



**Visual Quitter with Jodi Hays**  
**Episode 34, recorded in January 2026**

[Sharon Butler](#) leads an open survey of her many times of thinking of giving up art. She sits at the helm of her work and gave us [Two Coats of Paint](#). I have followed her since her days showing at [Pocket Utopia](#), and even had [a \(Nashville!\) studio visit](#) with her in 2012. I love her stages (1-4) of an artists's work and life, and her openness in talking about how hard it is to remain "non-suffering" in her practice. She's got projects coming up at 195 Henry St, NYC, Clear Sky (Insomnia Project), 68 Prince St Gallery (Kingston).



*Sharon Butler, Neptune Park, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 29 x 36 inches*

**Upcoming Shows:**

["Street Corner Conversations"](#) at McBride/Dillman in NYC, with Sharon Butler, Wendy Fulenwider Liszt, and Ariel Mitchell. Jan 16- March 1, 2026

["Insomnia Project"](#) solo at CLEA RSKY NYC, Feb 18 - March 6, 2026

["Spot On,"](#) at 68 Prince Street Gallery, Kingston, NY. 2-person show with Sharon Butler and Jason Travers, Feb 7 - March 8, 2026

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

*(electronic music intro)*

**Sharon Butler:** I had a bit of a shift when I moved. I had been in Dumbo for 10 years, and then I lost my subsidy on the space. I could have negotiated a market lease, but I thought, I've been in this bubble for so long, and the

election had just happened. I thought, no, I'm just going to put it in storage and see what happens. This is actually a quitting quitting story.

It's not that I was going to quit painting, but I just needed to approach it in a different way. So I put everything in storage. I've been on a subsidized basis for 10 years. I've been very lucky — had good shows and met great people — but with the coming of the second Trump administration, I just knew it was going to be really hard. How did I want to live through that? So I put everything in storage, and then we went to Dublin for a couple of weeks and then came back and realized it would be sort of cowardly to go at that point. What good does that do? It does nobody any good.

**Jodi Hays:** Because it was very real — you were really thinking you were going to move there.

**Sharon Butler:** I was just so angry and in disbelief. Anyway, I was working in my apartment, and finally after 10 weeks I thought, I *am* staying here and I need to have a studio. So I got a new space in Long Island City with an amazing view of the old neighborhood. I don't know if you know this area at all.

**Jodi Hays:** Yeah.

**Sharon Butler:** It has two distinct sections. There's the high-rise, fancy apartment buildings, and then there are all the auto body shops, the food cart storage — and I have a view of the old section. I was tired of struggling in my work. I had been at the point where I was painting things over and over and over, and it seemed like I didn't have any clear sense of when something was finished. I just thought, why am I making myself miserable? Why am I paying all this money to go to the studio and paint things over and over and be miserable about it? I thought, I want to be like my sister who plays tennis all day. Although, when I think about it, she probably has the same anxiety about her serve or the game she played that day. I just thought, this is ridiculous.

But when I got to the new studio, I kind of developed a new ethos of non-suffering — that I'm going to make these paintings and I'm going to enjoy making them. I'm going to stop being so doubtful about everything. If a painting doesn't work out, I'll just start another one.

So I think, Jodi, that I've reached stage four, if you consider it like the Buddha's four stages of development. In art, the first stage is when you learn your craft: you go to school and start thinking about how to make whatever it is you want to make. The second stage you start to think, okay, I know how to make this — but why am I making it? What does it mean? I did have various stages of quitting throughout those times. At one point I decided I was going to — well, I would comb the classified ads back when they had classified ads, and find jobs that looked interesting. One I remember was going for an interview for a big ocean sailboat that needed somebody to cook during ocean passages.

Going on job interviews for me is a way of envisioning myself as a different sort of person — the type of person who has no interest in turning things into art, who doesn't feel compelled not just to see and appreciate the world, but to make something out of it. Everything is fodder for something else. I had this vision of being the type of person who doesn't do that. But ultimately, of course, I realized I would just be miserable cooking on a boat for a 10-person crew, with no experience doing it and never having been on an ocean passage — even though I've sailed all my life. I go back to the studio with what I've learned about myself and the world from going on different interviews and things.

Then in stage two of the art-making process, you start to look at the wider world. You've figured out how to make your thing, and then it's: what am I doing? What is worthy subject matter for all these skills I now have? That takes a while. And then in stage three — though also in stage two — I remember going for an interview to be a

stockbroker. I didn't even make it to the interview. I was living in Boston at the time, I got all dressed up in the morning and headed to the subway, and then — this was back when there were payphones — I just said, I can't do this. I am not the type of person who is going to go to an office and meet people I have nothing in common with and try to sell them stocks.

**Jodi Hays:** Had you gotten your Series 7 and everything? Had you gone that far?

**Sharon Butler:** No, I hadn't done any of that. But my sister was a stockbroker, my father was a stockbroker — it was sort of a family business. I just stopped and called and said I couldn't make it. So then stage two passed, and I moved to New York, realizing it was a much bigger art world, and entered stage three. I started to get some shows, meet people, build some kind of community. I was always the type of person who had enough chutzpah to apply for things even when I was nowhere near ready. I had a pretty good run — a lot of opportunities. But then in stage three, you really know what you're doing. You've developed some knowledge of the wider world, and you hit your stride. And of course, the stages aren't uniform. Some people go through all of them in two years; some people don't get there until they're 70. Some people's paths are straight and some are winding.

I think the idea of quitting is part of my process. After I go for an interview, I ask myself what it was about that particular job that appealed to me — what aspects of it. And being an artist, that finds its way into the work.

**Jodi Hays:** Interesting.

**Sharon Butler:** My most recent job interviews — one was to be a guard at the Metropolitan Museum. You apply online, through LinkedIn or something. I think I was just tired of being a gatekeeper. You reach a certain level, especially with a project like *Two Coats of Paint*, and I could see the point where I felt like I was losing more friends than I was making, because so many people are disappointed that their show isn't covered or whatever. And then there's the other thing: I probably get more opportunities because of *Two Coats of Paint*. People come for studio visits, but I always wonder — are they coming because they want me to write about their upcoming show? That's hard to navigate. So I thought, I could be a guard at the Metropolitan Museum. I went in for that, and I think they felt I was probably too old for the job. They said, 'Do you really want to stand on your feet all day?'

**Jodi Hays:** I've got Danskos, man!

**Sharon Butler:** On the list of people they were interviewing, I saw other people I knew. I just thought it would be such a nice change to just...

**Jodi Hays:** Walk around and look at things all day — without the responsibility on the other side of what you do with that looking, like writing or advocacy.

**Sharon Butler:** Exactly. The problem with that job was that I wouldn't be making enough money and wouldn't have enough time to do other things. I'm used to a life where I spend my time doing things I'm interested in. I'm one of those people who can't wait to get up on Monday morning and say, okay, what's on my list? I really enjoy what I do, and I enjoy the freedom of my schedule.

The last thing I tried was being an extra on film and TV. I live in a neighborhood where they're always filming things, and my nephew is a sound person — he was on a shoot with John Turturro and Steve Buscemi up at the local pawn shop. I was looking around thinking, how do you get to be an extra on this? So I went through the process, joined Backstage, got my pictures up, and went on a few jobs.

I realized that being an extra wasn't what I wanted — not because I wanted to be an actor, I certainly didn't. I just wanted to stand in the background and enjoy the day, hang out with other people doing the same. But what I realized was that it's really hard to be an extra. It's hard to be an actor, too, but for different reasons. In one shoot, I was supposed to just be sitting in a restaurant. Great, I'll sit in the restaurant, I'll eat, I'll mouth 'peas and carrots.' But in fact I had to stand at the counter, get my food, come back to the table, have a reaction shot. I thought, I can't do this.

**Jodi Hays:** Now I'm acting!

**Sharon Butler:** I can only be me. (laughing) I don't know how to play a role.

**Jodi Hays:** I can only be a thoughtful painter, if that's what you need.

**Sharon Butler:** Oh wow, if you need someone doing a studio visit scene, I can do that.

**Jodi Hays:** Very well. Fascinating.

**Sharon Butler:** I did get a few things, and I enjoyed it. One was a music video for a pro-choice cause. We were standing outside having to play both the anti-abortion protesters and the pro-choice protesters, yelling at people going into the abortion clinic. It was kind of cathartic — when do you ever get a chance to do that? Well, at actual No Kings protests now. On another scene, we were up on a rooftop carrying signs and cheering. The experience of doing it really helped me at the No Kings protest, because I was yelling and screaming completely unabashed. I think that came from hanging around people who want to be actors — there's so much there about understanding emotion and emotional expression, which I'm just not naturally inclined toward. So I've learned a lot about emotional content and what makes people respond emotionally to something.

Anyway, here I am in my new studio making my work with a non-suffering process. I've reached stage four, and I'm quite content.

*(electronic music outro)*