

# Paula Crown: 5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me When I First Became An Artist

Edward Sylvan, CEO of Sycamore Entertainment Group [Follow](#) [E](#)  
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Go to exhibitions, live concerts, dance performances, and notice what truly draws you into deeper concentration.

**As** a part of our series about “5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me When I First Became An Artist” I had the pleasure of interviewing Paula Crown.

*Paula Crown is a multimedia artist with a practice encompassing drawing, painting, video, and sculpture. Crown rigorously incorporates cutting-edge technology, social activism, collaboration, and a commitment to sustainability in her studio practice.*

*Crown earned her M.F.A. in painting and drawing in 2012 from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has installed numerous public art installations and presented solo exhibitions throughout the US including the Aspen Institute, Dallas Contemporary, Marlborough Gallery in New York, Fort Gansevoort in New York, and The Goss-Michael Foundation in Dallas. Internationally she has exhibited with 10 Hanover in London and Studio Cannaregio in Venice during the 16th Venice Architectural Biennale.*

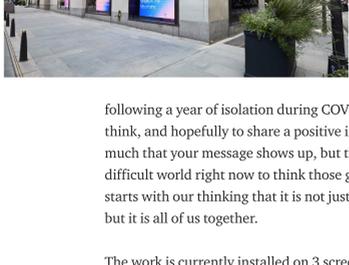
*In 2009, President Barack Obama appointed Crown to the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. She is a member of the board of trustees of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where she chairs the Education Committee. She also serves on the Aspen Institute Committee of the Arts.*

## Thank you so much for doing this with us! Can you tell us the story of how you grew up and what brought you to this specific career path?

**As** a child I intuited that ideas could be conveyed through the visual language of my mark-making but I was not preoccupied with calling myself an artist or worrying about what things were or were not art materials. Without invitation, I drew on people’s wallpaper or the interiors of their cars. I used heavy encyclopedias as the post and lintel for towers and cities. As I continued my education I took courses ranging from anatomy — reading vintage sources like Gray’s Anatomy — to printmaking. All of these experiences added to the quiver of my growing artistic language.

For 25 years, my adult life was beautifully chaotic with a husband, four active children, an extended family, and numerous board engagements in both the not-for-profit and profit sectors. But as the children grew, my needs shifted, and certain outside obligations began to lose their relevance. It was an open moment and my creative self had to be more fully realized. There was simply no other choice. One day while multitasking, sub-optimally of course, I just suddenly stopped. (I was likely drying my hair and listening to a weather forecast while prepping for a meeting.) I grabbed a pen, and wrote the words, “I AM AN .... ARTIST.” That lone act focused my attention and provided clarity about the steps needed to pursue a serious artistic career.

Not long after I embarked on a Master of Fine Arts Degree at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago and I graduated from the program in 2012. My professors, the majority of whom were women, reinforced my confidence that my artistic voice was valid and would be useful in the world. Their assurances assuaged the continual waves of guilt I experienced about the professional work I left behind and the emails that went unanswered. I knew I had to become monastic as a way toward the deep work of a studio practice. It was a time to radically expand my skill set while also following my curiosity wherever it led.



**What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now? Can you tell us about ‘Emanare’ at Rockefeller Center and your giant golden ‘Chalice’ recently exhibited at Spring / Break Art Show.**

I conceived of EMANARE in the Spring of 2021 as a way of healing and community action

following a year of isolation during COVID. I invite people to pause and think, and hopefully to share a positive intention. It is the action, not so much that your message shows up, but that you have taken time in this very difficult world right now to think those good things can happen. And that starts with our thinking that it is not just my feelings at this solitary time, but it is all of us together.

The work is currently installed on 3 screens in Rockefeller Center, as visitors in person and remotely submit their positive emanations, layers of messages scroll against a backdrop of morphing colors. Over time, new lines are added so that each participant’s unique mark not only conjures but conjoins with one another’s.

My sculpture CHALICE was recently exhibited at Spring/Break Art Show in New York City on Madison Ave. and 59th St. Answering the call for this year’s theme of HEARSAY: HERESY, this gleaming golden 7-foot cup calls to mind mythical holy objects, provoking questions of value, ceremony, choice, and consumption.

This sculpture embodies the dual notions of the physical and spiritual. A plastic solo cup is tightly twisted and distorted. Its translation to a vessel of heroic scale, burnished with gold, references religious iconography and power. How does theocracy twist moral values and control others through fear, violence, and abuse? CHALICE’s form, derived from a solo cup, reminds us of how personal choices resonate into the world and affect our shared health and that of the earth.

## What’s next?

I’m so excited that EMANARE continues to resonate with viewers and that there has been an interest from cultural patterns to share the work with their audiences. The installation will likely be traveling to Miami at the end of this year. As I think about how it can continue to make its way in the world I am exploring how to transform it into a large-scale projection or into a fully immersive environment.

My first large-scale bronze sculpture is planned for a public installation in New York City next spring. Follow along at @paulacrown\_art to learn more as these projects develop

## Who are some of the most interesting people you have interacted with? What was that like? Do you have any stories?

During President Obama’s two terms I served on his Presidential Committee for Arts and Humanities. The committee reflected the President and Mrs. Obama’s belief in the essential role of the arts in culture, history, and diplomacy. Margo Lion and George Stevens Jr. led a constellation of extraordinary citizens including Yo-Yo Ma, Alfre Woodard, Kerry James Marshall, Thomas Mayne, and Edward Norton to name a few. There was seriousness and purposefulness. We went to work on initiatives to Save America’s Treasure and on a Haiti cultural recovery program. We toured schools and celebrated new generations of artists from the Coming Up Taller program and the National Medals of Honor recipients. We worked closely with then secretary of education Arne Duncan to address the budget cuts to arts programs in schools across the nation.

Working with both the incredible committee members and the students and artists we supported was deeply inspiring.

## Where do you draw inspiration from?

I am often inspired by discovering and looking deeply at the unexpected and overlooked. My Solo Together project started in this exact way, by noticing how people interacted with common red plastic cups. These cups have assumed an iconic status via their single-use convenience for America’s college drinking culture. I became curious about these red cups for reasons that I could not immediately articulate. I trusted the spark of curiosity I had toward the cups and was willing to go where it might lead me. I became more observant. I saw each cup as an individual, no longer as leftover garbage but as a representation of its previous holder. Each cup began to signify an absent user, a missing consciousness. Their cups were twisted, crushed, or split apart to assume new forms. These marks documented the actions of each anonymous person who left a cup behind.

I went on to crush 300 individual cups and transform this object into a body of work encompassing monumental sculpture, prints, drawings and installations.

## ‘Emanare’ aims to bring goodness to the world, is this a consistent theme across your body of work?

Yes, family and friends have all heard me ask, what’s not wrong today? Leonard Cohen’s words, “there is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.” During difficult moments I find myself constantly returning to these words and hope that my works inspire this perspective in my viewers. The newest work in my #solotogether series, Resilience, is a monumental Bronze sculpture of a crushed and compacted cup form. This represents what we have gone through over the last year and reminds us that we are all resilient.

## What are your “5 things I wish someone told me when I first started” and why. Please share a story or example for each.

- Use your metaphorical “noise-canceling headphones” to tune out advice, comments and chatter that doesn’t serve you.
- Become monastic in your focus on what truly matters to you, clear your schedule of everything else.
- Divide your day, my mornings are reserved for uninterrupted artistic work. My afternoons are allocated to tactical problem-solving.
- Failure is data, understanding can be elevated by failures as much as by successes, and that is a good thing.
- Go to exhibitions, live concerts, dance performances, and notice what truly draws you into deeper concentration.

## If you could inspire a movement that would bring about the most amount of ‘good’ to people, what would that be?

I am both an artist and an activist — they are one and the same for me. Because art can transcend language, politics, culture, and race, it can provide moments to pause and get out of our reptilian brain and into our prefrontal cortex. As a result, we can think differently, and we can begin to listen. We cannot continue to just be rigidly reactive. My work, inwardly and outwardly, reflects my deep concerns about the environment, social justice, and climate change. I try to make art in a way that is not didactic but provides viewers with multiple entry points for pause and reflection.

## We have been blessed that some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US whom you would love to meet with, and why?

Jennifer Doudna, Nobel prize winner in chemistry for her development of gene editing and RNA delivery systems called CRISPR. She applied her research to the development of mRNA vaccines for Covid 19. Her ability to take her research work from the lab to effective vaccines in such a short time frame is notable. Her mind appears to work in both conceptual realms and pragmatic applications which is rare.

I would like to first thank her for our effective mRNA vaccines and learn more about her interest in genetics and infectious diseases.

## What is the best way our readers can follow you on social media?

On Instagram I’m @paulacrown\_art, and on Twitter I’m @pahc.

This was very inspiring. Thank you so much for joining us!

Thank you!

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**About The Interviewer:** Growing up in Canada, Edward Sylvan was an unlikely candidate to make a mark on the high-powered film industry based in Hollywood. But as CEO of Sycamore Entertainment Group Inc, (SEGI) Sylvan is among a select group of less than ten Black executives who have founded, own and control a publicly traded company. Now, deeply involved in the movie business, he is providing opportunities for people of color.

In 2020, he was appointed president of the Monaco International Film Festival, and was encouraged to take the festival in a new digital direction.

Raised in Toronto, he attended York University where he studied Economics and Political Science, then went to work in finance on Bay Street, (the city’s equivalent of Wall Street). After years of handling equities trading, film tax credits, options trading and mergers and acquisitions for the film, mining and technology industries, in 2008 he decided to reorient his career fully towards the entertainment business.

With the aim of helping Los Angeles filmmakers of color who were struggling to understand how to raise capital, Sylvan wanted to provide them with ways to finance their creative endeavors.

At Sycamore Entertainment he specializes in print and advertising financing, marketing and worldwide distribution of quality feature-length motion pictures, and is concerned with acquiring, producing and promoting films about equality, diversity and other thought provoking subject matter which will also include nonviolent storytelling.

Source: <https://medium.com/authority-magazine/paula-crown-5-things-i-wish-someone-told-me-when-i-first-became-an-artist-c7e3b4cfc58>

