

[00:00:00.12] - GWB

You're listening to masculine birth ritual. My name is Grover Wayman Brown.

[00:00:04.50]

Our conversation today is with artist Takeya Trayer.

[00:00:07.53]

Her work was featured in the brown boy project Health Guide that Sara Flores.-Boudreau and I talked about at length in episode 7. Takeya has a powerful series of paintings featuring masculine of center pregnant nursing and otherwise nurturing figures that she painted after the birth of her first son. She's a parent to three children and the author of a children's book My mommy is my dad. You can find her work at www.takeyaart.com.

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I'm scheming up some new materials to support listeners of the show and would love your feedback when this episode is done. Head on over to masculinebirthritual.com/survey. I'll have a link to all these Web sites in the show notes which can be found at [masculine birth virtual dot com slash episodes or links on our Twitter Instagram and Facebook pages](https://masculinebirthritual.com).

[00:01:12.18]

Without further ado I'm excited to share this conversation with Takeya with you.

[00:01:18.19]

Here. Hi. How are you.

[00:01:20.19] - TT

Hi. I'm doing well.

[00:01:22.52] - GWB

Would you tell us a little bit about yourself and your work.

[00:01:28.66] - TT

I'm currently a parent of three. I grew up in Stilton Pennsylvania, a small town outside the city and I played sports and I really wasn't much into... I didn't have much time for art when I was younger so I didn't really get into doing a lot of painting and I mean I wrote a lot when I was younger.

[00:01:57.14]

I think it could be much painting or drawing and tell a little bit in high school and then mostly in college I majored in art and I didn't like this huge journal painting for my thesis which kind of like bit different areas in my life. Capitalizing different areas in my life and then I like on one panel with imagery imagery and then on the panel. There were different excerpts something that I wrote some things that were musical lyrics thing like a nice man quote and all in different languages.

[00:02:38.92]

I get this from German, Japanese, I translated into Spanish, Italian... what not. So I mean I had a lot of journals growing up so that was kind of like my my Artist Journal. And then I was at school for animation. Like when I was about to finish working on my thesis and then I got I got pregnant and went back to Philadelphia because I was down in Oakland for a while going to school and I was just going for animation and then I came back to Philadelphia. And I gave birth in Philadelphia. Then began I began painting about my my birthing experience.

[00:03:28.00] - GWB

And so you're a parent of three children. You gave birth to at least one did you birth all three?

[00:03:35.14] - TT

I birthed two and then my wife the other . My two sons were born in Philadelphia and I had natural home births for both of them and I had a midwife and a doula. I only really had one like ultrasound throughout the process and they had their in-home care so I would go for visits in the privacy of their practice like in their home.

[00:04:03.80] - GWB

Yeah. Well I want to ask the more about your birth and \ can I ask you what parental name do your kids use when they call you?

[00:04:11.78] - TT

They Call me variety of things as well. Also Takeya, they call me Takeya. Call me Mom, momma, Mommy Taki Sometimes so...

[00:04:25.51] - GWB

And what gender words do you generally use to describe yourself or how does gender inform your experience of your art and also how your birth experience can come to us.

[00:04:37.89] - TT

Well I... I just generally go by she or her like a female pronoun that I don't shy away if someone else calls me by different pronouns. It doesn't bother me. Definitely more masculine of center. And when I was...when I first became pregnant you know a lot of my friends they didn't. They were just like whoa you know... you're pregnant. And then they wouldn't say they wouldn't directly say it to be but then like to my other friends and say well how does that work? Because she's like you know more masculine or or you know like a boy like a dude.... And then even when I was pregnant I would I would still continue to dress the same way. So where like jeans and baggy sweaters and just you know whatever clothing. And... And be pregnant and people wouldn't really directly say things to my face but you could just see people's facial expressions sometimes.

[00:05:34.99] - GWB

Yeah. And do you feel like that response was more coming within your own community or strangers or like both strangers and your community were like hmmm?

[00:05:45.07] - TT

I think the community more in the community they felt more comfortable actually speaking and saying how they felt you know if the random stranger got more comments within the community.

[00:05:56.92] - GWB

So you were pregnant and then you moved to Philly and you had a home birth. How is your birth? How did your pregnancy feel?

[00:06:05.35] - TT

It felt amazing to be pregnant. Actually I feel like I prepared for it. I didn't really plan. It wasn't planned but I definitely out and out in California out in Oakland. I felt like my I grew healthier healthier being there just like being outside and the farmer's market and often eating healthier and learning from the community better how to form healthy habits.

[00:06:35.18]

And so I feel like everything is healthy. You're just in general like in mind spirit and health and body. And so when I became pregnant first it was kind of like whoa you know me I maybe I'm not ready for this but I was I wasn't young. I was 29. So I just I was just gone down and meditate on it and think of it that yes you know like it's time you're ready. This wouldn't have happened if you weren't ready for it. So so then I moved back to Philadelphia and I've always wanted to I never saw myself giving birth in a hospital. So when I moved back to Philadelphia I was immediately start looking for midwives and

came across one in Philadelphia. And you know when I when I just went for a visit like it was immediate connection I felt really comfortable and at home and she she had said that she previously like back in her college days. I dated women before. So she does so yeah it is just very comfortable for me.

[00:07:45.31]

So to give birth at home was like a dream come true because I didn't have to deal with the hospital hospital setting doctors all that and that was in the privacy of my own home my own pace and I just had I didn't really. And I took a class before giving birth. I really had to trust in the process and my body and the midwife was great. So she gave me a lot of material to read. And you know what birthing classes would take a lot of advice. Still very thankful for her. I mean it was like it was the hardest thing that I've..I feel like I ever had to do my life... twice. But yeah. But I always trusted and it was more like running a marathon I mean like I was exhausted but I knew I enjoyed the whole process. So yeah

[00:08:37.87] - GWB

great thank you for sharing that with us.

[00:08:40.18] - TT

Yeah.

[00:08:40.57] - GWB

People just like hearing people's birth stories. I like hearing your story... at least a little bit about it. And you had your second son also at a homebirth?

[00:08:50.89] - TT

Yes. The same midwife. I'll also in Philadelphia but not in the same house. So when he came out a little bit quicker but it still was very very hard very hard thing to be able to trust my body and believe and like my first son I said I did want the waterbirth. So I had the hope for the tub and everything like in the house. But then his heart rate within the water was fluctuating. And so my midwife made me get out and then they're both they're both born opposite in like seasons. So he was born in and more in the spring. So it's very warm. and the other was born in November in the fall. So the colder. I wasn't. And you're in a small apartment. I wasn't able to have the tub where I was that time so I spent a lot of time in the shower and then the bath and he ended up being born in the hallway of our small apartment and then we were just... so you know it was it was there was a he came out a lot quicker I mean Labor was probably six hours shorter but still very tough. He was about a pound bigger than the first one. And it was a very tough birth. And so when he came out we were just... we didn't even check to see what the sex was. You know. for like 10 minutes we were just so happy that we had a baby like the baby without it. Yes. We were just staring at the baby and just was breathing and taking it all in and then like Oh yeah ah, let's see if it's a boy or a girl. So you know like not that it matters because obviously it doesn't, you know, we want a healthy baby.

[00:10:41.24] - GWB

Yeah. And were partnered with birthing both children?

[00:10:45.76] - TT

No I was not. I did both the whole birthing process and being pregnant alone. And it was something that I didn't I didn't expect. You know you like when you get pregnant you don't like before you get pregnant you see yourself how having a family and having this partner and they decide to get pregnant and all that stuff but I mean it was what it was. I don't regret it. And I was perfectly fine doing it that way.

[00:11:14.28] - GWB

Yes. You said when you're telling that story you said "we." Who else was with you for your second son?

[00:11:22.89] - TT

Oh my second son just the midwives and my my first friend that was there.

[00:11:28.10] - GWB

Mm hmm. Great. Thank you.

[00:11:31.32] - TT

Sure.

[00:11:31.61] - GWB

And so I came across to work first through the Brown Boi Project helath guide that we talked about extensively in episode 7 with Sara Flores-Boudreaux. And the first image that I saw that just blew my mind was the one you called Stand Up for Everyone. For listeners, it is an image.... Well why don't you describe it?

[00:12:00.76] - TT

Well. And it is what sparked it. The motivation for it was when I was in Philadelphia there's this statue on the boathouse row and a it was. It was like a woman from the Stone Age. And she was you know she was carrying a baby in one arm and then she had like another another child kind of cowering behind her. Her other leg on the bottom. And then she's stepping on a bear. She just defeated... she had a hatchet in her hand. She just defeated a bear. You know she protected her children from the bear. And so the image the portrayed was like a masculine...a more masculine the female tribal female holding a baby in one arm and then she has a hatchet in her right hand. And then the child you know on her leg below like cowering behind her. But I didn't put the bear image in but I did kind of make the finger look like she was could could be... you know it could be interpreted as it being she's pregnant. She's pregnant or... and um.... And then it's all black in the background. And then there's kind of like this these symbols and behind the image and you could interpret that as just like spirit. You know like pushing guiding helping this person along their path and they're just you know they're just prepared. There's they're prepared to stand up for their children. They're prepared to stand up for themselves and prepared to stand up for you know whatever whatever they may face. And I I painted that image right after my first birth. So I am I guess I felt like if I felt that way you know I went through the birth alone and the pregnancy alone. And so I I felt like I was being guided. You know when my mother passed away when I was 25. So I didn't have that I didn't have her there for support didn't have that support but I had her spirit you know. And so I guess that kind of this pushed in and inspired the whole image that comes out. So yeah yeah.

[00:14:50.30] - GWB

Great. Thank you for sharing that. The image is so beautiful and so powerful. And then in the series that I'm assuming that picture is a part of, you also have a number of other pictures of black and brown people that seem to me to be androgynous or masculine of center pregnant and nursing. Um. Was that... was that around the same time?

[00:15:22.91] - TT

Yes it was. I believe all those images were displayed at the Butch Voices conference in 2011. Yeah I mean there's just... I feel like there's not... It was kind of taboo and I don't know if it still is. But at that at the time I felt like was a taboo for masculine female to give birth or to be pregnant. And and a lot of people you know that whispers and they got stares and get looks and points and and question and a lot of questions and then some people that stood up and like yeah you know like I've always wanted to be pregnant and I've always wanted that experience and I just never felt comfortable because I don't know if it is more so I in the people of color community but it's kind of frowned upon, you know, people want to stay in their stigma. They want to stay in their comfort zone where they're roleplaying playing. They're just not not so fluid. And I didn't feel like there's lots of images that portray that desire or even like people who who see images and they say OK well now that you feel more comfortable than then then having those thoughts or coming forward and saying that because they're actually like images that have what they're thinking you know. But that they've had or dreams or anything so to to display stuff that I haven't seen before. But you, you know, experienced.

[00:16:54.77] - GWB

Yeah. Right. And how long was that after your son your first from birth that you were painting those images was it? While he was a baby.

[00:17:04.05] - TT

Oh yeah. I was Yeah. I think Because I would think that he he came to the Butch Voices Conference with me he was he was a little over one year old. So yeah.

[00:17:15.33] - GWB

Great. Do you still have those paintings? Did people snatch them up and buy them? Are they for sale?

[00:17:21.64] - TT

Oh no I have them and I would... So I don't think that I'm going to sell the Stand Up for Everyone. But the other paintings I have a few of them and Yeah, they are for sale. You know I've been like so many places so sometimes things are still like in Pennsylvania. I do have a few images here and there was well I'm in St. Petersburg Florida and they had this show called nasty nasty woman in St. Petersburg. It was it was they like likely Hillary Clinton's comments that you made it so I repainted like I made I made a duplicate of a smaller. There's an image of like a basketball player you know wearing sweat pants. And then nursing.

[00:18:12.93] - GWB

Yes I'm seeing it right now. OK. Yes.

[00:18:15.70] - TT

There you go. Yeah I do. I have that with me and I made a smaller image of that. To donate to the show so they can auction it off.

[00:18:25.49] - GWB

Cool. Great. So for listeners I'll put a link to Takeya's page in the show notes.

[00:18:33.27] - TT

That's great.

[00:18:34.38] - GWB

And Googling you I found that you also have a book out.

[00:18:41.30] - TT

Oh yes I do.

[00:18:42.44] - GWB

It's called My mommy is my daddy an. I read about a little bit about why you made the book but can you tell our listeners what the book is then and why you made it.

[00:18:53.94] - TT

Well like I said it goes along the lines with some images that just aren't visible to the community. And I wanted to just disrupt like the norm and then just show people that that you know women now and have been always. But now it's more recognized that they've been doing these jobs that are mostly predominantly like you know men do. But you know Mommy has to do it also. And so not only am I a parent now but I also have to go out and you know do the job. So yes. And I think you know some of the images are like like a lot of technology someone who fixes computers or a pair of computers or some kind of technology Java software developer or web developer or even like animation like I went to school for animation and it was predominantely men... guys who were in that in that major you know there were like two women in my class. Right. So yeah yeah. Even painting you know because you know you always think oh artists... art. I think that's a woman's field or a more feminine field or something.

[00:20:12.58]

But there are a lot of guys who who excel in that field because I mean it just ...I don't know. I don't

know. I don't know. They're not they're not taking not taking as much responsibility in their home life you know. So that they can focus more on just staying at the office and animating for hours and hours.

[00:20:42.51] - GWB

Yeah right. Or being out in their garage or while someone's inside cooking food.

[00:20:48.36] - TT

Right. You are doing the laundry. Or whatever. So My Mommy is my Daddy is just doing both. You know we're taking the kids to the park and then we're going home and late night and you know animating or film filmmaking or whatever at night or fixing the car or having the computer or Oh I am I am a teacher right now.

[00:21:12.45] - GWB

OK. What do you teach?

[00:21:13.04] - TT

I am. I teach four year olds and five year old. It's called Junior kindergarten through kindergarten teacher I coach middle school boys basketball during basketball season and then I do animation camps for first grade to fourth grade and summer.

[00:21:37.12] - GWB

Very cool. Are are your kids now in junior high age?

[00:21:42.08] - TT

Oh no my kids. I have a four year old girl. She's she's four and the through my marriage and I have a boy who's six and a boy.

[00:21:55.50] - GWB

Ah, got it. Got it. So you're you're coaching middle school but they're not there yet.

[00:22:00.28] - TT

No. They come they do come to practice but I mean they don't know they they have no interest in basketball I think. I played basketball in college so

[00:22:11.66] - GWB

yeah great. And how do you like... what made you want to switch from animation to teaching?

[00:22:20.35] - TT

It kind of you know people for years they've been telling me that I should be a teacher. I came right out of college my undergrad and I was working at afterschool programs. We're going to an after school program for a few years while I was also getting this associate animation and you know I just I don't know. No. I'm going to be an animator you know like I'm not going to be a teacher. That doesn't make any kind of money.

[00:22:48.42]

So I'm going to be an animator so then I went out to Oakland and start going to school for animation and then you know when I got pregnant and had a child and I was a stay at home mom for a while and I work on all my art that I was writing painting and amazing music and all kinds of things and I got a couple of grants and then it just became time for... you know I was homeless for a while trying to get back in the swing of things to get a job. I hadn't had a job for so long and then just I was able to get a job would because they were going to school you know I was finally at school age and I need to have the same hours that they do.

[00:23:30.83]

And so yeah how I was very blessed to come across this position where I could I could explore like you know all the avenues that I need to explore. And it's very fulfilling. You know I could have the thing

I was with my children I could coach basketball I could explore explore the animation side and still be able to create my artwork really need to know when when I have time I have the summer I have to essentially have the summers off I teacher hours Yeah it's kind of it's all worked out I guess.

[00:24:06.80] - GWB

Yeah great. Great. Thank you for sharing that back.

[00:24:11.40] - TT

Yeah.

[00:24:12.08] - GWB

Can I... Are you comfortable with me asking about your period of homelessness? Because I was homeless too for four years and I feel like we don't talk about it enough in our community. I'd love to ask some questions.

[00:24:24.40] - TT

yeah I'm open to. Well what started it was I just started to run out of money I had like a little bit of savings and then I knew that it was go some time where I wasn't going to be able to afford my place and so I went through a process a series of like just asking different people can I stay with you. And then I would go stay with like a family member for a little while until you know I had two children at a time. So you can't you can't just stay forever because it's a life very taxing on people who don't have children.

[00:25:11.76]

To bring you know small children into a home and someone who doesn't have children and if you understand like my parenting style. So you know we go from family member I stay for a couple months and then another family member to stay for a couple months and then finally had a family member who was like down here in Florida and I stayed with them or came down to Florida and I felt like just seeing that in Florida I felt like this was where I supposed to be. I had eczema from all over my face from my wrist to my shoulder being up in the north.

[00:25:55.79]

And when I came to Florida within two weeks it cleared out. So I felt like this you know like it was just feel like it's worth a try you know. And so I tried really hard to make it work. I couldn't really stay with my family member here for that long. So then we just went to a shelter for a month and then we stayed at a sublet for three weeks and then another friend who lives further up north in Florida just trying to make it work and he wasn't coming across anything job wise that was going to was going to help me to actually get an apartment of my own.

[00:26:38.45]

So yeah we ended up moving a few more times. We went to Tennessee. We went to we went back out to Oakland and in Oakland I was actually able to find a job but I wasn't able to afford housing because of Oakland. It was crazy expensive. So then I'm asking for... you know saying I have a lot of friends out there so what to stay with certain friends for you know very time. Even though I'm working. So then I did a go fund me page which was supposed to be essentially like a down payment for housing and then ended up using it for transportation.

[00:27:18.29]

Just buy a car because I was out there without a car. So I'm taking Bart and I'm biking and I had a bike trailer for the kids in the bike trailer actually save me I had a bike everywhere I went I had a bike here in Philadelphia earlier and I was like when I went back home and Stilton and then I got a car out in Oakland and so then I was able to have transportation back and forth to work for them. You know I just was able to save money. We've been on people's couches and having friends watch the kids while I work nights and then I saved up money and the money wasn't enough for California but it was enough for Florida.

[00:28:03.95]

So then we hopped in the car and I drove two kids back out to Florida across the United States back to Florida and we had we had a down payment for our apartment. So we got an apartment. I told them that I was going to work in a certain place. We didn't end up working out. But I did end up getting a job where my son was going to preschool. Like I went through the government program where they help me they pay for child care as long as you're in their program. And so they essentially they think they got him into a child care and then I was going to their program and then I end up getting a job like where my son was going.

[00:28:48.53]

So then that you know I was I was like perfect because I have the same hours as him. And then I could and it was right down the street from where the apartment was so I could walk I could walk. So just like a lot of planning strategical things you know it just sticks and you know as soon as soon as you start working they may want to cut you off everything government wise so that if it became not enough again and then I was in fear of losing. Like that apartment that I just worked so hard to gain because no savings was going out again.

[00:29:28.97]

And like it just kind of felt like through. I felt like Florida was the place to be because I felt like people were really trying to help us to succeed. And those just like just me getting out in the community and volunteering and just volunteered to go to... volunteering at the garden and we would go there and get veggie and also help helped to maintain the garden. And then we give the veggie at the end of it and they also make friends. And so through that I made a contact who worked somewhere else and then they like that job opened up and I got a job at the school that I'm working right now.

[00:30:12.11]

And it turned out to be like the greatest thing because now my kids go to that school and it's right down the street from where we live. And you know I it's enough to maintain so... Yeah. well that's the story.

[00:30:25.43] - GWB

You... wow. you worked really hard. It sounds like you worked your ass off to get stable and out of that.

[00:30:34.31] - TT

Right. Right again.

[00:30:35.78] - GWB

Yeah. Impressive.

[00:30:38.66] - TT

Thank you.

[00:30:39.62] - GWB

Right. OK. Thank you so much for sharing that. As you were telling me I could see just like you know traversing all over town and across the country. And Now, do you live with your partner do you live with your in your wife?

[00:30:57.11] - TT

Yes I do. Yes I do. She is from Florida. She's from here. And so you know after everything is leveled out you know I was finally able to breathe. I wasn't I wasn't ready for a relationship through all that she's ever able to breathe and actually enjoy myself. And you know we we actually met because I was her our daughter's teacher a couple years back. So we reunited and then things worked out because of timing.

[00:31:30.47] - GWB

So cool. Well congratulations.

[00:31:34.01] - TT
Thank you.

[00:31:35.45] - GWB
I guess the next question is what are you working on now? Aside from having a lovely family paying the bills... are you still making art?

[00:31:45.95] - TT
I am. I'm trying to figure out how to get my book into color. My Mommy is my Daddy Book. I really want to have a color version of it and a hard hardback copy. And so I'm just struggling though visually to be happy with what I produce. So that's the work. I have plans to go to China this summer to work at camp in China. Art camps for kids in China and I worked on a couple of painting too. I been no more abstract things and experimenting with texture and resin. So then I can't forget as it is this one huge painting is on plywood and it's like my comments love where we live now but I've added like a bunch of things like texture like rocks and dirt and sand and grass and twigs and things through it and then covered it and resonance like along with paint for the color and then covered it and resin and has this like really cool texture to it.

[00:32:59.17]
Does an experiment that I've been doing more or less treat like three the multimedia is cool.

[00:33:07.51] - GWB
What does that mean. Can you talk just like tell us what it means to work with the resin?

[00:33:12.13] - TT
It's just like adding a whole bunch of materials together and an art on a canvas like I have this one painting where there's the best piece of artwork where there's tracks that like little like model model train tracks that are glued on to the canvas or the board. And that's metal. And then I have like a cut out from a magazine of a tree and it's on top of the track and that paper. And then there's like this weird texture in the background of it which is like just a build up of acrylic paint and then it's all covered in the red there.

[00:33:54.76]
Cody Yeah. So I've just been combining like a bunch of things. See what happens. No it's bad in all kinds of things.

[00:34:03.14] - GWB
Cool. That's great. I saw work on your Web site as well. There are a couple of images of that on the Web site that I found out.

[00:34:10.04] - TT
Great.

[00:34:10.72] - GWB
Well thank you so much for talking with us. And thank you for your your beautiful work and your visionary work. Now almost a decade before the podcast exists it's really amazing.

[00:34:23.26] - TT
Thank you

[00:34:25.79] - GWB
Thank you for listening to masculine birth ritual as a reminder you can view to kids work and contact her via her Web site to key outcome. I'll have a link to her page in the show notes. Which can be found at masculine birth virtual dot com slash episodes. You can follow along with the work of this show. Instagram Twitter and Facebook. If you like what you heard today please consider supporting the show financially at patron dot com slash. Masculine birth which will. Make you feel blessed by every ounce of your persistent existence. This week which is a gift to all of us. Until next time. Have a great

week.