Jeff Goins: Well thank you again Elizabeth for chatting with me today.

Elizabeth C.H.: Thank you for talking to me. I'm really honored to talk to you about my work.

Jeff Goins: So I know that some ... I know that “The Warhol Economy” is not a new book. I mean, it was published in 2007 and I don't know what it felt like to you to have somebody reach out to you asking you about this book. But it was kind of serendipitous for me to stumble upon this book because I just had this hunch that there was a connection between where people live and the kind of creative work that they do. And I was talking to a professor about this, a friend of mine who is a college professor, and he's like way more into the deep research than I am. And I was like, "Isn't there something out there about this? About creativity and geography and how, like, certain places can make people more creative?" And he goes, "Yeah, I don't think so. I don't think you're gonna find that." And, you know, just through some searching and buying enough books on Amazon I think that your book was recommended to me, and I'm so glad it was because it was exactly what I was looking for. So thank you for writing "The Warhol Economy".

Elizabeth C.H.: Oh my goodness, that's a really nice thing for you to say. Well, you're very welcome. I didn't really feel like I was the first person to think about it, but I guess at the time maybe I was one of the first people to think about it with such specificity.

Jeff Goins: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So-

Elizabeth C.H.: But-

Jeff Goins: Yeah. Go ahead.

Elizabeth C.H.: [inaudible 00:01:35] But I think people have probably since the beginning of time noticed a relationship between certain places being more creative than others, and then particularly within cultural industries, you know, like the art market. But there's been a real link between where it happens and the other things going on.

Jeff Goins: So, I think this was in the very beginning of the book, you drew an interesting parallel between New York City's economic output in terms of just, you know, what the city as a whole earns ... it's, you know, a very affluent city ... And its creative outputs. And I found that fascinating. I wonder if you could elaborate on that a little bit more and maybe share a little bit about the idea behind “The Warhol Economy” itself?

Elizabeth C.H.: Well one of the things that was important when I looked at the arts in New York City was to be able to not just understand how they worked, but why we should care. And so one of the things that I found when I started rooting around was it wasn't just that New York City had a competitive advantage in terms of over-concentration in creative industries, but that actually if you looked at the numbers that they were very viable industries in another right. And that if you looked at their percentage of the economy in terms of jobs, that they were right
up there with those industries that we attributed with enormous economic development, like finance and law and accounting. So it started to make sense to me to start thinking about creative industries as real economic engines and not just gentrifiers or making cities more interesting, but that they really were important and valuable.

Jeff Goins: Right. So not to put words into your mouth, but when I read that I thought, okay if a city is more creative, meaning there are more people that are involved in creative work there, then it stands to reason that it will be more affluent. I mean, is that a fair thing to say? What would you say?

Elizabeth C.H.: Well ... This is an interesting cause and effect that’s hard to untangle.

Jeff Goins: Sure.

Elizabeth C.H.: Is do you have more creativity in places that are able to support it? You know, is it that the financial industry produces enough profit that they can support local art markets? Or is it- And that’s something that we’ve actually seen since the Dutch empire, you know, that this co-location of finance and art. Or is it that creativity is appealing to many different types of people and that means that if you can create ... if you can establish a creative place, you’ll also attract other high-growth industries? And this would be the sort of example around New York City's SoHo neighborhood, which is that of course initially it was a vacant light manufacturing district. And then the artists moved in, and then it was rezoned to let them live there rather than living there illegally, and then that started a whole chain of development that initially was abandoned warehouses and then 30 years later is Chanel on one corner and H&M on the other. So, you know, it’s actually ... You can find examples of the direction of causation around the world.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. It does seem ... I mean, as you said, the cause and effect is maybe not the easiest to untangle, but it does seem in certain instances that the creative industry is driving some of the other industries as an economic engine, as you said, not just as a nice sort of overflow spillover effect of having a ton of money in one place.

Elizabeth C.H.: Yeah. So that’s something that is fascinating, and I think is becoming an important thing even when you look at policy around the arts, is that where artists locate does seem to set in motion other kinds of economic development and does seem to attract other kinds of people. And, you know, whether you’re looking at Wicker Park in Chicago or you’re looking at SoHo or you’re looking at Venice Beach, that these are places that had a presence of art ... artists and their art when they were sort of downtrodden, and then that really brought in other amenities and then made it these exciting places to live. And now the conversation isn’t about the artist as much as the fact that the artist can’t pay the rent anymore.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. So you mentioned when we first started talking that you wanted to explore this connection between creativity and place, but you also wanted to explore why it mattered. So why do you think this matters? I
mean, what did you take away with from your research for "The Warhol Economy"?

Elizabeth C.H.: One thing that was exciting in a qualitative way is that the creative industries co-locate together because they actually feed off of one another. They are not in discrete vacuums. You know, the fashion industry needs the music industry and the art industry to survive. The music industry needs designers and graffiti artists to do albums. There's a whole synergy and symbiosis across creative industries, which means that they tend to flourish in the same cities, right? So this kind of creativity seems to work best when it's all happening together.

But then the second thing is when you actually look at the numbers, creative industries are real industries. They have real jobs that generate real profit, and that means ... they should be treated as legitimately as we treat medicine or finance or law or any other industry that we're looking to support and attract.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. And it doesn't always seem that way does it?

Elizabeth C.H.: No. I mean more recently there has ... I think there has been enough evidence to suggest their importance and enough scholars have been documenting how impactful they are from an economic perspective, not just a cultural one. But it has been a long time coming.

Jeff Goins: So there was this section in the book that I loved because it spoke to my own experience called "the social life of creativity". And I think it was in this section where you talked about something that you just mentioned earlier, how being an artist or a musician or a writer, how these are not separate silos but these creative industries are often interwoven together. You talked about fashion and music, and I recall in the book you were talking about nightclubs and how important nightclubs were to people of different creative industries sort of getting together at night and really doing business together. And you said something like, "Creative people want to do business together where it doesn't feel like they're actually doing business." Which I was like, yep, that is exactly true. That rings so true to my experience. Why is it that New York is perhaps a better place than some places for this kind of exchange to happen between creatives where they can create much more work, and they can reach more people or get bigger breaks by just being out there, part of the scene?

Elizabeth C.H.: I think that there's two things going on. I think that the first is that it is historically had a very, really post World War II and even before but particularly post World War II, a huge concentration of creative people. But also the built environment of the city is so important because it's so dense and it's so walkable and it is a city where people live their lives outside, not in their apartment buildings. And so it really lends itself to those kinds of interactions.

Jeff Goins: So one of the things that I guess I kind of struggled with, and I was left with a sort of "so what?" question, is, you know ... I don't live in New York, you don't live in New York anymore I don't think ... How can we take these ideas, because I really loved this ... It spoke to my
experience of trying and trying and trying to become an author for years and then finally it happening, and it wasn't just because I got good enough, it was because I knew the right people and was in the right places at the right time. And you know, I think we see that in our world and I often hear creative people say ... I mean, I live in Nashville now and being a musician living in Nashville is sort of a double-edged sword for people where it can be a great opportunity at the same time there's a lot of competition and many more ways, many multiples of that. I'm sure New York is that.

But my question is this: how do- Can you, and if so how ... Can you take these ideas, and if I'm a creative person I want to succeed, can I make my own little Warhol economy? I mean, how much control do we have over these factors or are we kind of products of our environment?

Elizabeth C.H.: That's a really good question and I think it's one that people who think about cities and think about policies around the arts are trying to figure out, too. My perspective is that it's a question of scale. So when we think about New York City, we often think about the city as a whole as facilitating the creative industries. And you know different neighborhoods ... New York City kind of has the luxury of different neighborhoods catering to, sort of, idiosyncrasies and specificities around certain parts of the creative economy. But to be honest, you know, I know Nashville well and I saw this kind of creativity bubble ring in particular neighborhoods, so it's not simply that you have to ... You have to think about the whole city enabling this.

And it's also about figuring out the strength of a particular city and what those are. So obv- Nashville is a really obvious one, obviously. I mean it's got music ... it's huge with music. It's got this influx of other kind of creative talents. But think about somewhere like Santa Fe, you know, I mean, it's ... How do you enable the artistic community there? And so what I think you start thinking about is if density matters and the synergy across different creative industries matters, how do we at least create neighborhoods that enable those kinds of things to happen even if you're not dealing with the whole city lending itself to it?

Jeff Goins: And you think that's a question of policy?

Elizabeth C.H.: I think it can be, yes. I mean I think some of the ... this is again ... You know, one of the questions that people really think about is how much of what we observe is organic? How much of it is inherently organic? Because then there's no amount of policy that we can fiddle with to make changes. And how much can we learn from the organic experience and then actually make it a reality for places that don't inherently lend themselves to it?

So from my experience I think it's the latter of the three. I think we have seen with all sorts of ways that we understand cities that we can learn from what happened in a positive way accidentally, and actually build cities that respond that way. So I think if you're dealing with creativity you can actually support the concentration of galleries in a particular place. You can support the amenities to be located near that. You can support warehouse space for artists. And in a way you're doing
those things that were happening in New York City, you know, 50 years ago.

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

And support of the art galleries and the music halls and those kinds of things, it can, if I'm not mistaken based on your research, it sounds like it can affect not just the well-being of those particular industries or those, frankly sometimes seemingly trivial activities or not necessarily essential to the well-being of a city ... But it sounds like it can affect it. It can affect the economies of the other industries in that city. I mean, is that accurate?

Elizabeth C.H.: Yeah, I think ... When I think about the creative industries' impact on a city, I see first and second order effects. So the first order effect is that they are in fact, and we've now been able to document it, important to a city's economy. The second thing that I think happens is that because they are ... because they are interesting not just because of what they produce but because they are appealing to other industries and other groups of people, their second order effect is that they then do draw lots of other people.

[inaudible 00:15:40] I'm really drawing from Richard Florida's concept of "The Creative Class". But when you really think about where what [inaudible 00:15:47] wants to live, well, they want to live around amenities, they want to live around creative, interesting people, they want galleries, they want nightlife, they want a sort of sense that people are living and that there are lots of things to do. And the creative industries really perform that function. I mean, gallery openings and music venues are not just music, they're actually these kinds of culturally interesting social gatherings. So that's, I think, a way to look at how they contribute to not just the creative economy, but to a larger, thriving city.

Jeff Goins: I love what you said about finding ... Like not trying to be New York City, but discovering whatever the inherent strengths of a city are and then trying to leverage those with these lessons that you've learned.

One of the things that you talked about was tastemakers. And I wonder if you could just unpack that term a little bit and why those are so important in the creative economy?

Elizabeth C.H.: So this is actually where New York becomes- Tastemakers are a huge part of why New York is so core because that's where so many of them are located. Tastemakers, because creative industries are inherently subjective, you need people who are technically the authority to tell you what to follow. Right? Part of consuming cultural goods, whether it's a movie or an album or a coveted dress from a runway, is that other people understand it's import. And that other people can also share information about it, right? So you get this kind of [inaudible 00:17:24] advantage around particular kinds of cultural goods because it's genuinely enjoyable if other people are also engaging in consuming them.
So tastemakers kind of set ... tell us what to follow, they kind of set the path out to what album we should be listening to, what movie we should go to, what fashion designers really hot right now. And that gives a lot of us, who are mere lay men, a sense of what things are culturally interesting by a theoretical authority, and that is important because cultural industries don't produce objectively good and bad things- I mean of course they do. There's really bad music and really good music, but there's a lot of gray in that, too. You know, what I think is good music you might think is okay, and what you might play and say this is the best musician ever, I might say, "Really?" So I think that that is important because it's not clear cut and objective, and tastemakers become important curators of what we consume.

Jeff Goins: So I'm gonna ask sort of an uncivilized question, but here goes ... Is that fair?

Elizabeth C.H.: No. It's just-

Jeff Goins: It just is. [crosstalk 00:18:45]

Elizabeth C.H.: Winner take all markets aren't fair.

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Elizabeth C.H.: You'd like to believe that when a book wins the National Book Award, again evaluated by a bunch of tastemakers, that it's at least a good book. But is it necessarily the best book out there? You know, that's the opinion of the critics who made that decision but it's not necessarily the opinion of all the people who read it that year.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I think that's the hard part. It's part of the game that you play if you're going to engage in these industries and whether you like it or not ... What was that ... Meryl Streep in "The Devil Wears Prada", I think you talked about her in your book, and you said like, "These people really exist and they are really important to our decisions about culture and what we think is good or bad art, good or bad fashion, and so on." And I guess I'd really never thought about it in completely subjective terms but you're right, there is ... you can tell when something is really really bad. But like you said, it is really a matter of taste and so it's fascinating.

Elizabeth C.H.: And look, people won't ... There are a lot of people who think that Tracey Emin's "My Bed", which was literally her bed, with old, dirty clothing on it and unmade, was not art. And there's other people who, including Charles Saatchi, who thought it was a masterpiece. So, I mean, you know, it really is anyone's guess what's going to be considered art. And sometimes it's because provocative, and sometimes it's because it's never been done before, and sometimes aesthetically beautiful. But all of these variable interchange in importance based upon who's evaluating it.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. S-
Elizabeth C.H.: But they do give us a reason to know that those artists exist by telling us that we should pay attention to them.

Jeff Goins: So how does somebody become a tastemaker?

Elizabeth C.H.: Well, that's a really good question. You know, I think in some ways it's almost as lucky as being one of the people who is chosen by a tastemaker because obviously if you get a gig at The New York Times or The New Yorker and you're the book editor or the art editor, the art critic, then you become a tastemaker. But how did you get that job? Is it because you went to a great university? Maybe. Is it because you met interesting people at a party? Maybe. Maybe you did a really great interview. So that is I think, also, it's almost this sort of meta narrative on top of it because it's also subjective how we often land these kinds of jobs, you know? Is there the best art critic out there in the world? Probably. There are people who are really good and fantastic, but to say that they are always the people who land the jobs to make these decisions, I think that would be hard to say for sure.

Jeff Goins: So if I'm a writer or a musician or an artist and I read this and I get it, and I go, yeah it's not fair but this is the way it is and this is just the way things work, and I want to make it, I want my big break ... Are there things that I as an individual can do to get in front of a tastemaker? That I can do to ensure or at least increase the chances of my creative success? Or is it just the luck of the draw and it's just whether or not you get picked?

Elizabeth C.H.: Well you know, that's a really good question. You actually took the words out of my mouth because a few moments ago when you were asking me about tastemakers what I was thinking was: we know they exist and we know they're important, but we know that most of them exist in concentrated places. And we know that if art is subjective then what we really need to do is get them to like us as people and our work, and so that means that we need to do the socializing. This is where all of that socializing and all that density and running into these important people does in fact increase your chances.

I mean, look, if you're not a great artist and you're trying to get The New York Times to write you up, it's probably not going to work. But using the social process that I articulate in the book I think is really very important to establishing one's self. And yes there are lone geniuses, but I am by far not the first person to observe that that is more myth than reality. That most of the time this is a, to use Howard Becker's term, this is an "art world". And for me and the slices of it that I really tried to look at was the social world of that art world. That in itself has all sorts of important processes going on and that ... If you want to increase your chances you need to participate in that.

And actually on that point, and this is something I really love seeing when I ... cause you know, I wrote about it in a very academic way and I really tried to formalize it for an academic community, but I loved reading Patti Smith's "Just Kids" ... because the way she talks about running into these people at Max's Kansas City and how, who Robert Mapplethorpe wanted to meet and how important it was for him to
meet, I think it was Andy Warhol he really wanted to get in contact with. You know, and then I was reading David Bowie's obituary in The New York Times and the profile the Style section did and just about his, how he navigated his career. And I actually saw that in action. They talk about these key social institutions and they talk about the tastemakers and the critical players at the center of the action at that time, whether it was Bob Dylan or Andy Warhol. And it was like, but that ... they lived in [inaudible 00:25:03] even if they weren't conscious of it, even if they wouldn't use my terms, they knew that was the game.

Jeff Goins: Yeah. What is something that you ... I mean, you wrote this book in 2007. In many ways it was the thing that I was looking for. I was like, I'm sure there is something out there about this and I couldn't find it, and then I found your book and I thought you did a very thorough ... and speaking of writing for an academic community, I found the book very readable and accessible. So I thought it was well-written and very interesting, but it spoke exactly to that thing that I've seen ... that sort of unfair advantage of people who engage in the social life. And I've seen it myself as a writer, you know, and for a while I sort of stood on the sidelines. But then when I realized, well no I actually can engage in this world, in the little creative social life that happens here in Nashville, and I encourage other people to do the same. I don't think it's as inaccessible as a lot of people think sometimes.

But I know you need to go in a minute and so I was just wondering, since 2007 ... You tend to write books or at least I do and then you go, oh, now I know so much more. I wish I could put that back in there. Is there anything that you would add to it?

Or anything that you've since discovered that you think is more true or false or just something that you would add to it?

Elizabeth C.H.: I think two things in very different directions.

The first one was I was very interested in the true winners of the creative economy. So I actually wrote my second book on celebrity, because I think one of the things that's really interesting about the creative economy is its winners do then get this kind of aura of stardom around them, right? So it's not ... If you're a really good lawyer you might be very wealthy and very busy and admired, but if you're like a really good musician, you're probably a really big celebrity, too. So this is sort of a really interesting component and it's also very much the creative economy is such a winner take all market that I was very interested in understanding what they did differently, and if they did do anything differently. And so my second book, I really looked at that a lot and I did try to understand if they had social networking patterns that were different. And again, some of this is very hard to tease out but certainly in the descriptive social network analysis that I did, it did suggest that that was something at play. That there was a density and a uniqueness to the social networks of these A-listers.

And then ... Also just that there's this [inaudible 00:27:48] advantage, so it's very [inaudible 00:27:49]. I mean, if you are good and you get reviewed, then more people review you, and it becomes this thing
where even as a tastemaker you feel you have to participate in reviewing whatever album or book or runway show or so forth. So that was something that was interesting and I wanted to explore.

I think the second thing for me, and getting back to my roots in urban planning and geography, is what do we do about the implications for the artists that set these places in motion? Because since I wrote that book, I remember that when it went into paperback writing a preface to the paperback about the transformation of the lower east side and the closing of CBGB’s. But fast forward another five years and you’re dealing with Manhattan, which is a gated island, and it has no sort of young gun bohemian core unless they come from trust funds or parents who work on Wall Street. And so the Manhattan of Patti Smith and David Bowie and Bob Dylan and even the Manhattan I write about doesn’t exist any more in that way. And so what do you do about the almost gentrification on steroids consequences of some of these creative centers?

Because we also see it in Los Angeles, we see it in San Francisco, that creative centers almost outgrow themselves and what happens is they push out the very people that made them interesting. And I still don’t have an answer, but it remains I think a very, very crucial question to ask in an age of thinking about inequality and the bifurcation of our socioeconomic situation.

Jeff Goins: Yeah, I thought that was interesting. I seemed to remember that being towards the end of the book and sort of the big takeaway is that the people that make certain places creative, eventually those places push them out. I thought that was fascinating and of course sad. And I’m wondering where those people are going.

Elizabeth C.H.: Yeah. What’s great for LA is a lot of these New Yorkers, certainly the media would tell you that they are moving to LA, so that’s … I mean, LA is not immune to the forces of gentrification, so it’s an ongoing problem for these very desirable places that at least in the beginning had a very true, artistic spirit and grit.

Jeff Goins: Right. Yeah. And you told the story at the very end of your book about the band Clap Your Hands and their story of how they were basically walked through this process. They were playing a show in New York, discovered by, who was it? David Bowie and David Byrne? And then eventually you saw them play, I think in LA or somewhere else … and I love this little line that you said: “Even 3,000 miles away, they are still creating New York just as New York helped create them.” I love that picture of being a part of the scene and then taking that scene and bringing it somewhere else and hopefully in some way kind of paying it forward.

Elizabeth C.H.: Yeah and I think that that’s … Again, this becomes a really tough one because there is this synergistic dynamic between what New York creates and how it then essentially executes and diffuses the New York brand. It actually makes it more appealing for [inaudible 00:31:33] to come to New York and try to establish themselves. But at what point does that become untenable in places like New York or London or Los Angeles, you know?
You could make the sort of macro argument that it’s great for places like Nashville because actually there’s a lot of really interesting cities and a lot of really interesting cities that have established cultural centers and so they will just move more to Nashville. And as it turns out, we’ve seen that. And then is there some sort of correction in 15 years that makes Manhattan livable again and then we see all of this bohemianism and young artistic creativity come out again? Maybe. I mean, that’s the thing. These kinds of questions, they involve very kind of long-game answers.

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Well I thought it was super interesting. Thank you for writing the book. I know that you need to run. Thank you again for your time, Elizabeth. It was a pleasure chatting with you.

Elizabeth C.H.: You as well and best of luck with your project. Do keep me in the loop. It sounds like you’re working on something I would find very interesting, and I would be happy to sort of direct you to different resources if I could be of any help.

Jeff Goins: That would be wonderful. Thank you so much for that, and I think we’ll be in touch. So, thanks again.


Jeff Goins: Bye bye.