

Episode 36: Jeremy Smith in conversation with Esther Anatolitis

Intro: The National Association for the Visual Arts is the big body protecting and promoting the professional interests of the Australian visual arts. NAVA conversation is a series exploring the issues and challenges of working in the sector. We speak with artists, curators and administrators to gain insight into the experiences of contemporary practice and seek to propose ideas for change, progress and resilience in both local and global contexts.

Esther Anatolitis: I'm Esther Anatolitis the executive director of NAVA and this is kind of one of those long overdue conversations.

Jeremy Smith: It is.

EA: I'm sitting here with Jeremy Smith from the Australia Council. Hello?

JS: Hello Esther.

EA: How are you?

JS: I'm very good. Thank you. It's lovely to be here. And um, and let's just say finally lovely to have this chat.

EA: I know.

JS: Yeah.

EA: Because so, we've not talked for a long, long time.

JS: Absolutely.

EA: But, we've known each other in the different capacities of these jobs that we've had and I have-

JS: We inherit.

EA: -yeah we have-
-we inherit-
-organizations-
-but then in parallel we have our own practice.

JS: Absolutely.

EA: But, also our own, um, if I can put it this strongly our own ethics and, our own values and how we bring those to the jobs that we do.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: And you're someone for whom that's really important.

JS: Yes, absolutely.

EA: And, why I admire you.

JS: Yes, absolutely. No, um, it's, I've sort of been one that has never tried to put too much thought or planning into my future career. I've just sort of been always seize the moment when something came up and I thought it might be um, something of interest or that as you say aligns to my own values. I've sort of followed it and thought it would be a good opportunity, which ultimately brought me two and a half years ago to Sydney. Yeah.

EA: You know, that's such a good way of putting it.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Because, I remember years ago I used to, um, and a lot of colleagues and we sort of we, we, we, we use that language at different stages in our work and our careers like you know, like, "I found myself in this position," or, um, the, the, you know, the lack of something. and, it's the older we get but, you know, we're still both-

JS: We're still spring chickens [crosstalk 00:02:18].

EA: We're not getting any younger.

JS: No, that's right. [crosstalk 00:02:22] but, yeah.

EA: And, then well, kind of scope for reflection we have.

JS: Yeah.

EA: We really do come to realize that those decisions that we make are grounded in, in those ethics-

JS: Absolutely.

EA: and those values-

JS: Absolutely and I think uh, serendipitous a lot of the time-

EA: Yeah.

JS: -when you turn into really remarkable and profound experiences. Yeah, mm-hmm.

EA: Yeah. Very much so.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: And one of those, um, I guess ethics these around; I guess the, the value of experimental practice.

JS: Correct, yeah.

EA: And not, just in terms of it's, um, it, its value to art form and discipline and to, you know, kind of career trajectory.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: But, its value as I guess um, a, a compartment to life.

JS: Absolutely. Yeah, definitely.

EA: The way that we approach things.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: What does it mean to you?

JS: Look, I mean, I think, I mean, I think I've got you know, biased opinion but, one of the best jobs in the Australia Council. Um-

EA: Tell us, tell us the official title.

JS: The official title god, deep breath, it's the Arts practice Director for Community Emerging and Experimental Arts.

EA: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JS: And so, um, I essentially oversee our relationship with the Community Arts and Cultural Development or CACD sector and the Emerging and Experimental Arts or EEA sector as we sort of say in our grounds programs in the world that is government that is full of acronym. Um, but back to your question, I mean I think, um, what council badges, and that's a, a sort of, I think an important pretext is that council I think it's the only one that has this sort of notion of an expe, emerging and experimental art sector. I don't think people outside of the sector identify themselves, "Oh, yeah. I'm part of Australia's Emerging Emerging Experimental Art sector." Within that there's lots of different genres of practice.

EA: Yes.

JS: So, you are either an experimental performance maker or a new media artist or, um, someone that sort of works in socially engaged practice and then there's a beautiful continuum between all of those areas. So, I think that's a really, um, I mean, as I was saying to someone just the other day that um, both the CACD and EEA sectors I think are the vanguards of the sort of exploration of new genres and new aesthetics within artistic practice and artistic expression. And, um, and I think

that's something that really is an exciting part of the Australian arts ecology to watching in the futu ... as, as we move into the future. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: That's, that's a great way of putting it around exploration because there's, um, as you say, there are, there are terms and acronyms that are used in the sort of you know, the, the formalities of the grant world because you know, it's important to structure the way that artists can access things.

JS: Absolutely.

EA: You know-

JS: That's right. Yeah.

EA: And be clear and all of that.

JS: Yeah.

EA: But, then there's, um, you know, the way that we, um, consider different genres or sub genres and we see them, you know, adjacent to one another.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Um, so obviously, you know, not all CACD practice is experimental.

JS: No, exactly. That's right.

EA: [crosstalk 00:05:08] what the practice is really nice.

JS: And that's ...

EA: And that exploration.

JS: Yeah, absolutely. And I guess that's the thing is that there's a remit for council to support experimental practice across all of its areas of art forms-

EA: Yeah.

JS: be it music, visual art style. it's theater, literature or whatnot. But, I guess within specifically the emerging experiments, lots, um, cohort of projects that we support is that sort of pushing of boundaries and, and really sort of like that sort of propensity to take measured risk or sometimes not even measured risk just to sort of have a go. And the fact that failure is not seen as a bad thing because you've had a really good, um, go at exploring a new hybrid form of practice or expression. That, um, is something that's really exciting.

EA: That notion of failure you know-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: I think about like in, in an experimental context, you know, obviously there's, you know, um-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: there is the testing, there is the fail and fail again and fail faster and take that time and iterate and reiterate.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: But, then sometimes, um, in certain, um, conversations or you know, uh, fields, um, failure is sometimes contrasted with excellence.

JS: Excellence, yeah.

EA: But, in, um, in CACD practice, um, the opposite of excellence, um, isn't failure, the ultimate failure is excellence.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: But, also there is work that happens around exploration-

JS: Absolutely.

EA: which isn't necessarily about, you know, even the creation [crosstalk 00:06:37].

JS: No, that's right. Absolutely. Absolutely. It's the, I guess the artistry of, um, self-determination and, and co-creation, um, in the CACD context. That's how you can sort of work with a community to help it, um, and the community can be such a sort of broad, um, cross section of be it a group of people or, or geographic location or people from a c, certain background or, or people who identify as those, uh, the community of people with a disability or whatever.

But, um, having that sort of, um, propensity to be able to go in and help that community to realize as you're saying artistic ambitions is itself uh, an art form and it's just like isn't necessarily about developing a, a whizzbang outcome, but it's just the process which is the artistry as well and just making sure that, that sort of, um, I guess then that's the sort of whole thing that I saw. I was on the community partnerships committee in the old structure of the Australia Council and, and something that I used to always sort of bung on about the peers. The other peers used to hate me.

EA: Hmm.

JS: Um, was I guess that context of innovation as well because that was sort of a buzzword back in that time about-

EA: Yeah.

JS: -you know, something. It could be the, our communities first attempt at trying to sort of do an artistic project and say something for that. The context of innovation and that is something very different to an established, um, community of art makers and art practitioners I guess, Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: This is one thing that dazzled me-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: about the small town transformations projects-

JS: Yeah.

EA: in Victoria-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: which, um, uh, in Atlanta just recently-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: -we saw a couple of sessions about the combination of those and just hearing people describe what it has meant-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: to have a first time engagement with the arts.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Absolutely.

EA: And then, some weeks before that I was in, um, Melbourne and saw the state of the union exhibition at the-

JS: Uh, yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative). [crosstalk 00:08:23].

EA: Did you get to see that?

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Very briefly because I was going upstairs to see the liquid architecture. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Yes.

JS: Yeah, eavesdropping ex, exhibition but, I did get a chance to look at the, yeah, the, um, the other exhibition as well, the state of the Union. Amazing. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: That was remarkable, uh, just to see that history of um, you know, artists organizing and you know, and, and coming together for all those different and you know, incredibly important projects and actions and so on.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

EA: But, something that I saw that, um, I hadn't been aware of before was, um, you know, I was saying earlier that CACD practice very much about, you know, like identifying, you know-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: what, what are these kinds of communities?

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: and the community can be so many different things. And, I had never known that in the 80s it must've been the Australia Council worked on projects, um, honestly I see they kind of more but, that was specifically for workers.

JS: Oh, great. Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: And, worked with unions in different ways and um, you know, workplaces in the sort of, you know, pre, um, you know, that enormous, uh, Hawke Keating restructure where we've got far fewer manufacturing jobs than we have now. Um, but that conversation in that, you know, the 60's and 70's and 80's-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: had been very much around, um, you know, a, a big, you know, defined community I mean, it was work. It could be workers in factories workers in jobs where we don't necessarily have that opportunity to kind of, you know, I guess a, actualize that sense of, um, how you identify with a particular kind of job.

JS: Yeah, exactly. And, I think that's something that's more and more we're saying CACD be used for. Not just an outcome but a process and that could be, you know, helping, um, engage you know, within an arts context, um, engage a site, for instance, a performing arts center and regional community trying to, I guess de-colonized its own sort of structure and behaviors and welcome first nations communities into that, trying to get uh, to working with main stage companies to change the content of what the material is that we're seeing on stages. And so, CACD has been a very central process to a lot of those sorts of things that a lot of, um, is changing content and approaches and um, and I guess attitudes more broadly. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Oh, god, that's massive-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: that's so massive.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Because, yeah, you have done an exhibition thinking, you know, uh, in that time in Australia and around the world where you could define a, a group of people working in factories, et cetera.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Uh, with that, with that notion of, well, an artistic project might be-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: You know, a, a really interesting intervention because, you know, kind of imagining that people are in, are in a working situation where there's an alienation and, and repetitive work.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: And, yet today we have so many jobs so they're kind of, you know, dressed up as being You know, quite fabulous [crosstalk 00:11:13] which are equally as alienating.

JS: Literally.

EA: Um, and, but we don't um, as readily identify workers as as a group.

JS: As a group. Yeah.

EA: Um, and yet, um, exactly as you've just put it, that, that notion of decolonizing by which, you know, I understand the, at well, an ongoing process, but also you know, at the very outset even just identifying what the values are that we're purporting to impose upon people as a, as a mode of interaction with [crosstalk 00:11:45].

JS: Absolutely. And, even beginning by just asking a question.

EA: Yeah.

JS: You know, in the context of a venue, "Why don't you feel welcome coming here?" or, "What would make you feel, you feel welcome coming here?"

EA: Yeah.

JS: That sort of thing, you know? And then, sort of beginning a conversation in the process beyond that. Yeah.

EA: Yeah.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Which is massive and important.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: And, shouldn't be kind of, you know, like day one should be like home going.

JS: Absolutely. Absolutely. But, when you've got so many years of different structures and, and whatever it's sort of. Yeah, exactly. As we're all sort of realizing now and very important that we are. Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: [inaudible 00:12:19] it's kind of a, it's often described as the, uh, "Put your hand up at the back if you can't hear me."

JS: Exactly [crosstalk 00:12:24], that's right. Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Like you don't know what you-

JS: Yeah.

EA: There was that great session at um, the Diversity Arts Australia Beyond Tick Boxes.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Um, sort of reflect back event that happened a couple of weeks ago that putting out the actual agenda, which sounds really fantastic.

JS: Amazing. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Um, but that kind of, you know, being conscious of unconscious bias?

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Absolutely. Absolutely.

EA: And, and one of the things that, that trigger that?

JS: Yeah, yeah, it's um, yeah, that's the thing it says, and, and a lot of people talk about this. There's a whole new movement around that notion of privileged now as well and everything-

EA: Yeah.

JS: -and what that means and how to unpick that. And um, and I was just like completely sort of, I guess um, I sort of, you know, in my own words, put a lot of thought into empathy as well about sort of p, placing yourself

in another's shoes um, because, I'm sort of trying to sort of get a lot of people to think that way about me and my physicality.

Um, so that's one thing that I sort of think about, you know, when I'm sort of thinking about my role with the Australia Council and how I can sort of ensure that the, the two sectors that I work most closely, closely with can um, remain current and, and support, um, tomorrow's artists or those that feel excluded is that you think about that sort of, um, what could I be doing in someone else's shoes to be able to make someone, not me in my position um, make step changes to be able to make the art sector more accessible but, a relevant place? Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: And, those conversations can seem so terrifying for people who aren't used to having them.

JS: Absolutely. Yeah.

EA: As you say it's kind of, it really is that that, that fundamental of empathy and humanity.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yep.

EA: Yeah. So tell me about some of the adventures that brought you to where you are now because-

JS: Oh, my god. [crosstalk 00:14:17]

EA: so, so much.

JS: Yeah.

EA: You know, following those instincts that were so like developing them.

JS: Yeah.

EA: You know?

JS: I mean, I studied at WAAPA um, so, I went straight out of school and did lighting design and then um, when I left Perth was quite a, um, small place still at that stage. So, that was the late 90's. And um, it's funny, I sort of, a lot of the, I did a couple of main stage works as a, as a lighting designer but, started working more in the independent sector over there as a lighting designer and doing a lot more experimental work.

JS: So, I guess that's when, um, when I applied for this job at the Australia Council and cast my mind back to then and that's when I sort of first thought, "Oh, actually that's when I guess something began for me in terms of a, an affinity to that sort of this area of practice." Um, worked in festivals and um, as a stage manager, production manager and a really transformative moment for me was receiving a Young People in the Arts

Fellowship in 2000, which um, at the time I was working with the Awesome Festival UWA and that-
EA: Uh, yes.

JS: -allowed me to go over to Vancouver and do a placement for six months with the Vancouver Children's festival.

EA: How thrilling?

JS: Yeah. Amazing. Which at that stage was probably the, the sort of Mecca for, for children's festivals in, in North America. And um, worked with their mono series of outreach projects because that was the whole thing that I wanted to, um, that I put forward in my fellowship proposal was um, making a transition from a, a techie as people were known in those days to an arts administrator and arts manager and actually a producer eventually, um, which was great.

So, then I came back and, and Awesome offered me a, um, a full time role um, to start, sorry, to, to continue the work of a, a program that's now known as, as the Creative Challenge, which is a sort of mini festival program with 10 regional rural and remote communities across Western Australia. Um, and that's basically working with um, children and young people in those locations to sort of explore through um, arts residencies, issues of identity, of place, of um, expression and um, and secrets and stories and histories of those locations to develop a local celebration and bring, bring elements of those back to the Awesome Festival in the Perth CBD. And, that was sort of, I guess my beginning of, of engagement too. Then with um, CACD practice at that stage.

EA: Yeah.

JS: Um, and then I've had sort of quite a meandering um, journey from there on where I went into, um, what was then called SWA as the, um, State Community Regional Arts Development Officer. So, um, had a bit of a big brief with ... And, that's where I really started [crosstalk 00:16:50] getting a, a very um, beautiful um, appreciation of, of the depth of what happens within our regional communities as well. So, um, that was a really profound and um, significant role for me to have. I had a couple of other sort of positions through that time and then ended up at DATA [inaudible 00:17:07] WA um, where again I sort of was the Regional Arts and Health Manager and, worked extensively with communities in the Kimberley region.

JS: So, we had programs running in Broome and Fitzroy crossing with um, remote first nation communities as well as um, helping to sort of develop inclusion strategies for people in those communities who identified as having a disability. Um, and that still one of the most um, remarkable um, projects that I've had the ab, absolute privilege to be a part of. We also worked in the southwest of WA um, and then began a new relationship in Aspens which was around mental health in that setting. And then, things took a bit of a, a, perhaps going back to what I said

earlier on, um, I was managing a partnership that was in place with Rio Tinto and I actually was tapped on the shoulder and asked to go in and, and relook at their community investment strategy and so-

EA: How amazing?

JS: Yeah, so I had a five-year stint um, in Rio Tinto, um, looking at that where we were setting up partnerships across the areas of culture, um, the environment, education and health um, but then maintain an artistic practices side of that. And then, two and a half years ago moved to Sydney through this opportunity at the Australia Council. So, um, yeah, it's been a wild ride I should say.

EA: For the wild west [crosstalk 00:18:25].

JS: Exactly. That's right. Yeah, though I fear. Um, and then, yeah, so uh, and since coming to the Australia Council, it's been a, a real remarkable, two and a half years that's gone so quickly. [crosstalk 00:18:37] Yeah, absolutely. Um, and it is a new role and so I think myself have ... Council and myself together have been exploring what that means of combining those two portfolios into one position but, then maintaining um, separate obviously, um, you know, panels and, and funded organization cohorts and whatnot around each of those. So, yeah. And then, the last five weeks have just been an incredible journey too in themselves. I've covered some several thousand kilometers I think of travelling, saying some great things, which has been great. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Oh, goodness me.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: And, yes, likewise. And I mean, the Australian Council would be hard pressed to find anyone with your uh, breadth and depth of engagement for this kind of role but, tell me, you just said when you went uh, in the years that Rio Tinto and also, um, uh, exploring your parallel practice.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Tell me more about that.

JS: My practice? Um, it's more been, um, I've saved myself more. I mean, I've never been American per se. I don't think one that would identify as such. Um, I always pursued Drisdol print making was actually something that I did right through um, school and continued doing um, university and even a few years after that as well actually. Um, but, um, lighting has always been my sort of love. Um, unfortunately I don't do nearly as much as of it nowadays as what I would wish to.

JS: I was always very old school in the sense that I would always handle my plans. I never used moving lights, so technology sort of got away from me a bit. Um, but outside of that always, um, I guess kept that techie

side of myself alive where I was a volunteer, was the operations manager on Tenex Perth and um, and, and sort of worked with a few sort of mates back in Perth as just as more of a producer I guess to help sort of them through that network of, um, logistics and whatnot. When you're a small independent maker um trying to ... Yeah, exactly produce your own so producer. Yeah. Yeah. That was sort of more like sort of thing.

EA: Yeah, we still got that notion of self-producing a lot when I was in Melbourne Fringe in the, you know, the importance of working with a producer and, and a ... But, I'm just intrigued by the way you described your drawing, uh, those, uh, those, that, those, those plans. And that of course is very much a kind of thinking.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: -and, and it makes possible-

JS: Yeah.

EA: -um, a number of things.

JS: Yeah. I've always been very tactile and so I used to take date, great rigouring in sort of self-drawing as I had luck in old school drawing board in my bedroom-

EA: Oh.

JS: -when I was still living with my parents and, and let move with me when I first moved out of home. And Yeah, had all the old tools of the big rulers and the markers and the paints and the templates and everything like that. And Yeah, you know, the scale of rulers and everything and yeah, I think that for me it was something, um, I, I took, you know, and bringing a hand drawn plan into sort of a group of techs at a large venue with that all sort of looked like, "My god, just do [inaudible 00:21:36]." That for me I've found a lot of um, artistry in just doing it that way as well. And, and not just sort of going down to the sort of a computer and AICAD cad program and whatnot. So, yeah.

EA: Yeah. You kind of like obviously there's so much that the software for it-

JS: Yeah.

EA: But, at the same time, they're sort of like your thought, your thought process in a way that is you know, [crosstalk 00:21:56].

JS: And, it was a way of familiarizing myself with the design and the actual physicality of it within the rig and then, you know, thinking about the sort of loops that I'd like to get and achieve through the actual, you know, focusing and planning and whatnot. So, it was a very live with some, but I found very rewarding personally process. Yeah.

EA: One of the things that has never ceased to fascinate me that over the last many years has been, um, the different techniques that we have for thinking through things-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: -and the different techniques that we have for um, constructive disruption. You know, how do we, how do we disrupt the way that we would normally go about thinking about and, and, and doing something? um, and you know, there's different ways of using our hands, sort of stepping away from the computer you know, different kinds of thinking.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Um, and um, yeah, just the, the um, the way that you just described that set of tools that I can picture you-

JS: Everything I know sitting in there, you know?

EA: Oh, yeah.

JS: Yeah.

EA: But, also kind of, you know, how that set of frameworks or tools um, that informs-

JS: Absolutely.

EA: how you think, how you move through.

JS: It's a thing around. I mean for me, I sort of, it goes back to rigor um, and, and I think a way of, um, you know, attention to detail. Some might say, [inaudible 00:23:15], but no, that was and I think that's something that I still sort of carry with me today and through my sort of day work through everything else in life and whatnot as well as that sort of um, care I think is something as well, which I hold very sort of close to me and not just being sort of a quick or um, you know, um, um, uh, a [inaudible 00:23:36].

I should say um, but yeah, that sort of way of sort of like every stroke of the pen was something that would need be done carefully and considered because if you sort of messed up you'd be sort of starting from scratch because once you've got that a lot out of text out or yeah. So, it's about thinking before, you know, thinking where you're going to put the pen before you've actually made contact. So, that's sort of another sort of true to the way that I go about my CACD practice as well.

EA: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, very much so. It's that kind of, you know, measure twice, cut once and we say [inaudible 00:24:07] But, also um, the, you, you talked about that transition from being a techieuh, or [inaudible 00:24:16].

JS: Yeah. Yeah, yap.

EA: To um, to roles that were administrative strategic Um, and that seems to me it's very much a bad, you know, you see yourself approach your work in a certain way-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: and you see yourself wanting to um, establish or create the frameworks [crosstalk 00:24:35].

JS: Yes, exactly. That's right. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I, I had always been a creative person but, I've just never sort of pursued that. Um, on a personal level I don't think. I mean, you know, the, the act of lighting was always the most beautiful moment that I used to love was, you know, there's all the sort of logistics around the drawing, the design and then rigging it and then focusing it. But, then sitting at the plotting desk and actually creating a picture is sort of almost a lack of a lot of the ways that sort of, you look at CACD in daily experimental practices.

Well, I guess we're sort of doing a lot of the groundwork, finding out what the community wants and sort of doing all the sort of um, framework around something and then sitting down and watching magic happen in front of your eyes when sort of an artist comes to work with that community or they already realize their own true ambitions through um, artistic expression or whatever. So, it's a, it's a sort of a similar parallel process I think. Yeah.

EA: Uh, I just suddenly had that, um, the way that you put it earlier, that uh, experimental NCAC being a vanguard um, you've just filled it out so beautifully the way you were describing that, that there is something new that emerges uh, and so being in that moment of um, discovery explanation as you put it earlier that experimental practice for me has always been, and it's, it's fundamental to how I do my practice, but it's also, it's what tends to animate my mind most. That kind of, that impossible to articulate, you know, kind of feeling when you're either uh, experiencing a work, uh, or trying to work something out for yourself where there is something happens. It's like a change of phase-

JS: Yeah.

EA: or state or, uh, and it can appear as a sort of uh, you know, a, an "Aha," kind of moment, but it is something that is just qualitatively different um, in your experience of, of you know, what seemed to be a linear progression.

JS: Yeah.

EA: Um, and that is just ... Yeah. Again, that, that sense of what can be both terrifying but also-

JS: Oh, absolutely.

And, that's always, you know, I think one of the really interesting things from, from my perspective is sort of seeing how artists and companies and events in this space of experimental practice wish to engage with, um, or dare to engage, I should say sometimes with audiences and that as an audience member that you've got that element of risk and trust and um, unknown a lot of the time as well because it's such a rapidly evolving. I mean, and you know, I'm so lucky to go to a lot of things, but every time I go to something new I always sort of see something that I guess pushes another boundary and have things that I thought previously might not have been possible or you know, I've just come back from Perth. And so, um, a couple of events as part of SymbioticA's um, Unhallowed Arts program there was the, the-

EA: I saw [inaudible 00:27:28].

JS: There was the um, hyper, Hyperprometheus-

EA: Hyperprometheus.

JS: -um, exhibition opening I think on Friday night, which was amazing. It was such a, a great exhibition, which obviously the whole um, concept of the Unhallowed Arts program was celebrating the 200th anniversary of um, their first publication of Frankenstein. And, um, but yeah, seeing that sort of huge, massive work representing Gladys from Stelarc to current practitioners from Australia and abroad. That was such a, an amazing array of, of um, practice of artists responding to that theme of what Frankenstein stands for. Um, and just taking over the entire exhibition space at PICA was, was really incredible.

And then, you know, seeing for the first time I've seen a lot of documented work of his, both uh, video work and photography, photographic work of say Stelarc performing the flesh with his StickMan, um, um, and he does a lot of the work using performance, so, but, um, he, he becomes part of the artwork and um, and yeah, really incredible. And then um, uh, Melina then, Melina project space in Fremantle also hosted um, a couple of exhibitions too which was just equally um, amazing and, and again, side showing a huge um, depth of practitioners from their early career to mid-career and many established as well. So-

EA: That's thrilling.

JS: Yeah, yeah, really amazing. So, yeah, and then, you know, this last weekend gone, we had a conformity in, in Tasmania which is looking at that whole sort of context of experimental practice in the socially engaged setting and, and urban revitalization and you know, there's obviously live where it's happening. So it's a, it's a massive time October for um, for um, exploring what is great about our Experimental Art Sector in Australia.

EA: It really is.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: There's just so much tremendous thinking happening.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: It's an incredible work.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: You know, I'm just reflecting back, where you were saying earlier about um, the kinds of um, the kinds of practices that established organizations have that sometimes do need that, that shift.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Um, that shift in thinking and that shift that's um, not just about, um, you know, perhaps um, embracing, um, the experimental or uh engaging further with their own communities.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: But, that is also that, um, um, all those ethics and values that, that underlie that challenge to decolonize.

JS: Yeah.

EA: That, that that's a word that I kind of feel, um, I feel uncomfortable with and I, um, and yet I uh, I keep using because I feel uncomfortable.

JS: Yes, yeah.

EA: I feel uncomfortable because I feel like it's something that um, you know, as a non-first nation's person-

JS: Absolutely.

EA: Um-

JS: Yeah.

EA: I want to you know hear and [inaudible 00:30:25] I have been strange situations where, you know, work has been presented as decolonized.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Like what, will we achieve that, you know, tick? And then I just think, "Oh, no, no, no."

JS: No, no, no.

EA: That's-

JS: Much more that we [crosstalk 00:30:35]. Yeah.

EA: It is a long ongoing.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: It's, you know, it, it's about it's about like we are saying-

JS: Well, it is almost as we talked about a value-

EA: Yeah.

JS: -as opposed to an actual, you know, there are actions but, it's something that you need to remain the central and an attitude of value and, and in terms of, um, and not just within, um, an artistical cultural sense but, you know in every day to day stuff as well. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Yeah, absolutely.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: And, at the very least, the very outset just being aware that-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: -um, you know, your institution, if you are one, um, doesn't have a default neutrality.

JS: No.

EA: Um, that there are values or expectations that you know, that, that, that people are expected to engage with you on the, on the basis of.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: And then, that's about um, culture and diversity and it's also that gender and about, you know, all of those things that make an organization.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: I've, uh, I'm open to and reflective of Australian cultural diversity or very much, um, you know, kind of uh, close to it in a particular way of thinking.

JS: Yeah.

EA: Um, and of course, both Experimental practice and CACD practice-

JS: Yeah.

EA: are means of, of-

JS: Absolutely.

EA: um, settling that.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Um, which means, you know, to, to um, you know, to, to put it in, in a more provocative way.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: I mean, should every organization or even every funded organization be looking at, um, both experimental modes and, and ways of thinking of working-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: as well as, um, CACD thinking in CACD modes um, so that there really is a, a rigor of engagement with it [crosstalk 00:32:16] community?

JS: Absolutely. I think you know, it goes to that thing that I said earlier about the fact that CACD process being used as a means to sort of shift perceptions, ideals and, and um, and actions as well.

EA: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JS: So, I think there absolutely is scope for that, you know, um, you know, the, again, going back to what I said about innovation, I guess, you know, experimentalism also has a very broad trajectory or um, or, or continuum I guess. So, you know, diving into the shallow end and sort of like doing small disruptions or step changes or whatever, to lead to something that would be more significant and profound. You know, I guess looking at, I mean, it's something that I always talk about in the diversity space is intersectionality.

EA: Yeah.

JS: Um, because, you know, I think that the, you know, the world is full of so many silos. Um, you can, you know, I think and then exploring what it means. Um, the, I guess the ripple effect of diversity. If you are a person um, you know, recently arrived to Australia, living in a regional community, what does that mean? If you are a person with a disability who was also um, living in a regional community, what does that mean? But, then the whole context of you, you know, you went and you age

and you add gender and you add sexual preference and you add everything into that, this way and you can really start looking at some um, significance.

Um, exciting. I feel, um, opportunities to sort of, sort of really um, shift, um, approaches to, to not just start making but you know, organizational structure and organizational values and all that sort of thing as well. [crosstalk 00:33:44] You know, because I think that um, uh, as I said, it's sort of, you, you, I think a lot of people see only the deep end, but there's opportunities for sort of small steps. I mean, some parts of the sector need to take big steps but, you know, I think there's um, there's, there's, uh, an opportunity for a lot of shift. Yeah.

EA: I completely agree.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: You know, it's funny. Um, I'm sure we're both in many conversations with good friends, but also with colleagues and organizations who want to make a substantial change they'll get to us to [inaudible 00:34:17] and think, "Oh, I've just got to make a big change." And often the first thing I say is, "Well, actually one of the very best and healthiest things you could do is make a very small change-

JS: Absolutely.

EA: and lots of small changes. Daily practice. How do you speak to another?"

JS: Yeah, exactly. The cumulative impacts. That's right. Exactly.

EA: "How do you make decisions?" All of that.

JS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

EA: And, I'm reminded of something really um, wise and, and, I'm like incredibly useful attitude, your moment that Abdullah Abdullah said at Future Forward, which is that, "What we all need to do is afford one another um, the same specificity that we would ourselves." Like you're saying that silos, you know-

JS: Yeah.

EA: we are each complex and multiple and you know, um, that siloing and I think in particular in the current political sort of context in Australia where there's, um, um, we've lapsed into some really disappointing short term as in-

JS: Yeah.

EA: Uh, it's a very opportunistic [crosstalk 00:35:16].

JS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EA: short term [inaudible 00:35:18]-

JS: Yeah.

EA: -um, and then just refusing to deal with all those huge, huge issues.

JS: Absolutely, I think, you know, there's, there's a point where people sort of move into a solely reactive phase which is sometimes really good, but then you can just sort of get stuck there-

EA: Yeah.

JS: -um, and lose-

EA: Yeah.

JS: -the opportunity to be proactive and, and think about those changes that you'd like to make even either you know, behaviorally or, or, or you know what conversations you should be having versus what conversations you are having just because of the here and now.

EA: Yes. Yes.

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Especially when that then kind of, you know, uh, laid back out into the broader mainstream-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: whatever that even means-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Exactly.

EA: But, also broader political context in those conversations that we sometimes find ourselves in. When someone just says, "Well, why not?" Um, "Why are you interested in it? Why should be publicly funded?"

JS: Yeah.

EA: Um, and you sort of want to, on the one hand, zoom out to these broad kind of statements of value but then, um, yeah, I find more and more there's actually that zooming, right?

JS: Absolutely.

EA: And, very specific [crosstalk 00:36:21].

JS: The granularity. Exactly not motherhood statements anymore. Yeah.
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JS: It's about, you know, it's just that meaningful. What difference can I
make here and now?

EA: Yeah.

JS: As opposed to, you know, I think horizon thinking is great. As I said
earlier, I'm very much about the here and now and what I can do, um,
to, to sort of make a difference right at this moment and quite often
because of the context that we're all working in and operating in and
practicing in that needs to sort of be a lot more of a smaller scale thing to
make one little shift which down the track would result in bigger
changes. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: And, I see you doing that a lot. I see you in the here and now and I see
people, you know, respond to you and I love the questions that, that-

JS: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EA: you pose um, and yeah, it's been great-

JS: Thank you Esther.

EA: -to have a nice chat with you [crosstalk 00:37:11].

JS: Likewise. Thank you for asking me. I know.

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advocacy and campaigns for improving the working environment for
Australian artists and arts organizations.