at just word salad, just talking and talking, and she had been gifted something that we'd problematized in our culture, where we have to be eloquent, and fill up all this space. She was always leaving space open for birdsong. And in a moment in time when so many birds, so many animals, so many singing insects are going extinct, what a profoundly beautiful thing it is to stutter, and leave a space for another being's song. It's something we need to get better at in general, I think.

Amanda: There was a stunned silence in the room. And it opened up, hearing you tell that story, and also not just hearing you tell that story, but also looking at her reaction to the answer, to even the possibility that her stutter wasn't this problematic,

fucked up thing that she had to fix, and that was just her lot in life, and her crucifix to bear, and to have a whole room of people witness it and look at her as possibly this gift, was an astounding moment. And it made me think about all of the things, the illnesses, the diagnoses, the traumas, the abuses survived, that we by definition in this culture, in this way, make problems that have to be fixed so that we can get back to the next thing. It was kind of a mind-blowing moment for me, to pull the camera back, and to think, there is a whole new way of looking at everything, actually.

Sophie: Well we're always doubly burdened with this defect, this disability, this lack of normativity, and then with the fact that we have to be always striving to get better, to correct ourselves. So not only are we tired from our illnesses, we're tired from trying to get better from our illnesses. It's a feedback loop, and it's super tight. But there are these interesting moments where we can interrupt that, and see if there's a different way of collaborating with an admittedly tricky dance partner. I never wanna act like these things are easy, or fun, or anything you'd order off the menu. But when you can't digest them, or get rid of them, you have to learn how to grow with them.

Amanda: So when you present this idea at a conference, or a talk, or to a group of people, or to a bunch of academics, I imagine that you occasionally get criticized or targeted, that there's a laziness, or the idea that I will just accept these things, and you will have to accept them, and I don't wanna change, and I don't wanna grow, and I don't wanna fix myself. If someone counteracts you in this moment, what do you do? What do you say?

Sophie: Well, I mean whenever you say that you don't wanna participate in the cult of wellness, you're saying that I don't wanna be perfect, I don't wanna be normal. And that's always considered to be subversive. It basically is communist. You're saying I don't wanna be a worker. I'm gonna be a burden. Is it okay if I'm a burden? Are you okay with that? And what is a burden, what does it actually mean?

I write a lot about microbiology. I'm really interested in the evolution of the term parasite, and how morally loaded it is, for a term that's supposed to be scientifically objective, that we have a very narrow, empiricist lens with which to look at the complicated relationships between plants, and fungi, and bacteria. And when we see that there's only a flow of nutrients or help going in one direction, we say oh, that's a parasite. That's a bad thing. But oftentimes those parasites aren't harming the other beings they're mutualistically involved with. Something much stranger is going on. Maybe there's something qualitatively beautiful about helping another being. Maybe you're getting something that doesn't show up in your data set. And so, I always wanna push back on this idea that we need to be well.

I oftentimes say that the people who are sick and handling these things that can't be fixed have a strong muscle for improvisation. And right now, we are facing increasingly unpredictable geopolitical storms, climate change, personal issues, and the best way to prepare for that is to learn how to improvise. So I think it's to the disabled, to the chronically ill who have had to learn this high stakes lesson, that we can turn for advice on how to deal with uncomfortable situations that don't easily resolve, and cannot be prepared for.

I mean, a question I have for you, Amanda, is what moments in your life that the external view would view as being a problem, have actually interrupted a sterile narrative? What narratives were a prison for you, that when they were interrupted by something bad, actually opened up space for something much better?

Amanda: What a simple question! Well, I'm not sure this is exactly the answer, but what that calls to mind is actually something really interesting that just happened to me a couple weeks ago, in New York. My band, The Dresden Dolls, is finally coming out with a new record for the first time in 20 years. And I've gone through a lot of twists and turns as a songwriter, and I've found myself a little bit scared by my own material, for the first time in a while. And I was trying to navigate this emotionally, and also remembering what it felt like to be 18 and scared to play my songs for people, not because I thought the songs were bad. I've always been very egotistically healthy in my relationship, and I know when I've written a bad song, and I just trash it. But the songs that are good, but also the songs that are naked and hungry and mean and ugly and a little bit off-putting or whatever, that's why I was afraid to play my songs for people at 17, 18, 19, 20. I had a pile of songs that I was just not playing them for anyone. I was too scared.

And then lo and behold, the first time I did kind of a concert at my university, the first real show I played, I would have been about 19, I remember someone coming up to me after the show, and looking at me with a genuinely concerned face. It was an older friend of, my older sister went to the university too, I was at Wesleyan, and it was her friend who kind of got dragged to a teeny show in a room half this size with maybe 50 people. And she said Amanda, I need to ask you, are you alright? Are you alright? Because your songs really worry me. And I was like, that's a fucked up compliment. But I think it means the songs worked.

And mostly I went through my career not getting a lot of that. But I got a little bit of that after the Dresden Dolls shows at the Bowery. I had a couple people come up to me and say, I'm concerned about you. Are you well?

And I was 20 at the time of that concert, I'm 47 now. I'm pretty sure I have the answer. I'm not positive, but I think I am able at this point to look into that person's face and say, I think what you don't understand is that I am well *because* I was able to write that song. Right? It's a little bit of a paradox, but if I weren't able to express that in a way that would concern you so deeply, I would be way more worried about me.

And this brings up some really interesting questions about the responsibility of the writer and the artist, my responsibility to myself, to my band, to my community, to my ex, to my son. What is saying and sharing too much? What is pushing too many buttons? What's too emotional? And if I have carved out a weird niche space as an artist, this is the space. It is not being afraid in the middle of writing a song to just go fuck, this is not gonna look good, but I'm gonna say this. Especially when it's not gonna look good on me, and it's gonna make people question whether I am well.

And it is kind of a dangerous palette to paint with, as a songwriter. Writers especially, lots of artists, but we come from a lineage, songwriters, poets, novelists, artists, where not everybody is okay, and that's clear. And strangely, and maybe not greatly,

there's a romance around our un-wellness, and a romance that I used to really worry about, especially when I was in my 20s. The parts of me that wanted to be not 'traditionally well', but feel whole, and be healthy, I really was like, am I staying unwell and acting unwell and writing my angriest and most bitter, upset, fill-in-the-blanks as a songwriter, is this trapping me in a world of unwellness?

And this circles back to something we were talking about earlier today, about what happens when you're the person who tours around talking about chronic illness, or you're the songwriter who's like the goth Taylor Swift, and really good at the fuck-you break-up song, and can it trap you?

Sophie: Yeah, I mean this is something I'm thinking about a lot in terms of diagnosis. So when I was younger, before the age of 3, I was repeatedly raped, and old I couldn't share that with anyone, and so I just effectively somatised that, and was a very normal, well child, until the age of 16, I started to die. Eventually it will find somewhere to come out.

And I was still very normal, and very quiet, and didn't tell anyone, never spoke about any of these things, even to my family. And they couldn't figure out what was wrong with me. And they couldn't figure out what was wrong with me, it took about eight years of me going in and out of the hospital, ERs, specialist doctors, PIC lines into my heart, different diagnoses applied, removed, taking skin with them when they were removed, treatments that left me even sicker than I was before, when I finally arrived at the correct diagnosis of a genetic connective tissue disease that had no cure.

So it felt like I'd had the happy ending snatched away. Which is I did finally get a diagnosis, but boy, was it not the diagnosis I wanted. There were no treatments. What there was there was a laundry list of the surgeries I should expect, and the stages of decay. And within six months of receiving that 'cure', that diagnosis, I began to exhibit more of the symptoms. I actually started to get sicker faster. And I was really curious about that, I was curious about how that diagnosis started to actually move through me, and trap me. That it was both the answer to a prayer in that it gave me an explanation for lots of strange things that have been happening in my body, but also seemed to speed up my decay.

And so something I'm really interested in is the idea of the no-cebo effect. Does anyone here know about that? The no-cebo effect is more powerful than the placebo effect, and more prevalent, but less talked about, which is that if you are given a diagnosis, or prognosis, a life prognosis, you're much more likely to live it out. If you're told there's gonna be a bad side effect, you're much more likely to exhibit it, even if you're not even on the medication, you're on a placebo.

The theater of medicine accounts for quite a lot of our activating, our innate immunological healing ability, but also activating our minds' ability to dampen our immune system, to live into a tragedy. I oftentimes think of Penelope in the Odyssey, never finishing that shroud of Laertes, always unweaving it during the night, so that Odysseus can come home. And I love Greek myths and mythology, I write about them a lot, and I think about what it means to finish the shroud, to weave the

diagnosis, to put the period at the end of what's supposed to happen to your body. How do we begin to live out a story we don't wanna live?

So lately I have plenty of diagnoses attached to me that explain what's happening to me, but I'm trying to un-tell them. I'm trying to un-diagnose myself, because I'm not sure I want to live those things. So something I'm struggling with right now, in the fact I write about these things, is how can I write about them in a way that is un-weaving the story, rather than weaving the shroud?

Amanda: Well, and then there's also the added weirdness of being in a community that then has a set of expectations of who you are, what you're like, what you stand for, and that's something that I think comes up a lot, having worked a lot in the world of survivors of rape and sexual assault and abuse, is there's a reason that no one really wants that job. It's not a fun job, and also you can get stuck there. You don't wanna be defined and walking around the world as this is the thing that happened, and I'm gonna talk about it, and this is gonna be my story.

It's the same thing with abortion, and this is what I found in 2019 when I was touring and talking about abortion all the time, is that just no one wants to be the person sharing their abortion story. It isn't that people aren't brave, it isn't that people are that ashamed, it's just not a whole lot of fun to make that a centerpiece of your life. Even if it's urgently necessary, given what's going on politically.

And that winds up fucking us. Because who wants to be the one saying, this is the story I'm gonna tell, this I where I'm gonna focus my time, energy, and attention? Because it's incredibly un-sexy.

Sophie: Yeah, the joke is that I complain and say I'm undateable, and then the next day I write something that makes me much more undateable.

Amanda: What about it is undateable?

Sophie: When you peel your skin off and you reveal the mistakes you've made, the vulnerabilities, the ways in which you don't function, your insecurities...

Amanda: I think it's hot.

Sophie: Oh, yeah. I mean, I do always say diversify your portfolio. If you write about... I never wanna be part of the trauma olympics, and I was very hesitant, to go back to your original question, I wrote fiction. I actually was a ghostwriter, I didn't even write my own books, mostly I wrote other people's stories for a long time, and then I wrote fiction, and it took a very long time to finally write my own stories, and it was very vulnerable, and immediately scary. Immediately I had thousands of people in my ocmments saying thank you, and thousands of people saying you are the ugliest person I've ever seen. So it was intense, and as a person who has PTSD and a history of trauma, I shut down. And I asked you, early on in our friendship, I was like, can I keep doing this? Is it worth it? And I still don't know the answer to that question.

Amanda: I don't fucking either.

Sophie: It's physically wearing. But lately I've been focusing on a project that will make me no money, but will probably keep me alive, which is a sci-fi fantasy re-telling of Tristan and Isolde.

Amanda: Nice.

Sophie: My question, Amanda, is how do we balance this work that feels urgent, and also in some ways physically risky, psychically and physically risky, with the nourishing art-making that keeps us alive?

Amanda: I mean, I've been having this conversation, mostly over the phone and occasionally with friends, mostly female friends lately, about the cost of making art that gets you in trouble. And whether... It sounds so terrible to say, but whether we are supposed to be maturing out of that as we get older, or are we actually supposed to be getting better at giving no fucks? And saying you know what, this is going to be expensive.

And what's interesting about my journey right now, especially with the book that I'm thinking about writing, and the album that I am in the middle of making, I think if it is costly, if it is expensive, if it is going to open you up, me up, to anger, criticism, insult, all of that... I think the people who have approached me and said, you need to mature because you have a son, and you need to tone it down a little bit, Amanda, you need to think about your child. And these are well-meaning, usually older people, saying you need to be more careful, you need to think about Ash, you need to think about the fact that 5, and 10, and 15 years from now, he's gonna have access to your work, and he's going to have questions, and you need to protect him. And I look at the urgency of the world right now, and I think, I want to protect him from a mother who is afraid. I don't want to carry on this lineage of scared women. I just don't want to do it.

And the whole point of it is that there's a teeny story that you're gonna be a brave woman, and stand up and do your thing, and everyone's going to applaud, and actually that's not true. It is still not true. Because the cost of going against the grain, or having the opposing narrative, or being the one who's like, fuck it, I'm gonna rewrite this story, I'm just gonna do it, and I'm not gonna do it in a way that you're necessarily going to approve of, or that is academically sound, or whatever, the sorts of things that you do, and sometimes the sorts of things that I do. You don't get the applause necessarily. Maybe in some corners you do, but it is expensive, and then you mostly just have to run the cost benefit of living, physically living in the body, and living the life where you get up in the morning and you are that person, and you turn on the internet, and those comments do come at you.

And this was one of the first discussions we had when we met. We got on the phone, and I think I was in New Zealand when we first talked, or maybe I was back here when we first talked, but this was the urgent discussion of what's too much, and where do you draw the line? And I think one of the more important things that we do, as writers and artists, is we also discuss the side effects of our work. We don't hide them and just go back to the kitchen, and just go back to our immediate circle, and

go fuck, today sucked. We wrap in the sucking into the work itself. Does that make sense?

We create a larger conversation, and a lot of it is because we have the internet to do it. We can go directly to our readers and say and this also happened. And the effects of this were this, and this is why this sucked, and I'm gonna literally screen-cap the comment, and say just so you know, the cost of this piece was this. I had to live with this in my inbox. And artists 50 years ago couldn't really do that. We didn't have, women especially, didn't have an ability to create a meta-conversation around their novel, or around their album. Janis Joplin, it was just like, you deliver it to the label, and then you go out and you tour, but she couldn't also have a discussion about what it felt like to read this about her in the press. She was muffled that way.

Sophie: Yeah, I mean one big thing... So I was just thinking about this, it was about a year ago from today, some bideo of me got reposted on some QAnon alt-right page, and tagged me in it, so I saw everything initially, and I got within the space of an hour 20,000 comments, I am not exaggerating, of running comments, dissecting my physical appearance. The interesting thing was they didn't wanna dissect the ideas, they hated the ideas, but the way to get at a woman is to dissect her physical appearance, and I will tell you, if you have a history of eating disorders, or abuse, and you think you have figured your shit out, let me tell you, it was humbling, deeply humbling. Sit there, watch those comments. There is no amount of therapy that is gonna prepare you for that, for what it feels like afterwards, it's like shellshocked. I think I went over and saw you later that day, or the next day.

And I think especially, it feels really urgent for me to talk about wellness right now, because wellness in our American culture right now has become a possession. And you don't earn it, you don't get it unless you pay for it, and the sicker you are, the more you have to pay. It's a personal responsibility. But unwellness is produced by untangled networks of oppression that we cannot individually account for, or interrupt, so it's this terrible Sisyphean task, where you're making money to try and eke out a little bit of care, but you're spending all your last bit of health trying to just get the care in the first place. So this feels super urgent to me. And yet, the cost is my psychic wellbeing. And it's been intense. I think I have to oscillate, and I'm gonna have to hibernate for a while.

Amanda: Yeah, I mean that's my approach. And I think I was raised in a family that really prized productivity. I'm from Massachusetts. Puritan-land. It was very important that all of the kids in the family be constantly busy, and productive, and achieving. It wasn't about leisure. And I have spent a lot of time unpacking that, and I look back at my 20s and my 30s, and if I wasn't working very, very, very, very hard at being a good better-known-everyday, productive songwriter, touring musician, I was enslaving myself to some very, very monastic yoga retreat where I had to be working very, very, very hard at being a good meditator. And the dial was just always on 10. There was never any actual rest period. I was either at a yoga retreat with my phone off, ohm-ing on a fucking mountain somewhere, very, very hard, and being a very good, productive yogi, or I was in a recording studio, working very, very hard on my thing. But it wasn't really on the menu to just chill. I had not been taught that. And I still struggle. And now I have a kid and it's extra weird.

So yeah, it took me a long time to even see. And also in my marriage, my ex-husband and I, we both stoked the worst parts of that nature in one another, with the constant need to over-achieve, and the constant need to be on the go, and the constant need to say yes, and fill the schedule, and never really have a recovery period.

And I think one of the things that we just don't understand in this culture, and one of the things that I also really found myself blindsided by when I was in New Zealand, which has a culturally different approach to work and time and family, was that Americans do not build in recovery time. It's just not built in.

Sophie: No, it's not. Which means we never actually have time to digest our behaviour, and then act differently and evolve. I mean, our culture is sick. If we're sick, our culture is sick. We're made sick by a culture that is sick. And if we never take a second to re-assess, I oftentimes think, someone said it would do more for global emissions if we just slept an hour more, than any of the actual re-arranging of the deckchairs of the Titanic that we're doing at these COP26 events, if we just slept more. If we actually just did less.

And I think about that a lot in my own life. The sicker you get, the more traumatized you are, the more you feel like a failure, so the more you drive yourself to burnout, to be over-productive, to prove that you're worth staying alive. And I for a long time have fed myself to the meat grinder, and have been my own slave master, saying if you're sick you'll have to work twice as hard, to show people you're allowed at the table. And that's not good for anyone.

Something I've been thinking about a lot is how little I practice what I write about, and we were talking about this behind stage, is I talk about embodiment, I talk about resting, listening to your body, and then I'm at home like, gotta stay up and finish that essay! So there's a lot of paradox. I have to get better at resting, and reading what I actually write, and then doing it.

Amanda: And what I have found, especially in the world of yoga people, meditating people, Buddhist people, self-help people, the rule seems to be that the people writing those books, and writing those blog posts, and banging those drums, are the people who need to hear it themselves very badly, which is why they're saying it. Otherwise they wouldn't bother. They'd just be out there, enjoying their lives.

As my mentor therapist friend Anthony used to joke, he was a clinical therapist, he used to say clinical therapists are people who need 40 hours of therapy a week.

I am constantly haunted by *The Art of Asking*. I practically broke into tears a couple weeks ago when my partner pointed out that I was fucking terrible at it, in the gentlest way. And to have a gentleness with yourself, in the kind of hilarious paradox that if you're the person on the soapbox, you're the person who most needs to hear it, and that that isn't really a paradox, because you know from where you speak. And as long as there's not a ton of hubris, you're okay.

So I wrote a book in 2013 called *The Art of Asking*, and the more distance I get from it, the more sympathy I have for the person who needed to write it. The more I

unpack, especially my past before that, what I was going through at the time, my childhood, my culture, American-ness, I look at the book with almost a kind of a pity. The book is good, and the philosophy in the book is good, but also I just so desperately needed to hear it, and believe it. And I think there's always a part two, that you need to go back and listen to your own work, and listen to yourself, but also have the patience with the echo in your head about the belief system that you create, because otherwise you get lost.

Sophie: Yeah. And I think about 'spell', and etymology of the word 'spell', to utter is to make happen, to enact a kind of material, sympathetic magic in the world. And so I think for me, writing has always been a type of spell, which is if I write it into the world, perhaps it will come into being. And so I think sometimes we do a kind of magic with writing, where we're trying to write ourselves into the story, into the mind, into the psyche, into the health we wish we had.

I'm doing that right now, finishing a memoir about healing beyond hope and the human, and I'm finishing the last chapter right now, and I was like, how do I write a last chapter that doesn't curse me? That spells me, doesn't finish the shroud, doesn't land me with a partner for a happy ending or a cure, but also doesn't damn me to being sick?

I was saying to Amanda, I've been trying to think, what if I went to sleep tonight, and I woke up tomorrow and I was better? Completely better, and there was no explanation. Would I be available to that? What part of me is praying to the parts of me that are ill? And that's something I think about a lot, which is that if something happened that was so outside of my epistemological framework, would I be open to it?

Amanda: I hope you find that unfinished shroud the same way I hope I can finish the last song on this Dresden Dolls record.

Sophie: We should exchange it, and do it for each other.

Amanda: I'll write your last book chapter, you'll write the last Dresden Dolls song?

I feel a responsibility, not to the listener, but to myself, not to leave things on a tidily, with a bow tied around the box, as if I know what I'm talking about, because I know I don't. And I wanna remind myself, and the listener, and the world, that it's a record because it's a record. It's a record of time, it's not an answer, it's not even necessarily a question. And without getting sentimental about things, you have to leave an open door for the spell that you're casting on your own life, because you don't wanna be trapped in your narrative, because you really will...

Sophie: You'll write yourself into a corner.

Amanda: Yeah, and you can succeed as an artist, and then get trapped as a person, and that is a scary place to be.

And I think that's a good time to turn it over to the Q and A, thank you.

Tim: The original plan was to have this conversation last for nine hours.

Amanda: We're gonna do it!

Tim: And you could see you could, right? Very good. Right, so this is the drill, folks. We have basically 26 minutes to entertain questions from you. And they're called questions, they do end with a question mark, and they are short, and they're to the point, and they're directed to the speakers, and they're not about what are you doing next, in a sort of professional sense.

So we have Ryan and Jay on either side of the house, and a hand has already gone up in the second row.

Audience member: Sorry.

Tim: That's okay. Never say sorry in this room. You can do anything you like, almost, except have a long question. And then we've got another question, thank you. Okay, yes please.

Audience member: I hope I don't just break your rule right now. But I just wanna say thank you. I'm saying that as the 10-year-old who needed you, Amanda, and now the 27-year-old social worker who still wants you. And this question's for both. I'm a social work student, and as you know there's a lot of tension going on. I'm in the process of co-facilitating a space that I want to be restorative, and it's for people who have opposing views of what's going on right now, and I think you know what I'm talking about. So knowing that we are, as social workers, perpetrators of the cult of wellness, within that framework I'm curious, what would you recommend I do to have a restorative space for that?

Amanda: It seems like you're referencing something, but maybe spell it out.

Audience member: I'm a Jewish student, I'm going to be co-facilitating a space for Palestinian-Israeli students, and people who are leaders in that community, to come together and have a healing and processing space, and I'll be co-facilitating.

Amanda: Well, I think we should both speak to this. I think we have a large problem in general right now about a moreorless critical compassion deficit.

And I'm not even worried any more that I'm gonna get cancelled for what I'm gonna say, because I've been cancelled so many fucking times it doesn't matter. I don't wanna curse myself by saying I'm un-cancellable, because the Rubin will have me, but I actually think it is bananas that the left, the idea of a liberal society, of a left-wing that to me, when I was a kid, and I looked at what it meant was that it was a compassion-based society, which meant compassion for all people, everyone, with an emphasis on everyone with no exceptions because the minute you start making exceptions, you are fucked. And it was also why I found myself drawn to Buddhism, where the idea, if there was a tyrannical tenant, it was that the compassion had to be so extreme to almost be noxious.

And this is where in my career, especially around what happened with the Boston Marathon bombing and other things, I got myself into serious trouble. Serious trouble. And this moment that Sophie was talking about, where the alt-right was filling up her feed with 20,000 comments, I had that when the Boston Marathon bombing happened, and I called kind of by accident, writing this stream of consciousness poem, and then doubling down on it, and calling for compassion for the kid in the boat. And I was told by the liberal left of Boston that I had taken it a step too far, and that there are limits to compassion. And I could not believe it.

And in that moment in my life, my brain broke. And I wanna hand it over to Sophie, because Sophie actually knows a whole lot more about the Christian myth, and has written a whole book that is very Jesus-y and Madonna-y, but the idea that the left, that the liberals, that the bleeding heart liberals that I thought I identified with, and that I thought I was supposed to have all this in common with, would say no, our general vibe, our general opinion, is that there are limits. There are people for whom we should not have compassion.

And when that happened, I felt a kind of loneliness, a sense of isolation among my own people, that I had never knew existed. And it really fucked me up quite severely. And I would have preferred, and didn't mind, the crazy right-wing people. The crazy alt-right, Reddit, 4Chan people coming at me and saying you are ugly, you should be killed, you should be raped. That felt fine. It was the idea that this other community that I lived and worked in, the social work people, the therapists, the musicians, the artists, the people who I thought were like me, the idea that they thought that I had gone a step too far by saying someone who has murdered, someone who has committed a terrible crime, someone who's a terrorist, someone who is attacking innocent civilians, they too deserve compassion. The fact that we didn't agree about that really scared me. It still scares me. It scares me right now. It scares me right now that we're not able to find one agreement that everyone deserves compassion, and that means everyone.

And I think until as a group of people we can get there, we're screwed.

That's my cheery answer for you, I'm gonna hand it over to Sophie.

Sophie: I just wanna preface this and say I don't care about getting cancelled, I'm probably already gonna get cancelled, just call for a ceasefire. Every second that goes by, a kid is dying. I mean, come on. Are we really at this point where we're squabbling over that? It makes me wanna vomit. I just can't. I don't understand how we are cataloguing people through identitarian categories that pit one kid against another kid, that feels crazy. And I also think that we have a low ambiguity threshold and a bad case of moral superiority. Everyone's trying to find the pure, talking about purity culture as inherited by the most toxic versions of Christianity, which is can we find the pure moral position, whereby we are not culpable. Every time you turn on your car and spew gas and exhaust into the world, you are killing other beings. Every time a vegan eats an avocado, you are participating in blood agriculture! There is no extricating yourself from the web of culpability!

I am nauseated and terrified and not able to sleep watching these videos coming from the Middle East right now – on both sides. No prioritizing any person. People

are getting caught, we're squabbling over what's AI? AI is here, and it is the fucking state, sorry for swearing. It's the state that doesn't care about the aliveness of any being, it will digest entire peoples, olive trees, cultures, webs of ecology, for some abstract idea that doesn't care about anyone.

I'm trembling, but the truth is that I was upset before this, because we are killing off entire species every day. There is an ecocide. There's genocide right now of human beings, and there is an ecocide that is happening every second. We are losing our kin. Our human kin, our more than human kin, and we are all responsible. We all have bloody hands. And that shouldn't paralyze us, it should make us feel extremely urgent. And we're gonna do a bad job. I read somewhere, any job worth doing is worth doing badly. I forget who said that, but it feels so important to say right now, which is I am doing this job badly right now of trying to answer your question, but we need to care about each other, and other beings, in a way that doesn't care about a flag. Someone posted this thing that said 'God hates flags', and he was an atheist anarchist. He's my friend and he's an atheist anarchist, so it was a real joke, but what it said is that when you're identifying the kids to care about by the flag they are under, you've missed the point.

So that's my impassioned, I am heartbroken, but also aflame. I feel politically homeless right now.

Amanda: I think a lot of people do. And I think the danger that we're all in, and everyone can feel it in every department right now, is it is not allowed to be messy.

Sophie: We have to clean it up somehow.

Amanda: And it has to be perfect, and it has to be pure, and everybody has to strike the exact perfect moral note, and not fuck it up, or everyone will be angry at you, and you will get cancelled on Facebook, and you will get cancelled on TikTok, and your phone will blow up with criticism if you dare say it wrong, do it wrong, express the wrong opinion, and it's the death of nuance. And this situation is, as you know, as everyone knows, is the epitome of infinite layers of nuance. And in a culture, in a world, in a conversation that is not allowing it.

Tim: Next question, let's take this side of the house.

Sophie: Thank you.

Audience member: For work I'm an environmental consultant, so every day, I don't know if there's a day that goes by where I don't yo-yo between depression, nihilism, so I guess my question for you is how do you deal with that nihilism, and also you talk about wellness, so how does that nihilism and wellness intersect? Do you see there's an intersection in that?

Amanda: We've actually decided to start wellnessnihilism.org. It's a non-profit umbrella... I'm gonna hand that one to Sophie first.

Sophie: Feeling that in my body with you. My friend who has my condition, and is similarly unwell, said to me we oftentimes joke about what a problem it is that you go

to the doctor and they're like, on a scale of 1 to 10 how much pain do you feel in your body, and you're like, right now? In every single part of me? Are you looking at me? No! My god, no! Are you asking me to perform my unwellness so that we concretise it? And she says I've been thinking about wellness as the amount of joy I can feel on a given day. Alongside the suffering, not negating it, but alongside it. How much joy am I feeling in my life?

And I think for me, a word that I've been coming back to lately is Eros, which is at the base of us, we are built from matter, matter that wants to get involved with other matter. So this is not reproductive Eros, this is not sexual Eros, this is the Eros of matter that wants to half-digest other matter and create complex eukaryotic cells, and it then builds multi-cellular beings. We want to get involved, we want to smell things, touch things, and be sensuous beings that have desires, and are soft and vulnerable.

And I think the thing that I've been trying to lean into lately is just the breadth of feeling. As someone who had been abused, I disassociated, and I didn't feel anything for a long time. And when I started to feel things again, I felt a lot of pain. I oftentimes say it's like when your foot is asleep and it comes back awake, there are a lot of pins and needles. So I think right now, we're realising that we've been killing our extended body, our extended kin. And the threshold we have to cross when we realise that complete despair is hard. We need to doula, midwife each other through these thresholds. But on the other side is the fact that we can fucking feel again.

For me, the fact that I can feel that heartbreak every day, is also, the flip side of it is that suddenly the world is alive again. Thank god. Thank god I care about something enough to feel this heartbreak.

Amanda: I think I'm mostly just gonna plus one what Sophie said. I mean, I've had a tough couple of weeks for a few reasons, and I have been able, not at every moment but at a few moments, able to step back with incredible gratitude.

My antidote to cynicism and nihilism is something in the realm of at least I'm feeling something. If I'm angry, if I'm bitter, if I'm resentful, if I'm overwhelmed, if I'm freaking out, if I'm up at 3 in the morning for the first time in my life dealing with chronic insomnia at 47 with spinning thoughts and how do I, and where will I, and what's gonna happen, and what's gonna happen to my kid, I'm able even in that moment to say okay, at least I care. I'm concerned. There's a value to that, there's a value to this, there's a vitality to my concern about myself, my loved ones, my friends, my kid, the planet, my ex. This is definitely not the end of the line. This is what it feels like to struggle. This is what it feels like to be alive. I'm at least engaged with the work of surviving, and living.

And that's not something I think I was really able to do in my 20s and 30s. I would just get overwhelmed, and it would all go dark. Art was one way out, for sure, but now I think I'm able to take a deep breath and say oh yeah, you're just really struggling. You're human. Good job. Good job, mere mortal! So yeah. Basically, what Sophie said. We're alive.

Tim: Who would actually like to ask a question in the course of the next ten minutes? If we can't get to you all, just know that Sophie will be upstairs signing copies of this book, as well as *The Flowering Wand*, her previous book, and Amanda will also be welcoming your responses and conversations to continue the nine-hour marathon that we hope to continue.

Amanda: Which we are going to present at the Rubin Museum in 2024.

Tim: So to be fair about it, who's never asked a question in public before, and would like to tonight? I need two takers.

Audience member: Hi, I'm a doctoral student, and something that's come up a lot in my classes this semester is the idea of a post-heroic narrative, because the west is so eagerly identified with the hero and the savior, and that's led us into a lot of over-consumption. And earlier in the evening, you said that those of us that live with chronic illness, because we don't get that victorious part of the narrative, I'm thinking that maybe we're a good place of wisdom to start with living into a post-heroic, and I'm just curious if you could each talk a little bit about how you think that post-heroic narrative might unfold in this next chapter of our complex history.

Tim: Did everybody hear that? If you don't mind paraphrasing a little bit.

Amanda: A good way to summarize would be talking about we have the hero's journey, and a long-standing heroic narrative structure. I see this coming up constantly with my kid. He's 8, and I have very strong emotional feelings about the stories he digests, and the stories that he loves, and the stories that he wants to worship, and the stories that I try to steer him towards, and the stories that he still really wants, and wanting to tread gently, especially for a kid who's going through a divorce, and living in a house with a mom alone and a dad alone, and what he needs to believe, about women, about men, about partnership, about resolution.

And it's a stunning and kind of shocking project, to realize how much of it I've internalized. Nothing will make you realize how much you've internalized, sexism, capitalism, all of it, until you have a kid and you are really forced to face what you're spewing back out, and how much is really in there.

And I mean, I think one of the things I try to be careful about is that there is a value, there has got to be a value, in the story that we all know we love, where the survivor survives, where the hero conquers, where Odysseus gets back, where true love wins the day. There's a reason we desperately love and need those kinda of stories. And I'm gonna leave this deliberately unwoven, and push it over to Sophie, who will probably be able to wrap it up in a more beautiful way.

But even just looking at my struggle as a mom, reading books that do and don't wanna wrap up in certain ways can be really confronting. And I think there's a value in tearing it apart, and there's also a value in examining, god, why do we need it so badly? And then probably the largest value around having that conversation with the kid. Why does this feel so good? Why is candy delicious? There is a real reason that it looks delicious when you see a shiny, glistening red piece of candy. It comes from nature.

And so, I'm gonna hand all of that over to Sophie, and let her finish it in a more articulate way.

Sophie: Well, probably not. First is I wrote a whole book about this exact question, called *The Flowering Wand*, and it's about composting Joseph Campbell's idea of the hero's journey, and why it might not be well suited to an age of ecological collapse.

But I'll pull out for a second and say that we back-form. One of the issues with history is we project back our modern viewpoint, and think that it's always been how people thought. But the truth is that if you look at most paleolithic art, the most striking thing is the absence of human beings altogether. And usually what you're seeing is polyphonic experiences of animals. Polyphonic music is music that is not harmonious, it's many different voices at once, all intersecting. And if we think about healthy ecosystems, they're healthy in as much as they are diverse. They're not monocrops. Monocrops are incredibly vulnerable to pathogens, it's why our agriculture is so vulnerable right now, is it's too simplistic. We need convoluted foodwebs, convoluted symbiotic species interacting with each other.

And a hero is never gonna save an ecosystem. Ecosystems are not built of hero's journeys, they're built of their nested homes. I often bring up, we don't see heroes, we don't see heroic literature actually really dominating any stories until the collapse of the Bronze age. And having a lot of empathy about what caused the end of the Bronze age, we don't know what exactly called this shift from what Riane Eisler calls partnership cultures to hierarchical dominator cultures. But we do know that there was drought, there were volcanic eruptions, there were genocides, empires took over other empires, just a lot of trauma. And what happens in a human body when we are traumatized? We disassociate. Mind body split. Right after that, we see platonic philosophy. We see the ideal forms, and then the brute matter. And we also see the idea that humans can master the Earth, that there's a difference, there's a split between us and nature. And that's the moment in time when you start to see heroic individuals, you see Homeric heroes.

But the funny thing for me is those first Homeric individuals we think of as being the proto-heroes, are inside of ecological stories that are nested narratives with multiple different characters with competing interests. They're more ecologies than they are hero's narratives.

So I agree with Amanda, which is heroes are compelling stories, and they're a technology, but they're one type of technology in the toolbelt, and we may need more complicated ways of telling stories that reinforce our culpability. The fact that we are not so much individuals as we are interfaces between ourselves and our environments and our people. I oftentimes say that intelligence is not a possession of a single brain, it is the moment you're interacting with something else, it's interstitial.

Tim: We have one final question.

Audience member: So I wanted to go back to the compassion bit. I'm wondering, when have you guys reached the limits of your own compassion? I have so many other questions, but that's the one I want to ask.

Sophie: That's a great question.

Amanda: I think I have struggled... The only struggle that would really be worth examining would be the recent ones, because I'm supposed to be constantly progressing and getting better at this.

I'm a closure addict. I feel like I can handle anything but a closed door, and I have hit the limits of my compassion with those who won't engage with me at all. And that has been my hardest work. My hardest work in my life, in my social circle, in my relationships, has been the ability to have compassion for those who will simply not pick up the phone. Because I get so enraged. Because I just assume that the whole thing will work, but we have to be able to talk to each other. And then we can have all of this compassion for one another, and then we can work it out. And this is something I have really struggled with, still struggle with now, and in the work that I feel I have to do in my own research and writing, and I always feel like the stuff that I'm struggling with, contending with, is always the stuff I'm gonna write about, and aim at, and I think that's right where it is, is the ability, and I'm also calling back to this question here, the ability to walk away compassionately from an argument where you kind of aren't getting anywhere, and to not insist on closure.

And this is also a constant problem on the left right now, which is that you have to talk to me about this, it is your fucking responsibility to stay in that seat, and stay in this seat, and have this difficult conversation. And that's a real third rail for me, for many right now, which is can we have compassion for those who need to walk away, must walk away, and the flipside. And this calls back to Sophie talking about the respect that we need to have for disengagement and rest and recovery. And in a world of constant barrage, constant social media, constant text messages, waking up and immediately checking the phone, you must be constantly engaged or you are irresponsible, unproductive, and failing at life. To have compassion for the disengaged, and that may be ourselves, that's a hard one. That's a hard one for me, and I think it's a hard one for many right now.

Sophie: Yeah. Something interesting for me is, and this piggybacks and is in concert with what Amanda said, is I think a lot about response-ability. The ability to respond to someone, to look them in the eye, to share community and space, to know that you may see them in the grocery store tomorrow, or that they are your pharmacist, and they are gonna be the person mixing up your medicine. We have lost the ability to respond to each other in a way that is not disposable. This relationship is gonna last til tomorrow, and the next day, and I cannot throw it away.

And as someone who was very private on social media until very recently, and then was very not private, and had a lot of people... Checking your phone in the morning is like letting a million people into your room. I noticed my lack of compassion for people who would come into my comments who didn't know me, who would start to berate me, and then not actually want to have a conversation. I think of it as like yelling at people out of moving cars, it's weird. And I started to feel in myself

defensiveness, and a lack of compassion for people who would interact with me that way.

And I realised that we are not compassionate towards each other in these artificial spaces, because we have no ability to actually be response-able to each other in this protracted, long, culpable way.

And I used to think, something I think about a lot, is I need to be good at realising that I'm wrong. And I used to think that the comment section was gorgeous, and amazing, and it was a great way of other people changing your mind, or giving you resources, and that it's important to risk your thinking in a community of people who care about your work. I still kind of believe that, but I'm not sure actually. I think the most important thing is to have people in your actual community who aren't an echo chamber of your ideology, but who are response-able to you, who you share your ideas with, and then you have to continue seeing them every day. I think that, for me, is more important than the comments sections, and I actually think people aren't very compassionate towards each other there. I'm certainly not. I don't know this person, I'm not looking into their eyes, I can't smell them. I always come back to the fact that we're animals, and most of the information we're getting about other people, even if we think it's intellectual, is physiological. We're reading their micro-gestures, the way they're moving, we get none of that. We're not talking to each other as animal body to animal body.

Amanda: Yeah. In short, the internet has fucked all of us up, and we're only just scratching the surface. Which is also a really good moment to commend us all for sitting in a room and talking about these things, and sticking ourselves in these chairs. I really do think, and I thank Tim...

Sophie: Thank you.

Amanda: I do not take this for granted. Going out and seeing music is one thing, going out and seeing entertainment is one thing, just getting into a room with a couple of randos, to talk about life and discuss ideas, and not just Netflix and chill, or scroll through Facebook and have a conversation with the algorithm. There is a little bit of this that feels crucially important, and maybe even a little revolutionary, especially post-COVID, to just get around and talk about what this has all done to us. And we should be doing it, and doing it, and doing it a lot. And the fact that the Rubin and Tim invited us, and host this, it's a great thing, so thank you.

Tim: Let me just add importantly that we're doing this all in the context of an art museum. And this art has something very compelling to tell us right now. We've heard the word compassion a lot. We've heard, but not necessarily expressed as a word, wisdom. How are we compassionate in the world? How do we express it, how do we be effective? Compassion is an action, but if it's not applied with discernment and true understanding, it just bears no seed. And so I do invite you, while we've got the time, the gallery is open until 10 and you are here, seek out the illustrations of compassion and wisdom, and you will see they are intertwined. They can't really operate without one another. And they're all upstairs. So whether it be on the sixth floor in Death Is Not The End, or even bang a gong and dip it into water to release

your anger on the third floor, these are all interactive expressions of what we could be doing beyond these walls, and that's the Rubin's invitation to you.

Amanda, Sophie, this has been an extraordinary dialogue, and as a dialogue it triangulates out with the rest of us into hopefully an action. So that's the invitation. But Amanda has the last word, it's her series. So over to you.

Amanda: I wanted to end with a quote that actually follow son that perfectly. But before I totally end, please buy and read Sophie's work. And we're going to be doing our final discussion next Friday. This was a series of three talks, this is the middle one. Next Friday I'm in conversation with Noor Taguri, who is this incredible journalist, activist, like Sophie a total firecracker, change-maker, unbelievable human being. So come back if you wanna come back, tell people, it isn't quite sold out yet, but I think it's doing pretty well, and I hope we have a crowd this robust next week.

And also, follow us both on social media, and help us out. There's a lot of cruelty, clearly.

I found this quote last week, and it's an old one that I was familiar with, but it just is on point for the moment. It's Kurt Vonnegut. He says...

Go into the arts. I'm not kidding. The arts are not a way to make a living. They are a very human way of making life more bearable. Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake. Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories. Write a poem to a friend, even a lousy poem. Do it as well as you possibly can. You will get an enormous reward. You will have created something.