

Money Talks: Emerging Artist Forum [Transcript]

Hatched Open Day 2023

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Location: Performance Space

Speakers: Timmah Ball, Grace Connors and Ramesh Nithiyendran

Facilitated by Kelly Fliender

BRENT HARRISON:

Hello everyone and welcome to Money Talks the emerging artists forum for Hatched 2023. My name is Brent Harrison and I'm the Hatched Curatorial Fellow here at PICA. I'd like to begin by first acknowledging that we're meeting on Whadjuk Noongar land and pay my respects to their elders past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded, and this always was and always will be Aboriginal land. Today, I just like to begin by introducing our facilitator for the discussion, Kelly Fliender. Kelly Fliender is the Collection Officer at Artbank in Western Australia. But she also has a really incredible practice as a writer and curator and is responsible for co-founding Semaphore, which was a digital platform that had writing on art in Western Australia, which is really important. I won't go on too much, Kelly actually has a really impressive CV. So I'd encourage you to look at it in your own time. I find it really interesting. But there's going to be a really great discussion. And it's so great to see so many of you here and I hope that you'll take something away from it. Thanks.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Thanks, Brent. So, kaya, everyone. I would also like to acknowledge the Whadjuk people of Boorloo Boodja, who are the traditional owners of the land where we meet today. I respect your culture, your custodianship and your continued contribution to the life of this city and this region. I extend that acknowledgement to all peoples of the Noongar nation, as well as all of the indigenous peoples of the lands we've come from, where we work, where we make our homes. That respect includes recognising and respecting sovereignty, like Brent said, while working in solidarity, towards structural reforms, like the Voice towards treaty, and supporting ongoing connection to Country. That means supporting linguistic rights, artistic endeavour, and

not least in the context of this conversation, economic opportunity to our Elders, past, present and future. I above all, say thanks. Okay, so thanks for coming today. It feels good. It's exciting. It's a packed audience. I imagine lots of you were here last night. I didn't stay too long. There are some pretty dusty figures around though I hear, so I think it went a bit late. So to the panel, today we have Grace Connors, Timmah Ball, and Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran. So Timmah is a non-fiction writer, researcher and creative practitioner with Ballardong Noongar heritage. Timmah has studied at Melbourne University in creative arts and has gone on to contribute extensively to many publications in Australia, including the Sydney Review of Books and Art Guide, has won multiple awards for her writing. Timmah currently works at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in both curatorial and editorial positions and has a very wide and varied practice and most importantly, here has often been interested in kind of interrogating and critiquing the labour inequalities of the arts world through her writing. Grace Connors is an artist writer and curator living in Boorloo, she did a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Curtin University and has been involved with many artists-run initiatives in this city, including Success Gallery, Moana Project Space, and currently Cool Change Contemporary which is an artist-run-initiative here as a founding member and a chair and the current chair. Yeah. She's currently working at the Aboriginal Art Centre Hub of Western Australia. And like dare I say, is a bit of an anarchist but very community focused and one of the things that I really appreciate about Grace is that her practice and involvement with artist-run-initiative kind of appreciates that those spaces are not necessarily a through road to a kind of commercial representation or larger institutional kind of showing but they can be a place to stay and like find community and be and inhabit ongoing. Ramesh is one of the judges from last night, has been an exhibitor of Hatched. He's an amazing contemporary artist whose work is informed by many things including place of birth in Sri Lanka, global histories and languages of figurative representation, politics of idolatry, monuments, gender, race, and a bunch of really interesting things, including religion, as well. Has shown extensively nationally and internationally and is collected by most of the major institutions in Australia, is represented by a commercial gallery, Sullivan + Strumpf in Sydney, and is represented by Jhaveri Contemporary in Mumbai as well. So that's kind of great to think about the different contexts in which your work can kind of be presented. Also, a teacher at UNSW. Yeah, so is kind of working really closely with people just like yourselves. And I won't really say much about myself other than I'm a board member here. I have been involved with lots of different parts of the arts ecosystem, including university galleries and obviously big institutions like Artbank, which is a national organisation, an initiative by the federal government, but I actually cut my teeth in the artist-run-initiative scene and worked for quite a long time with a gallery in Melbourne called West Space. So I really appreciate that kind of, those places for community, and they might be the spaces that you're immediately going to be thinking about exhibiting in the future. Yeah. So, I think our conversation today like, we'll leave plenty of time for questions at the end. So, like, keep them to yourselves, because we want to respond to the things, you know, the burning questions that you have. It's such an exciting time. I know not everyone in the audience is just emerging, or emerging from university, but I

kind of, a lot of you are. So we'll a lot of the conversation will be focused around that kind of moment, immediately after graduating. But these things are important to always consider. And I guess the big theme is like, how do you kind of create a sustainable practice in the arts? And so will really will, I'll just like, actually start. But the first maybe the first conversation, I can ask Timmah and all of you as well to contribute, but like, Where were you when you had just graduated? And what were you doing? What was the kind of work that you were doing to make that like burgeoning part of your arts career kind of happen.

TIMMAH BALL:

So when I first finished undergrad, I did a little bit of travel. And then when I got back, I was literally, cause I had no money, working full-time for Victoria University in sort of admin, data entry. So nothing really arts-related, but it was just a time where it was just good to have a full-time job to pay rent. And yeah, I guess like very much thinking, what is going to come next? And do you make art on weekends when this is how your life seems to currently be? And I guess, to be honest, feeling a little anxious that, yeah, I wasn't where I thought I would be, after the luxury of three years of intensive making.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah, I think it's really hard to go from this beautiful like sanctum of the university where you have your network around you. And it's all kind of organised, and it's set up and you know where to go. And then kind of what do you do afterwards? Yeah, that's a hard thing. It's hard to find your community sometimes outside of that. Yeah. Yeah. What about you Grace?

GRACE CONNORS:

Interestingly, similar feelings. Coming out of university, I studied for about five years, including the time that I was at TAFE as a bridging course into university. And I think that what survived me was, I think, having worked at Bunnings for about 11 years casually since I was 14 years old and nine months I think, which is like the legal age to be employed. And then kept on to that job within the skin of my teeth is that the saying from the skin of my teeth, and really working part-time to sustain an arts practice, excuse me, an arts practice that was almost like supplementary to kind of injecting myself directly into working in artist-run-initiative straight out of and during university. I was doing my Honours, and that was not serving me in a way that I really was satisfied by. And a friend of mine alerted me to Success Arts, which was an artist-run initiative in the basement of the old Myer building in Fremantle, I think this was in 2015 or 16. They got an Australia Council grant to deliver five blocks of programming over the year. So I knew that time was such a precious commodity for me to get involved in that project at the

time that it existed. Because if I hadn't have kind of let my university dormant, was, I don't know I found it to be really lame, for me. It wasn't really feeding me in a way that being around people making things happen, really fed me and I knew that if I wasn't involved in at that point in time that that opportunity would not exist by the time I finished university. So I was there holding paint brushes, like sledgehammering walls, sweeping the floor of a dark basement, which felt really futile. But it all really.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Success was in a basement.

GRACE CONNORS:

It was in a basement. It was like totally nuts. And it had an elevator that didn't work. They super-glued a like 10 cent piece on the ground so that every time someone would come off the elevator they'd try and pick up the coin, but it was stuck to the floor. But just being involved in a project like that saw a continual thread being sewn between then working at Moana Project Space after that taking over that and then starting a new ARI after that fact. So I think that I found great solace, comfort and discomfort, that was challenging, but really feeding and nourishing, being, amongst other people who were just making things happen in a way that university was so structured and very dissatisfying, for me to really just like, get my hands involved in something and be a part of something like that. So yeah, that has now led to eight years later, still running artist-run initiatives. Yeah.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

I mean, it's a good point to say, you know, like university isn't for everyone. And it's definitely not the only way into the arts world. And I think that's becoming increasingly so as we kind of diversify the ways, people can be entrepreneurial in new ways now because of the internet, that there are far more different, there are far more ways to be in the arts world or enter the arts world now, but universities and like a lot of you here is definitely a main kind of, still the main way that people start. So even though you weren't necessarily into the kind of structure of the institution, or the kind of education that you were having were the people that you're working with within the artists-run initiatives, were those people, the people you met at university?

GRACE CONNORS:

Yeah, so I think that that is a really important point as well, thinking about sustainable practice, survival at the very least is that peer-to-peer network that you do meet out inside that university, that is your survival, you know, the peers that you, you know, mix up against, and you bump into those spaces, they are the ones that will, you know, that you can draw resources,

from share books with, you know, start spaces with, have exhibitions in parks with, uh, you know, or in hallways, or basements or wherever, those people are still my friends to this day after, you know, a long time and even those that I was at TAFE with, and that was like, I don't know, a long time ago. And those people are what get you through and outside of how do I survive monetarily? It's like, those people are that sort of supplementary survival.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah, I think your cohort is really important and it's really important to raise each other up. Like, it's always good to have healthy competition, right, and like, see where everyone's going. But it's so good to work together. I graduated from my undergrad 18 years ago, which I worked out last night. And I'm still friends with lots of the people that I studied with, at Melbourne University, and a lot of them still work in the arts industry now. And I think that there are the conversations that you have at university with the people that you study with are some of the most like formative ones that you'll have. And there are lots of people who aim to kind of collaborate with those that are more senior to them. And there's like advantages to that you can be strategic, but it's nothing like kind of having a cohort and lifting everyone up, yeah.

GRACE CONNORS:

Totally. And I think just a really quick, kind of aside to that, as well as that knowing that you're not just going to meet like arts, like interested people at universities or institutions, either. You know, you'll meet them at art openings around the cheese table, or you know, at the pub, or whatever. So I just yeah, I think it's important to recognize that you're not just going to have arts, you know, peers coming from institutions, that kind of will exist in orbit around those spaces as well. Yeah. You don't just have to go to university to yeah

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah. What about you Ramesh, what were you doing at that graduating point?

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

It was all very unglamorous. So again, I was working at Michelle's Patisserie since I was like, 14 nine months, and I was 18 selling bikinis at City Beach. Like I was always working, you know, and I came from, like a very migrant-style family where this idea of a gap year or a break isn't in their literacy. So and I was always really, really academic. So I went to like a selective school, I was always really performing really well. So I always had discipline, you know, embedded within everything. I did discipline and structure. And I was, I think, from a very early age, I was able to see the mechanics of different things and get a sense of how things actually operate. But I

went to UNSW Art and Design, and I did Fine Arts (Arts), majored in painting, and did my Honours. And it's actually around 10 years since I graduated with my Honours now. So, and essentially what I was doing was I was working three days a week. And then I was not really going out and having much of a social life. I was like living and breathing art, going to lots of openings. And it wasn't because I sat down and said, I'm going to make a decision to go to openings because I want to build my career. It's because I actually loved art. You know, I wanted to go to talks I wanted to, you know, meet other like-minded people, 'cause I never had that in high school or anything like that. And I think something that people in the industry can grasp really quickly, that's really attractive. For an, I think what makes an emerging artist really attractive is when they are able to demonstrate commitment, and engagement, you know, and actually turning up is one of the main ways to do that. And I understand there are like structural things that make it easier for some people to attend openings or attend events than others. But sometimes I want to say like, you know, if you're really interested in the industry, you need to participate. And that participation also reads as communal support of other people. So, if you're going to someone's opening, for example, that is a show of support. It's a show of solidarity, in some ways. And I was doing that a lot, you know, but my practice started very humbly, you know, I was making small scratchy paintings on plywood, and they, I don't, like, I think, I think it's actually good if you're a bit embarrassed by what you made at art school, like sometimes when I'm teaching I say, I think now's the time, you should put the tampons and the condoms, in the artwork, like get it out of your system, you know, and I think, I think, like, it's such an amazing environment to do that. But when I left art school, and started practicing in the real world, one of the most challenging things for me was that I struggled with the pedagogy that was fed to me in tertiary education. And this isn't meant to sound disparaging. But I wasn't really taught by practising professional artists of a similar generation, to me. So, I feel like a lot of my teaching was actually quite dated, you know, I was taught to write in a way that wasn't relevant to the industry, I was taught to speak about my work that was opaque and not transparent. So then actually going to industry events, reading magazines, talking to other artists, you actually realise what you need to unlearn to operate in an industry. And sadly, I think just because of the way universities are structured, they have to meet a lot of criteria. And academics are often in full-time positions, the ones who are writing course material. So I actually was like, a lot of what I learned didn't compute in the real world. So it was actually through experience that I had to understand how to navigate a lot of those industry things. And I think that also comes down to some sense of rigour, in actually understanding that being an artist isn't just about creating your work, you know, it's about, it's about the language you elaborate around your work, it's about your digital presence. Sadly, that's the reality of the situation that we're operating in. But it's also empowering, you know, your digital presence can actually empower the way that your work is read. Just this is a little bit of a like, reveal. But like part of our we were looking at the digital presences of all the artists when we were going through the judging process, because we wanted a sense of context. And any kind

of digital presence that showed that there was a seriousness about the way they were presenting their work was impressive.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

And actually, when we're thinking about what to acquire for Artbank, we always look at people's online presence, whether that's like an Instagram feed or a website, it doesn't have to be anything specific. But it's so helpful to have a good online presence. And whether that is frustrating news or not, it kind of just the like, it's a reality of how curators and institutions will kind of see your work, yeah.

GRACE CONNORS:

And I think that it's also worth like mentioning when you talk about showing up to which is so important that you can show up digitally, as well, you know, by sharing your friend's exhibitions that they're doing, you know, reading not like digitally, but like reading their catalogue essays if you can't go to the openings, but really sharing and celebrating, recognizing and engaging with the things that people are doing, spreading that word far and wide, because you just never know who's in your online network that is not in theirs that then you know, goes to something that you've shared of theirs, and you just never know what that's going to lead to. So yeah, showing up digitally is also really important, I think.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

I think yeah, Ramesh has said a lot of really interesting things in that little bit there. But one of the things that I will kind of pull out is just be ready for your work to really change a bunch over the next few years. So yeah, you've been at university and it's okay for your practice and it will change and it's going to change and the next however many years, I, you know, I spoke to everyone before about the kind of that really amazing, energetic moment after graduating, which is just where you put everything into your work and your relationships. And that's kind of what's really helpful if you're a bit obsessive and go to every show and, and see all of the artist talks and just show up is such an important thing. But yeah, your work is going to change and respond and mutate in really different ways and kind of become far more complex as your understanding of the arts world becomes more complex as well. Yeah. What about? Okay, so we're still like thinking of ourselves as like baby practitioners. But so, what are the things that you wish you would have known about the industry? Timmah, I'll ask you again. You know, those, potentially some of those pitfalls about money or? Yeah, I mean, Ramesh did make a good point that it's like, yeah, there are unfortunate, there is unfortunately, because it is an industry that relies on it uses, abuses volunteer labour quite a bit. It is easier for people who do have the means to kind of support themselves, particularly in this early stage of your career you

can hustle, though and make up for that. So, if you don't have those means, I think it's like really good to just acknowledge, and be aware of it. But what do you think, Timmah?

TIMMAH BALL:

I think for me, and that kind of connects back to that sense of finishing a degree and not feeling like you're going anywhere, is the sense that it's totally fine to go to be really slow in your practice and have breaks, I think that's been the big thing for me. And I feel like sort of, there's this amazing, I don't know, it's like three years of being in a little bit of a bubble, where you have so many resources, support. And you'll literally just making work quite intensively and having continuous feedback. And I feel like, yeah, there was not really any sense, any indication of what to do after that intensive period of making work. And yeah, I feel like, you know, like everyone was saying, definitely staying connected with peers, who you studied with, is really, really great, too. But yeah, I think something that I just didn't think about at the time, was the fact that it's okay to have breaks without making work. And for me, in which what I've really found continually inspires me is actually going off and studying or working in different fields, that's probably to me been one of the biggest shocks is that other types of professional work or skill sets, has weirdly been the stuff that's enriched my creative practice so much more than the actual, technical or logical pathway of doing a Bachelor of Creative Arts, like I don't think I think of that time. It's just really fun. And oh, my gosh, I had access to like 16 mil filmmaking cameras like, whoa, I don't even know how I could get access to that sort of stuff now, because you know, but at the same time, in terms of what I'm wanting to do, I sort of think about I did further studies in urban planning. And I think just having this really broad sense of like cities and space and community, I think that's what I tend to draw from a lot. And I think one thing I'm finding so much more is the artists I'm meeting who I'm probably the most blown away and excited by their practices. They all have other pretty amazing professions. And it can often be quite a shock, because I just I think, again, there's that sort of artistic mythmaking of the artist or the writer is someone who does it full-time. And yeah, I'm increasingly meeting people. And they're, I don't know, they're just working in so many different fields, other than having an arts practice, and it's a way they can sustain income. And often, it sounds like really busy and messy negotiating kind of two types of work. But often what it means is that people can have respite from the intensity of unpaid labour and very lowly paid waged frameworks and actually have some sort of resource from another profession that they quite enjoy, or at least provide some was the ability to, which I guess goes into the kind of class and racial structures, which, yeah, tend to favour a certain type of person who can just like solidly work hard at being an artist for free for five to 10 years, which I yeah, I think there are very few people who can just work at being an artist and not income.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

I think definitely at the start of your career, you're not going to be just an artist, you're going to be doing lots of different things. And that's really great, because all of those experiences are enriching your understanding of the world and informing your art. And that's actually really good. And you're right, you do need to have breaks. Because if you want to have a long career, in the arts world, you, the audience in Australia is not big enough, the institutions that we have here, the market isn't really big enough to kind of sustain. Definitely not everyone in this room for the whole of your careers, you know, so there are going to be moments where artists have peak exhibition times where they're showing like a bunch of really amazing institutions and they're the hot thing in like, Art Collector, or Vogue, or whatever it is, and then there'll be quieter a period, and you better hope you have some skills and some expertise in some fields, or you have relationships with arts institutions, or you're teaching you have some kind of other form of income, right? And that's really important, and really great. So definitely, number one, there's also heaps of ways you can be in the arts world. So Timmah is kind of describing people who have like joint professions. And I do know a lot of people like that. But, you know, there's, there are other artists who do make the practice their focus. And like, I mean, Ramesh is a really good example of that. So, I don't know like, is it crass to just ask how you kind of make that happen?

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

No, no, not at all. I kind of want to present a little bit of a counter, which is it is possible to earn a healthy living as an artist, you know, so I show at Sullivan + Strumpf and Jhaveri Contemporary, most of the artists in the stable there live through selling their artwork.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

At Sullivan + Strumpf?

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

Yeah, yeah. And at Jhaveri Contemporary in Mumbai, right. So, I know that because they're my peer base. So, I know what they do. So, I think we can actually say, yes, it's a possible goal. You know, it's not an easy position, or thing to get there. But it's totally possible, right? So, I think we can actually establish that there is a level or there is a collector base, for example, in Australia and internationally, that can sustain practices. But what that means is not every practice is prone to commercial viability. And I actually think it's really important when you're building a practice to actually be a little bit anti-sentimental in some ways and ask yourself, how can I actually create a financial infrastructure around what I'm doing? That isn't based on my part-time work that isn't based on relying on the government or grant money and private sales are really what is the primary mode of income for me. So, I haven't had to teach for two years, for example, I'm on a consulting retainer, so I don't need to really go in. But, like, what we

got to keep in mind is that, you know, like, look at it also, like a business. You know, I think a lot of people, especially when they leave art school, you end up kind of, you're very politicized when you leave, and a lot of artists are very anti-capitalist. No, I won't sell my work for this amount. And sometimes I say, okay, but you have to be prepared to work at McDonald's. You know what I mean? Like, and that's fine, if that's also part of your life philosophy, right. So I think you also got to think about your values. And also think about how you make a compromise, if you want to make a living as an artist and that compromise, for me sometimes is making ceramics that are 40 centimetres tall, but I don't show them in exhibitions, they literally just get offered privately to clients. So, there are actually ways to work strategically, with the people that you're working with to manage how you are represented in the context of making money. And in a crass way, you can think about that as brand management. And often I think the language of other industries is really important to actually use when we're looking at how artists can actually develop and manifest careers. But in terms of the artists I know, not just me who are making a living off their work. What I do notice is that they have different, they have different scales of work, small, medium, large, ridiculous, you know, and they're able to cater to lots of different levels of the market. The small usually brings the young professionals in and as they accrue wealth, you take them on the journey, and they might end up being large or ridiculous, you know, institutions might be ridiculous, like, my biggest acquisition, like, it was a commission for the Art Gallery of New South Wales. And they commissioned 77 individual works. And I thought they might buy two or three, but they bought the whole lot, you know, so I didn't think that was ever going to happen. But what we got to keep in mind is that there actually are these really amazing collectors who do support practice. And when we're thinking about a commercial gallery structure, they're really the primary ways that artists are making a living. And if you can operate in that model, that's great. And there are really good galleries that do show artists who primarily work in video. But it tends to be object-based work that circulates in the market, the best. And I also compromise, like, if I'm having a show, I am going to make, I kind of do like a 60, 30, 10. You know, like, the 30 and 10, are like the crazy, ridiculous works, but the 60 are kind of safe. But then the 30 and 10, make the 60 looks a bit better. So, I think you can also think about it like that, right? You don't have to be too romantic about your work, I think you also need to be a little bit realistic, and not hold yourself up to these ridiculous moral standards that I think people in other industries don't feel burdened by. So I don't think because you're an artist, you need to see yourself as more moral than the rest of the world. You know, you're operating in the same world, you can make money, you can wear Balenciaga and not get criticized, right? And, you know, like, I grew up refugee family, I lived next to McDonald's. And I have no problem with making money.

GRACE CONNORS:

Yes, yes.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

Do you know what I'm saying? So, and I think we need to be a little bit more frank about those discussions, because I think generally, Australians don't like to talk about class, you know, we can talk about, we can talk a little bit about race and gender. But class seems to be this invisible thing that we don't talk about too much. But what I will, by the end of my rant there is that I think we can dream big. You know, I think when we're talking about goals and money, and you know, what we want to achieve in the arts, I don't think we need to always talk with the position that it's too hard. How can we compromise to get there? I think we can say, I want to be shown by, you know, the most amazing commercial gallery, and I want to sell these works and I want to have these, and I think we need to be a little bit. I think we need to dream a bit bigger.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah. There are lots of steps, right, though, before that and we will.

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

GRACE CONNORS:

Totally, yes.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

Yeah.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

How do you go from graduating to?

GRACE CONNORS:

Yeah, the most amazing commercial gallery. But it's possible, it is totally possible. And I think that it's also important to recognize the fact that universities do this horrible thing, where they try and make you over-intellectualise the art that you are making it has to be conceptual, or to make a fucking painting that you can sell. Like, honestly, that is also fine. Like, you can do that. And you're not going to be like, Oh, but what does it mean? It doesn't have to fucking mean anything. Sorry for swearing. But it really doesn't have to mean anything, like you can make that like an abstract painting, like, make that painting and then sell it. But there's also, you know, a

real shift in commercial representation at the moment, that are collecting lots of different types of artwork, you know, it's you. So, you can, you know, be that artist that, you know, has video works that are in a collection that can sell because you know that there are some collectors out there that have beautiful homes, that their hallways are set up with a big video art in it and sound installations in their house. These people exist, and they can and they will collect your work eventually if you try hard enough, but you know, I think that that's just a quick aside to that. And also, just want to kind of massage that a little bit further as well to talk about material as well when you're making work because I'm always of the volition as well is that if you are bankrupting yourself to make your artwork in the first instance, maybe try a different approach, you know, work with what you have available to you. One of the most amazing artists that I know is a classically trained like opera singer, they sing baritone and they make work through throat singing and they use their voice that material is for free, but they make work with that. So, it's not about having to plexiglass this and stainless steel marble plinth that you know it's and that I'm that work also can travel you know, those sorts of works. You can send as an email, or Dropbox to a gallery all across the world and that's a way of building your CV is working within those means to know that those things aren't limited by space, freight costs, and studio space and labour, there are things that you can do pretty quickly and they can travel pretty far.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

Can I add to that quickly?

GRACE CONNORS:

I realise I'm yelling.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

No, I love it. I love it. One thing that a lot of artists who are in my kind of peer level do is if they make their crazy conceptual video, they often have a series of six stills that are presented as photography and editioned, you know, and what that means is the collectors actually are able to participate in that highly conceptual mode through collection, and they still have a way to connect to the video work. You know what I mean? And that it doesn't mean you're sacrificing the intention. Or, but you know, when you're at university, they'll say, oh, but what does the

framed photograph next to the video mean? And blah, blah, blah? Like you don't need to worry about that.

GRACE CONNORS:

It means money.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

Yeah, let's say. So, like, you're allowed to cite that at times. You want to make money. Yeah.

(AUDIENCE CLAPS)

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah, I think that.

TIMMAH BALL:

Can I just add to that, I guess what I find really interesting is I, you know, it's really interesting to hear that sort of honesty about money. But I kind of feel like, you don't have a commercial practice. And what I find is kind of really interesting in terms of arts institutions versus commercial practice, is you know, it was really kind of refreshing and interesting to hear you talk about, you can just make money. But what I find, it's like a step lacking is I always find, doing commissioned work, which is never commercial, is that, as an industry, everybody is so sort of seems like a class thing too maybe, but strange about money. And I almost feel like sort of as a new generation coming up what we all have to, and everyone is, actually, if someone's commissioned you to make money, commissioned you to make a work that they're paying to have that ability to actually say, Oh, can we maybe increase it to \$500. And I feel like we don't feel empowered to speak to institutions in that way. And I also feel like institutions are so strange. Whenever I get commissioned to do work, you know, you've done the work. And you're getting all these emails, like, amazing, amazing, just do this bit more. But you're so often not actually then getting clarity on when you're going to get paid. And for so long I just was sort of awkwardly kind of being like, am I allowed to ask if I can send my invoice now? And yeah, I kind of really want everyone like, whatever stage you're at, to sort of feel almost yeah, a little bit more confident in the way you were speaking about sort of commercial work? I don't know. I think it's a real shame and frustration that other kind of more government, university, those sorts of sectors, even when you have a contract, yeah, it feels like you're getting paid six

months later. And I feel like we all have the right to demand to get paid when we've done the work.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Well, you have the right, you actually do as contractors have the right to demand within 30 days of getting paid. But that's just like a basic practicality. But you make a good broader point, like advocating for yourself to raise the artists fee. Like how much? Is there more? Is there additional? I'd like to spend more time on this, I'd like to spend a dedicated amount of time on this, can I get paid more? Like just asking is really good, right? And then organise? So it's like have your community talk to each other about what you're getting paid with the institutions make sure you are open about it. I think that you know, like Ramesh made a really good point about the arts. Firstly, though, you don't have to, it's not like conceptual practice exists here and commercial practice exists here, you can have a practice that intersects with both of those worlds. And I think, actually, everyone here does. So that's just like one point that I'd like to make. The other point is, yeah, like, art is really special. And it's like an amazing kind of world to find yourself in. It can feel really enriching and welcoming in ways that other industries and other professions mightn't but in many ways, it's also not special. There are lots of people who work in the world who are organised, who get paid for their labour, and they also really enjoy their work. So, it's kind of I think we need to have like a bit of a reality check around like what it is we're actually doing in this world. We're not that special even though we are but you know, like, I think that that would go away to helping each other organise helping each other advocate for our selves. I don't know, dare I say it? Wouldn't it be great if we had a proper union? These kinds of things? Yeah.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

I think you want I think you might want to add to the point I'm making.

GRACE CONNORS:

Yeah, definitely.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

Which is if we think about the audience here, I think something that a really interesting framework to think about is being entrepreneurial, and how to actually negotiate, you know, like, and keep in mind that I think a lot of people when they start practising, or they start working, they might imagine these hierarchies, I'm working with someone, I need to be very passive. But you actually need to bring things to the table and bring suggestions, and bring

partners and actually grow projects collaboratively. And that sounds a little bit like jargon, in a way, but what that means is, okay, you're discussing a project, you can say, oh, oh, well, you know, my friend might my friend owns a brewery, he might sponsor the opening, you know, and you bring these kinds of things to the table is an entrepreneurial thing that can grow your relationships in the industry. And that's something that, you know, isn't too unrealistic. But something that I do, for example, is I do something a little bit controversial is I have, I have brand partnerships, right? So, I work with, like, luxury brands some of the time. So, whenever I work with institutions, they come on board, you know what I mean? And they actually support production, they support the presentation, they bring new audiences in, and then I bring them into philanthropy. So, I'm actually starting to think on a larger level on how, you know, the artists role in society is actually changing. So how can we actually look to the future and be a leader, rather than look at what's happened in the past and just repeat those scripts? And I love it when you see people being really creative about how to grow their opportunities.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah, I think what you're describing is like, quite empowering. Like, you can actually do this work yourself. And isn't it amazing that we have the internet and we can do it? And you have to. It has to feel good for you, though, right? Like you have to live your own morals. And you know, you can't, you have to think about where you're getting your funding from, or what those relationships are. And that's really important, because you got to live your life and like, be true to yourself. But you're definitely right. There are ways that you can be entrepreneurial, and it's not a new thing, like being entrepreneurial in the arts is ancient. It's just sometimes we don't like to talk about it in those terms, yeah. What were you going say Grace?

GRACE CONNORS:

Well, it's kind of like ships sailed away a little bit. But I think it's important to also talk, like to bring into the force and very recent discussion, and real-time, things that are happening, talking about artists, organisation, artists organising together, knowing their rights, knowing that there are things that exist, that they can actually demand and hold people to account to, happened recently at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. So, ACCA in Melbourne, the staff were not being paid properly, they all organised and came together, they created an Instagram, like, you know, bought all of this stuff out into the forefront. So, knowing that these things happen, and they are in real-time. And you know, for anyone being like, oh, the institutions know that how to treat people, right. They don't, and they will get away with making concessions and undercutting things, because, you know, they have excuses about, oh, you know, payroll is taking longer, we are a government institution and we have to wait for approvals and whatever

have you else. But know that as artists, as individuals, you can come together, if you are being treated unfairly, or you know, you're not being paid properly, chances are someone else is also being treated the same way. So knowing that you can actually talk to people and say, Are you going through this as well. So that's something that's happening in real-time. Always read your contracts and know that there are things like the National Association for the Visual Arts that also have like standards, like, pay rates for people, if you are an individual, and you're invoicing for your work and your time, I use a great app called Hours Tracker, where I when I'm working on a project, I check, I put it on when I'm working. And then I'll have a thing that tells me how long I was working on a thing for. So just making sure that you know, every minute that you work on something that is commissioned by somebody, every minute counts, and you need to be accounting for the time that you're working on something. And not everything has to be in-kind to people that have money that can pay you because they should and you should get paid by them. So just wanted to quick aside to that.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah. And I mean, while we're on like super practicalities, like if you are working a bunch of part-time jobs or cobbling together a kind of independent art or writing income, practice, whatever. Like think about contributing to your super, like if you're going to spend the next 15 years without a full-time job. That's like a reality that I don't think universities prepare us for, right. So little things like that. Just be really practical about these things. Um, But the other thing that I wanted to talk about is like, of course, just naturally some people will feel uncomfortable talking about their work that might be quite ephemeral in like a pure like in a purely transactional sense. And that's not that you can't advocate for yourself within various institutions and argue for more funding, and you absolutely should. But sometimes that is a bit harder. And there's you don't it is hard. But I do want to assure everyone that is, in my experience, that that hasn't stopped people getting the work. So don't feel like uncomfortable in that kind of advocating for yourself, like I actually know, very few examples where people are like, had have said, no, or kicked someone off a job. Like it's, there's always a conversation that happens in collaboration. Yeah.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

Should we maybe demystify how artists might have some kind of pathways from graduating to institutional recognition, not saying that institutional recognition is an ultimate goal. But I think, you know when I graduated, I didn't know how that happened. But you know what I mean, I think it's a very mystifying process. And I think a lot of art is.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

And what do we mean by institutional recognition.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

So, let's talk about that. So, I think when we're studying art, we're looking at artists who are showing work in museums a lot of the time, you know, and big galleries or biennales or festivals, and, you know, we'll go on excursions to the big museums, but not the kind of grassroots organisations a lot of the time. And so, I think we're often instilled that practices presented in certain venues are more valuable, culturally, you know, and it's this kind of implicit thing that we're often fed. But no one ever kind of gives you the mechanics or tells you that that artist is married to the curators, you know, blah, you know what I'm saying like? So, I guess what I want to say is, what are some narratives about how some artists go from emerging and finishing university to then having to be in Primavera?

KELLY FLIEDNER:

We've gone into the nepo baby phase of the conversation Yeah, I mean, I hate that phrase. But it is true, there are ways that people have a head start, because there's kind of know how it works, right? But yeah, I guess that that's the conversation, there are many, you need to find out what part of the art world you want to be in, and then learn as much about it as possible.

GRACE CONNORS:

you find out by like being in it as well. And I just want to quick aside, we're not going to talk about nepo babies, but my advice is to be friends with them. Just hang out with them and go to their parties, because they have the nice natural wines at their party or like their house that their mummy and daddy paid for. Just hang out with them, like, you know, ride the coattails, but you know, be genuine, I guess in your relationship to them, but just hang out with, like these people exist, like and don't resent them because like, you know, they can't help it, you know? They can't help it.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

But yeah, first steps, though, right? So, the first steps are the emerging institutions that you should be looking at are Next Wave festival. Next Wave is based in Melbourne. Various, I don't know, what are they Newcastle? What are the emerging?

GRACE CONNORS:

Adhocracy is also one that has applications open at the moment, I think they closed on the 22nd of May. They have three different streams one for Adelaide-based practising artists, there's an emerging artist workshop where you can go to Adelaide for a few days, and it's all paid. And things like that, where just apply for stuff even. I know that takes time I understand. But just for things, such as that where you're actually going to be able to immerse yourself in you know, different peer-to-peer networks.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Make your work happen by being involved with artist-run initiatives. And there are lots of different scales of artists and initiatives to like you can have an exhibition in your house. You can cobble together group exhibitions with the people you went to school with the with the people in this room that you've met at Hatched, just make sure you're having conversations with each other, but definitely touch base with those key institutions that are set up for emerging practice. And there's a lot of them in each and every city. But the big kind of national ones is definitely Next Wave or like un Projects. Yeah.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

I think we should clarify what it means by know what part of the art world you want to be in.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah, yeah, sorry.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

So like, for example, if your goal is to, you're really happy to make beautiful oil paintings of flowers 12 times a year and you want to sell them and that's really fulfilling. That's what you want to do. Great, you know, but stretch your canvas, buy nice linen, high-quality oil paints, you know what I mean? I work with a commercial gallery that sells paintings, right? But if you were doing that, you were interested in still life painting and you said, I want to be in Primavera, I'd say, have you been to Primavera lately? You know, there are I've never seen still life paintings in Primavera. So, it's basically finding that microsphere in the art world that you want to be in and understanding what that means. But also understanding that one isn't necessarily better than the other. It's, this is what will make me happy, this is what I'm working towards. Right. And being realistic that, you know, like, for example, if I say with me, I make colourful ceramics a lot of the time, you know, but I want to be in be in biennales and big shows. So, I do make crazy

large conceptual, ephemeral installations, sometimes with a bunch of collaborators, you know, but then some of my work is also, you know, tour to lots of regional galleries, because they're medium-sized ceramics that fit in crates, you know, so I'm trying to actually cater to different markets and different audiences through the creation of different types of work. And that actually gives you a diversity of audience, as well as a diversity of exhibition opportunities. And something that I realized recently is that, you know, we've got finite museums in the world, but there's lots of public space, you know, so public art is something that I've worked towards as well. So, I'm working on two public art projects at the moment. And it's us, it's actually being a little bit strategic about sustainability. You know, how, how can you like, find avenues to exhibit that's actually going to also sustain your body? Like a lot of public artwork is fabricated by other fabricators like, I don't want to be in my studio, making my hand making my work by myself my whole life, like, I'll get like RSI, and you know. So, I think it's also good to almost think about your art practice as something that could grow into almost like a bit of a, I don't like this word, but I'm using it very intentionally a factory, and there are different rooms of the factory, you know, what I mean? And how can those different rooms, service different aspects to get you to those to get you to those goals? The other thing that I think you should do, which is a really interesting, simple exercise, is think about an artist whose career you might like to have, you know, like, and then look at their CV, like, see where they started, see where they ended up. And there might be a historical dimension to that.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

What residencies do they do? What kind of funding bodies did they apply for, and therefore get funded by you'll know them immediately.

GRACE CONNORS:

And then also, DM them, you know, reach out to them, email them, just message them and be like, hi, don't be afraid to be a fan girl, either. I think that's really important. And I just want to make it clear that you kind of, I think, kind of going back to the fundamental points, like what happens the minute that you get that certificate from your university, or maybe you drop out because you hated it, you don't have to have graduated in your institution, either. You just have to be like, embarrassingly, like, you just have to embarrass yourself a little bit. You just go to everything, you know, DM people, like message people, email them be like, oh, like, had you know that person in that position in that institution? Would you like to go and get a coffee? Or that artist do you want to get a coffee? The worst thing that they can say is no, honestly, and then you'll be surprised because sometimes it works. And I'm speaking from experience, I like DM to one of like, my favourite artists and now we're like friends, you know, it's, it's a thing that can happen and it's a thing that is so embedded in that like, you know, how do you survive in this world is that you do have to have a certain degree of that, you know, embarrassing

confidence and just shoot your shot for those sorts of things. Because you'll be really surprised what can happen from that. But just you know, you just never know what can happen so yeah, that's my word of advice from that like immediate stepping out point. And you know, go to people's shows I know we keep saying it, but go to people's shows, meet people like a thing that survived me throughout because you know, we talk about that class conversation a lot. And I love what you said the working-class people and like migrant people don't get the luxury of a gap year I think that's really funny. Remember that everyone, but just bring Ziploc bags to openings and take their cheese and crackers that are left over at the end. I did that and I used to do that for years. Take the wine that is left over you know like just if it's there, just take it you know, so you have lunch the next day you know working at Bunnings for 11 years I like just used to steal you know and you just built you know just don't do that not advocating for theft or anything but you know that you know you can build a have a supplementary job coming out of university where you can siphon resources out of you know, and I'm I really really mean that don't tell them I told you but like I have a whole like tool kit basically and I can make most of my art from what I got from those jobs or even just like, you know, financial management information, I worked at a debt collector for two years because I couldn't get a job coming out of university. You know, just making I made art about it, I made a performance artwork about working at a debt collector, everything's there for parodying or stealing so that's an immediate thing is just making sure that you can work with you know, what you have at your disposal. And don't overstretch yourself, because it's not, it's like, it's not worth hurting yourself, or like, bankrupting yourself over. And really, as you said, those public spaces exist. One of the best exhibitions I think I've ever seen was the wind chime festival exhibition in a park in Melbourne, you know, and it was just people putting wind chimes in a tree. And it was incredible. And it's there are so many things at your disposal that don't really cost that much. They just cost a message, you know, the time it takes to email somebody or to sit down and come up with an idea that you can then organise around, because there's nothing that excites me more than when my friend hits me up. And they're like, I have a crazy idea. Do you want to be a part of it? And I usually say yes, you know, just things like that. Just give the time to come up with ideas and reach out to people, practically from the first instance of stepping out.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah, Grace is obviously like the queen of working out how to instrumentalize every single job, location and relationship. But yeah, but I mean, it's, it's not, it doesn't necessarily have to be like, all instrumentalisation. Like, I think that you should and coming back to this, like finding your elders kind of thing. Like, it's really important, like, find the people who can enrich your experience and your art practice, and you can continue to learn from but also, that's a mutual exchange, too. I know that the elders that I have in my life, the people that I've collaborated with long term, it's a mutually beneficial relationship to have. And so we get things out of each other that are great for our practices at the various stages of our careers. And I love

spending time with more emerging practitioners and talking about their work, just as I had the pleasure of talking to a lot of you last night about your practices. It's amazing. But yeah, maybe we are who are burning with desire for questions. Yes. Okay. So, let's wait for the mic, because we're recording this conversation for perpetuity. So, if you wait for the mic for your question.

AUDIENCE:

Thanks. Can you hear me okay, through my mask? Yeah. I have a question. And I'm not an artist myself, but my partner is an emerging artist. And I know a lot of well-meaning support networks around us. Ask a question. Oh, so what do you what are your plans? What are you going to do when you finish? And it's often difficult to answer that question. And they sort of feel like, oh, you're going to be a perpetual student? Or how do you kind of navigate that well-meaning question about, you know, are you going to make a career out of this? Or how are you going to support yourself? And I think there have been lots of ideas in this conversation, but interested to hear about your experience as artists and how you deal with well, meaning family members and friends that don't understand that being in the art industry can be a legitimate profession.

TIMMAH BALL:

Yeah, it's really interesting that you bring that up, because I feel like for so long, it's not even something when you first finish, like I felt I remember just talking about some work I was doing. And someone said, who's not working in the arts, how much do you get paid to do that sort of stuff? And it was like very unnerving because I had to say, oh, I'm not getting paid. But it was really important work to me. And the person was very shocked. Which again, is reflective of this industry, but more shocked in a way of almost kind of like, oh, that it's just a hobby or like it's not work, because I don't understand why you're doing it. When are you going to start getting paid? And, yeah, I kind of feel like it's just having that sort of confidence to sort of explain to people that it's a long-term decision, or something that you want to pursue. And even one thing that I thought I found really illuminating and interesting. I had a quick look at the works. And in the labels, I was noticing that there's actually quite a few artists who judging by the year they were born, must have recently graduated in their 30s and 40s. And I found that awesome, because it was kind of like, oh, that's great that you so obviously taken you a long time to get to a Bachelor of Fine Art, but you obviously had it in you you wanted to make work. And clearly, it's you're not in Hatched as a 22-year-old. But yeah, I think it is to sort of almost educating people that it's a lifelong thing we're doing and yeah, it's not it's not clear when you're going to start generating work. You know, and even that journey of working out how commercial you are versus other niches of subcultural work you want to do. Yeah, but I think it is just like that long-term sense of advocating that what you're doing is really important, but it's lifelong. And it's not in any way like a science or, you know, sort of law type career.

GRACE CONNORS:

And to be unapologetic about that as well. You know, I think that there's this really interesting thing that I noticed when you see shows like, I don't know, Project Runway, anything within the creative sort of industries where people just talk about, they, they're older people that are returning or you know, they're finally getting a chance to explore something creative that they've always loved. But they've worked as like an accountant their whole life. And then they had a, you know, midlife crisis. And then you know, they returned to baking or like sewing or making art. And then, you know, they, there's always the sentiment of it, you know, you don't want it to be too late before you explore the thing that you really love doing. And I think that anyone that tries to interrogate that or, you know, question it, it's like, I think that there may be projecting a little bit, maybe they're quite unhappy in their life. That's meant to be a joke. You're all supposed to laugh. But yeah, I mean, I don't know. So, I think it'd be unapologetic about it and know that it's okay to not have an answer, either. You're just doing what makes you happy. And you get to hang out with your friends or like-minded people, you get to stay up late and think about big ideas. You know, you're not, you're not doing something that you don't want to be doing. And I think that that's a good enough answer. Yeah.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

My contribution to that question is that I think you're actually drawing attention to more of a cultural problem, you know, so I think it's about the way in which people don't have literacy in understanding pathways, and the kinds of labour involved in creative and artistic careers. So, I think one thing is accepting that that question is a little bit beyond you, you know what I mean? And that's comforting. But the second thing is, like, I'm probably what people might see to be, you know, successful artists. And I get that all the time. You know, so it actually doesn't stop. But I think what you can like what I've kind of discovered is, I think, explanatory responses, I've stopped giving so much. You know, I'm usually into the one-liners now. And it really conserves what you're giving, you know, I think as humans, we all have finite resources. And you need to kind of prioritize and be strategic with who you're giving energy to you know and sometimes I just say things like, oh, no, I'm doing quite well, done. Like so I think it's also about socially navigating a culture that isn't very literate, about artistic careers. That's what it is to me.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

My immediate response to that question is just find the service providers in your city where you're located in Perth, its DADAA, which is an amazing organisation, which will help anyone with a disability or maybe finding it difficult to access grants or what have you, those people are there to help you. And there are a bunch of other organisations who will help as well. But

DADAA is like the place I probably send you first. And I am sure that there are organisations like-minded in every city in Australia. Yeah. And I think that this is a really interesting question. And I'm kind of going to pivot from where Ramesh was just leaving off to like, in the recent National Cultural Policy that was put out by the federal government. It's the first one in 10 years. And I think they're really trying to change this narrative too, like that professionals in the arts industries are professionals. And it's a professional industry, and we contribute economically to the like, not only the cultural diversity of our like nation, but also the economic diversity of our nation. So, like, don't be afraid to have that conversation too because it's like a reality. And in that cultural policy as well, there is a lot of information on the ways that arts can increase access for lots of diverse communities, not only people with disabilities, but language barriers various cultural barriers. Yeah, so there's a lot of stuff in there that will be kind of enacted in the next few years. That encourages organisations like PICA to kind of speak directly to more diverse communities. Yeah.

GRACE CONNORS:

I think it's also important worth noting when we're talking about funding as well is knowing that if there are questions like that, like to your state, and even the federal level funding bodies is that they have grants officers that it's their job for you to call them and ask questions. Like if you're unsure about anything at all, that's like their job to answer to your questions, to give you any help about any questions you might have, within an application knowing you know what specific stream you should be applying for funding for, they're there to advise you on that. And it's a really important tool to weaponize when you're if you're unsure about anything to do with funding too.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Sorry, sharing a mic now, but yeah, people who are on if you go to a funding body website, and you're interested in applying for a grant, and it has a phone number with a person's name there, give that person a call, doesn't matter. If you have one question, call them and ask something because it actually helps even just being in that person's mind. Often the person, the administrator of a funding grant isn't on the panel making a decision, but they're always in the room. And they're always there to help the people who are on the panel, kind of think about what that practice is. So that's just such an easy thing that you can do to kind of like help yourself. And if you're having trouble with grants and writing grants, just having conversations with these people can really help too.

AUDIENCE:

Thanks.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah, no worries.

AUDIENCE:

Hi, my name is Jenny, I'm 66 and doing my PhD in Fine Art at the moment. And really enjoying it. And last year, I started performing my songs, which sort of, you know, I did my undergraduate and did all sorts of different things. But I've ended up being a songwriter and performing. But um, Artshub is a great is a great newsletter sort of thing you can subscribe to that tells you have all these opportunities, and everywhere you can go to apply, apply for prizes, apply for opportunities Artshub, it's good, worth following. And what I was going to say about the lady's problem, really people who say to you, oh, you know, what are you doing that for? Or people say to me, I say I'm an artist, they say, oh, what do you paint? And when you look at people who are saying those things to their reflecting themselves, you know, that it's no reflection on you, or what your choices are? They're just reflecting what they know, in the world. I mean, you know, there is this famous saying, we can't know what we don't know. So, you know, they can only know, what they've been brought up to, which is that, perhaps, you know, what they're fed by social media and the culture they live within that art is only painting, you know, so it's doesn't reflect on yourself. And I was going to ask before we were talking about opportunities, and you mentioned Next Wave in Melbourne. What are the organisations like, I'm from Melbourne. And I've been here about six months. And I no doubt I came over to put on an exhibition at DADAA, which was in February. And I'm seeking opportunities, you know, in Perth, but I do follow Artshub. And a lot of the stuff they do promote is in other states, but you know, you couldn't name a Western Australian opportunity in that context. I'm just wondering if you think hard or.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

I mean, I think lots of opportunities, maybe not a similar amount of opportunities as somewhere, like, there's a kind of, there are more people in Melbourne and Sydney. So, there are more organisations, but there are definitely organisations here that facilitate a kind of entry-level into the like your first exhibition, for instance. Yeah, Artsource is a great place. So Artsource, and is it a member organisation? Yeah. Artsource is a member organisation based in Freo, and they have studio spaces, as well as exhibition spaces, and they do regular callouts for exhibitions in those spaces. So that's a really good place to start. There are lots of yeah, no, Grace.

GRACE CONNORS:

And I think that this is a thing that I like kind of love to bang on the drum about a little bit, the drum keeps getting bigger, and the noises keep getting louder. But that's what we're talking about a bit earlier, around when there isn't an opportunity for you to be able to exhibit like, maybe a space or an organisation is that you just collectivise or you kind of just do things yourself. And that's an unfortunate reality that has been the case for WA for quite some time is that a lot of those intermediary spaces? I think, we know we lost like seven artists-run spaces in the space of 10 years for lack of funding and like volunteer burnout, because like you know that they are powered by volunteer labour and very minimal funding is, you know, just doing things in the living room or you know, having shows in parks, and then that's basically That advice that I give is that you just have to organise and do those things yourself, unfortunately. And then that helps to build a sector around it, it helps to build ecology and a bit of a whirlpool around it, because then other people see that it's possible, and then they start doing things because it is a West Australian epidemic, unfortunately. And I think that it can be different. It's just that that is necessarily due to like lack of funding, or, you know, just perhaps just people not seeing or being evidence that they can do those things.

GRACE CONNORS:

Yeah, don't get me started. But yes, it does. It does exist, it does exist, but it's largely project-based funding. So just being aware that a lot of funding that exists through your federal or state funding is mostly for project to project. So, keeping things with a short life. And then this is another endemic problem of, you know, there being a lack of structural organisational funding for things to be able to sustain and survive. So, my tip is just basically to do a bunch of projects and use that project funding or you know, making sure that in those project funding applications that you put in that you're paying yourself as well. So, you're paying yourself an artist's fee to do it, you're not just paying for material or studio hire or whatever that might be.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

I think residencies are a good one, too. And I've seen a few recently, like, this is more WA specific, but there's a, there's been a few advertised for down south, like regionally based residencies are quite good. And one of the other things this, like, amazingly untapped resource, I think often is a council gallery. So, a council gallery is often funded in a really different way. It's, there are often like quite a good artist's fees involved, and very emerging practitioners are often showing at these spaces, and they have a lot of support. And in almost every council in Australia has some kind of gallery. So, wherever you're living, check it out, because it's an amazing way to like, have your first exhibition. And once you have your first exhibition, make sure you document it well. And that can be just you on your iPhone, but just take some time. And if you're having problems, get someone to help you, you know, those kinds of things and just like start cobbling together a little bit of, yeah, but in council galleries are good.

AUDIENCE:

Just going say with residencies, I've got three dogs, and a lot of people have kids, and you know, they can be they're sort of a niche opportunity, I think.

GRACE CONNORS:

But knowing that also those council galleries and opportunities like that, is there itching for people to do things in their spaces as well. And I think that the most resounding advice is just to see what's in your area near you and do your research as well. And I know that that also takes time. And also, a thing that I wanted to bring up to a very small thing could be bringing up Artshub is that a lot of articles that you might want to read as well are paywalled. I know that Artshub is paywalled. And I know you should be paying for the subscriptions. But there's a website called 12 foot.io, where you can get rid of paywalls on any article.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Write it down.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

Wow.

GRACE CONNORS:

Yeah, any article anywhere that removes a paywall, so 12 foot.io, thank you to those developers that are doing that. And I hope that that website doesn't get taken down, because I'm sending so many people to it. And that one's amazing. And also like Z Library, if that still exists, you can get free books. You should pay for books, obviously. But just some advice that so yeah, look up, get rid of those paywalls. Yeah, knock down those paywalls. Oh, it's free for students. So that's great. That's wonderful.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Do you guys have anything to add to that? First exhibition spaces?

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

Oh, I do. I do. I just had this memory. But it's relevant. I remember when I finished university, like, I like I was actually lucky. I never liked to party or anything. You know, so I never spent days hungover or anything like that. So no, I was just like, I would always bring like a bottle of sparkling water to an opening. So, I had something to hold. But um, when I finished university, I was basically there was an artist I thought was amazing. And I worked in her studio one day a week for free just cleaning and hanging out. And I had to, I had the privilege to spend that one day doing that. But what that meant was, we became friends through that constant seeing each other and then I went to her birthday, went to her house and what you'll find is people who are established generally hang out with people at a similar level, you know of establishment in a career. So, then I had my first show at Firstdraft, which is Sydney's like longest-running artists initiative in 2013. And I had like The Director of Sydney Contemporary and all these curators at my like, Firstdraft show, just because I was friendly with them through helping another artist out and going to her birthday, you know, like, in a way that the mechanics of that situation is quite clear, you know, like people support people they like, and they're interested in. And the other thing to keep in mind is when you do finish university, you're actually very attractive to curators. You know, we're always looking for new practices and new voices, there's this real fetish around new, you know what I mean? So, you can actually use that thing to your advantage, because people are actually interested in what you're doing. That's something to keep in mind. Don't be afraid to actually tell people what you're doing. If they say, oh, what do you do? Don't be coy. Like.

GRACE CONNORS:

You can be humble.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

They're actually asking you what you're doing. It's not like you're going up to a random and saying, hey, this is what I do. You know, so you actually need to learn how to communicate with people about what you do. And that's like a very basic entrepreneurial skill.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Timmah?

TIMMAH BALL:

Yeah, I mean, I think, um, I don't know, for me, it's like that, yeah, fight in terms of finding spaces for new things, just even making things very independently. Not sometimes it's like, you

may not feel like you're being noticed by the industry, because certain people didn't come to your event or those sorts of things. But I have found that there's something about longevity or a sense that sometimes I'm quite shocked that things that I assumed no one could possibly know about. Because at the time, it didn't, just didn't seem successful. Yeah, people are looking at what you're doing. So, in some ways, like, don't be afraid to just make work independently, or probably more collectively. And think that, oh, we didn't necessarily have an amazing opening night or, you know, whatever. But it's actually I don't know, it's like some accumulative effect, like, definitely don't do something independently or as a group and decide it wasn't successful. Just learn from that. And absolutely, just keep going. Because you'll be surprised how, yeah, someone will have noticed that really strange thing that you did.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

The other thing to keep in mind is people who are in these positions, curating or whatever, they know how to look at practices at certain stages, you know, so if you are very emerging, and you have pictures of shows you put on in friends, garages, that is actually quite impressive, you know, because it shows organisation commitment. You know, it's actually good, but if, like, we're not expecting to see a group show at the MCA on a recent graduates CV, do you see what I mean? Like we're looking appropriately, at the stage of your career, when we're being on things. I've been on so many emerging panels and things. And the main thing you're looking for is commitment. Like how have they demonstrated their commitment, and it's through these very grassroots things that they're doing? And actually, like something I do, which is a bit I don't know if this is right, but Artsy, which is, you know, one of the biggest, you know, arts platforms, all the major galleries in the world prescribed to it. They recently sent a survey out to like, David Zwirner, all the biggest commercial galleries and the question was, how do you find artists? First thing they said was through other artists, second one was Instagram, right. So that's just reality. Right? And sometimes when I'm looking at emerging artists, and I find their Instagram, and they're not even following, like, any galleries, you know, like, all these things start to become signs in which you're read by, and I'm not saying this is, right, right. But this is the world we're living in. Like, if there's no information about you in the world, and we find some, that's what we're using, unfortunately, to make our readings of you. So I actually think having a very careful online presence is good. You know, what I did when I was in my, when I finished uni, I went through my Facebook and deleted like, so many photos of me, like in the gutter, you know, and like.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

I thought you didn't drink?

(AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

Well, my friends drank. So, I'd be sitting in the gutter with them, you know. So, like, you actually need to think about branding a little bit within that space. Because right now, artists who can, are happy in front of a camera, can go on TV, can post on socials will actually get more opportunities, because sometimes galleries will be like, oh, we'll do a public program with blah, they have lots of followers, like this is actually sometimes the discussions that happen, you know, and I'm not telling you, this is good, this is bad. This is just reality. Right? So, and some people are more naturalize to that, but it's like, learn one photo face, learn your angle, do it.

GRACE CONNORS:

Get a headshot, if you want to go down that route as well. You know, like it's so important to do that sort of thing. And just a really quick aside and think about the I'm so many sides today. But if there is no opportunity for you, you've unlocked a core memory I did in with some friends in uni is where we took my sneaky friend with a backpack full of artwork. Brent will remember this. I'm implicating you in this, but we backpack full of artwork, so I just bought it in AGWA. And put a little, what do you call it didactic panel next to it. It was up for 15 minutes, but we got it, before I got thrown in the bin. But you know, just storm the gates. Like if they're not giving you an exhibition opportunity. Just put your work in the gallery anyway.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah. There's a lot of manifesting one's destiny going on here.

GRACE CONNORS:

I'm encouraging theft and trespassing. This is great.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

But no good point, make the space available for you in any way, shape, or form. But the other thing is, yes, there's social media, but actually publishing, just like little zines of like great documentation of your work such a good way, send it to people, I don't know, publishing, self-publishing, it's always a really good way of creating like, documentation around your own work.

GRACE CONNORS:

And having a digital presence around things that have happened, creating an archive of things that have existed and happen so that you can point to it as time has gone by and say we did that thing because there's nothing that grinds my gears more than the fact that Success Arts, which is probably one of the most incredible projects that's happened in WA in the last like, you know, forever. It doesn't even really have a proper website and things aren't documented properly. It only exists is like this oral kind of mythology. You know, it's a thing that's like, do you remember, I think they're like, what are you talking about? So, it's really impulsive.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

This is a very WA specific cultural amnesia kind of problem that we have.

GRACE CONNORS:

Yeah, very much.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Any more questions? Yeah. Oh, there's lots. Okay. So maybe one more question. And I will remind you that we're all going to be outside having a drink and some food at happy hour. So, we'll be all around, like, please come and chat to us as well. But yeah, one more question.

AUDIENCE QUESTION:

Thank you so much for sharing your strategies and your stories today with the journeys that you've had. And I want to say thank you for those questions about service providers and services for artists as well, because I wanted to ask the conversation and the stories you've shared in your own careers have focused a lot on the individual responsibility on artists to forge that path and forge that career. And whilst I appreciate the individuality, that's expressed in the personal choice in that, and that being very important, I also feel this sense of, you know, those are pathways that are made possible through a capitalistic way of thinking. And there are many artists who cannot access that pathway because of not being privileged by the status quos of those systems. And so I wondered if, yeah, if you have concerns about whether the costs of and I'm thinking about this, particularly at the moment, most of my peers are disabled artists who are really, you know, who do not have the privilege of being able to go out and be in community, In the arts, if there is not hybrid events, if there's not Auslan interpretations, if there's not people who can, you know, literally know how to interact with you, there's a lot of different barriers that are, of course, on the responsibility of institutions and culture to change. But it's also, like, there's an enormous amount of labour, that is also put on individual artists who have to go through all of those barriers in order to get anywhere in their careers. But at the same time, many disabled artists historically, and in the present, have ways of practicing and

working that challenge, the ways that the industry thinks about art as well, and have, in many ways also continued to contribute to like innovative change and evolution of what art is, as well. So, I wondered if you feel, you know, that any concern around the costs of normalising or reinforcing or kind of Yeah, I suppose, valuing that individual pursuit over our collective responsibilities as like, citizens. And how, yeah, like, is the cost really worth that? If it's not really shifting the balance?

TIMMAH BALL:

Yeah, I worry about it a lot. I think for me, it almost like reflects how, yeah, I feel like as I've moved on, I've become less and less interested in having, I guess, a solo career, or a solo practice, because I find it too. Yeah, too draining. And I'm someone who's able bodied white passing and there's just you know, I have a lot of more Yeah, visible privileges. So, I can imagine for someone who's not in my position Sheeran, yeah, that sense of having to orchestrate an identity that's going to pull you up to the next level would just be not only just overwhelming, but potentially, you know, impossible. In some ways, and I think for me, yeah, it's just kind of been a sort of sense of like, either, if I'm going to have like a sort of, you know, successful solo career, it's just going to take decades, and sort of, for me being comfortable with that. Or, alternatively, I think I'm much more interested in collective work and doing sort of much smaller scale collaborative work. That's, you know, might not get any recognition or a lot of interest or buy in. But I feel like it's that sort of work that if we keep doing it, you know, whether the industry becomes interested or not. Yeah, it's that sort of community building. But yeah, I feel like I think you've raised something really interesting in terms of, yeah, almost that decision we make, but also the fact that it's not decision sounds like a strange word too because I think for some people, the choice isn't there, which you're raising, it's yeah.

GRACE CONNORS:

And I think it's also worth noting that we, as people who may be working in institutions, or as a collective of people is putting pressure on institutions to make sure that they are, you know, making spaces accessible for people making sure that their budgets are equipped to having accessible, you know, accessible, having an accessibility budget, so that they can have also an interpretation and have things like that, that they even physically accessible, so that people can come into the space and knowing that there is a shift in accessibility at the moment, where we are knowing that it's not just about physical ability, there are so many other things that we're having to take into consideration and making sure that those institutions are actually acting on those things. Because I don't think that there's any excuse for institutions to not be doing those things or participating anymore. And seeing examples like, in over in Sydney, I can't remember her last name, her name is Rihanna. She DJs under the name of Aquenta, but ran this incredible event called Crip Rave, at Performance Space in Sydney. And it was a event like a music event,

but for people with accessibility issues, and with disabilities of all different ranges. And it is just showing that there are events like that where people, again, having to self-organise and do it themselves, but just setting an example. And just showing that it's easy, it was not easy, obviously, because there's a lot of labour and time and, you know, certain funding involved, but just showing that it is possible. Yeah.

RAMESH MARIO NITHIYENDRAN:

I think it's a really interesting, practical and philosophical, you know, question when we're thinking about art practice, you know, I think when we're thinking from a position of cultural plurality, we can, you know, understand that, you know, different cultures have different communal modes of art making, you know, some are more individual, you know, but I think the other thing to keep in mind is that sometimes, things can be both, you know, and my, like, I think something that I try and do, you know, within my larger practice, is thinking about, like, when I was at art school, or whatever, they were actually no south, I didn't see there were no South Asian lectures. And what I try and do now is actually focus on one area that I'm interested in developing. And I do that with kind of teaching, consulting, being on boards, doing things like this, working with PICA and I think it also comes down to the fact that what are the values you want to instil within your practice as a whole and understanding that your practice, as an art practice, isn't just the artwork you're making. And it's the exhibiting it's how you're working with people, and how you're engaging with people broadly, in an industry. And something that I've discovered recently is when I was emerging or whatever, I wasn't feel I wasn't comfortable to speak up about things. But now I feel a bit easier to do it, because I don't feel a sense that opportunities will be taken away from me. And I think sometimes it's actually more of a responsibility of people in higher positions to actually advocate more.

KELLY FLIEDNER:

Yeah, thanks for your question. I mean, as a board member of PICA, I think it's important, like recognize the room you're in and ask yourself how you're letting other people gain access to that room. So, it's like a question, we all should ask ourselves this question I asked myself all the time, like, how you bringing other people into that room with you that physical and metaphorical room? And also, what does success look like? You know, how it doesn't mean, you're having like multiple shows every year. It doesn't have to be a particular model of like burnout. It can be you went to art school, and now you're incredibly articulate and skilled at viewing art, and you've gone and done another job. Like there's so many ways that you can have a successful relationship with the arts. So definitely questioning those things is so important. So yeah, thanks so much for your question. We are out of time, but we'll all be here afterwards, so we can continue with the conversations. I just want to thank everyone. I want to thank the panellists, obviously, want to thank the Hatched artists. I want to thank everyone

PICA
Perth Institute of
Contemporary Arts

info@pica.org.au
08 9228 6320
51 James St, Perth
→ pica.org.au

that's here. I want to thank the PICA staff. Yeah, I think it's been really great, Ingrid Cumming last night in her Welcome to Country. So, this most beautiful thing, which I've been thinking about constantly, which is just at the end of her welcome, she said, let's just all hold hands and walk into the future together. So, I'm just like, kind of bringing that energy, that positive energy into this conversation and thanking everyone and thanks. Thanks. Okay, cool.