

Further Afield - Joanne Coates - Video

Bella Milroy 00:06

Hello and welcome to Further Afield, a project which discusses and explores art and disability in rural spaces. My name is Bella Milroy, I am a disabled artist based in my hometown of Chesterfield, North Derbyshire, and Further Afield is a project produced in collaboration between myself and Level Centre, who are a rurally based Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation in Rowsley, Derbyshire, just down the road from me.

Bella Milroy 00:33

The project consists of a series of interviews with disabled artists, as well as research into the experiences of disabled artists in rural settings. It seeks to promote their work, and learn about ways of making and producing art that aren't always offered the space or recognition that it deserves.

Bella Milroy 00:49

All Further Afield interviews are available to watch on the Level Centre website, and an audio podcast version will also be available to listen to. There will be transcripts of all conversations. Go to <https://levelcentre.com/> for more information about the project, access, and the contributing artists.

Bella Milroy 01:07

Further Afield is a project supported by Arts Council England, Level Centre, Shape Arts, Derbyshire Libraries, Haarlem Artspace, Arts Derbyshire and Wysing Arts Centre.

Bella Milroy 01:19

My pronouns are she/her, and for my visual description, I am a white woman in my early 30s with an oval face and round cheeks. I have pale white skin, with short brown hair and round glasses. I'm also working from home where behind me there is a grey sofa, a lamp, some cushions, a stack of shelves and drawers in the background. There may also be some dogs and a cat wandering around from time to time. We have the dogs behind me here. I also have a heat pad on my left shoulder.

Bella Milroy 01:48

Today I am very lucky to have with me Joanne Coates, a working-class visual artist working in the medium of photography who lives and works across the North East of England. Her work explores rurality, hidden histories and inequalities relating to low income through photography, installations, and audio. She uses photography to question the concepts of power, identity, wealth, and poverty, by exploring the social histories of land, gender, and class to narrate stories that have long been forgotten or simply never told.

Bella Milroy 02:26

Joanne, welcome, thank you so much for joining me today. Would you like to do a short visual description for the audience?

Joanne Coates 02:34

Thanks for having me, Bella. My pronouns are she/her. I'm a white woman in my early 30s. I have curly red hair, and I am in an office that can be described as chaotic.

Bella Milroy 02:49

Perfect, that's so wonderful. Thank you so much for joining me here today. It's so so wonderful to have you as part of this, part of the program.

Joanne Coates 02:58

No thank you again for having me. It's such a brilliant program.

Bella Milroy 03:02

Thank you. And would you like to just tell us a little bit about yourself and what you're up to at the moment.

Joanne Coates 03:09

I am a visual artist that uses mainly photography but I'm also a farm labourer. And I kind of am really, I guess at the moment, I'm really exploring those two things because I think for a long time, I maybe like hid the fact that I had to do other work to exist as an artist. And actually, now I'm thinking that well, what does it mean, to be doing those two things? And how does that intersect? Because I found it did increasingly kind of intersect for my practice. So at the moment, I've got a developing your creative practice grant from Arts Council, where I'm looking at what it means to be like a rural working class person, and explore these art spaces that work really well in other places and think about what that means and how like, I could develop that or how I could think about that, or what that means for people and how that kind of functions and how it functions for artists because sometimes I think that that's something that's kind of missing out there and I mean, that's what you're doing here, right, as well, it's really exciting but sometimes, yeah, you like you want to know, like, there's all these people exist in all over the kind of countryside making this amazing work, but sometimes you don't directly know about that, because they might not even said that were they're based or they might not even talk about that within their work or, you know, it's different kinds of reasons for that. So I'm really interested in that and then I'm making a body of work that is about these places that are seen as remote and rural, but often for the kind of communities within they're not really identified that way and how the cost of living crisis is affecting people in those places and kind of focusing on that. So I've been working in Hoy, in Scotland in the Orkney Islands and in Swaledale and Wensleydale where I'm based.

Bella Milroy 05:07

Oh, wow, I mean, all of that sounds absolutely amazing. Thank you so much for giving us a little snippet about what you're currently working on. And, and yeah, I just really appreciate this kind of place where you're, where you're at within your practice at the moment, where you're really trying to further I guess, embrace and contextualise where you exist and where you work. And I guess kind of a new way of like, trying to dismantle the kind of like, compartmentalising that goes on as artists and actually kind of like, really consider the context of, of the other places in which you exist and make work like being a farm labourer as well. So yeah, thank you, thank you for that.

Bella Milroy 05:58

I'd really like to begin by talking about a really wonderful example of your kind of commitment in your work and practice of an exploration of class in rural spaces and communities and culture, which is a body of work titled "The Lie of the Land", which you created as part of your Jerwood - Photoworks Prize in 2022. So just a little bit about this work for the audience, this body of work involves collaborating with 12 women who identify as working class or low income living in rural areas of the Northeast of England, and consisted of a photographic series, sound piece, sculptural installation, and handwritten diaries. I absolutely love the way you encapsulate the motivations behind this work and what you hope to achieve with it. In your 2023, Lie of the Land lecture at Photo Frome Symposium, which is found on YouTube, by the way, I highly encourage anybody to check it out. It's a fantastic lecture. You say, I am asking an audience quite often from a different background from my own, from a different place of my own to listen, I'm not asking you to give me a voice, I'm not asking you to give these women a voice, I'm giving you clues about a past that often isn't taught, telling stories about hidden histories, hidden presents that that are also an important part of the story of the rural. I think that's such a wonderful way of capturing you're, capturing your motivations behind that project, maybe you can tell us a little bit more about this work, what it involved, who you collaborated with, and the kind of work you created as a result.

Joanne Coates 07:50

So I guess the the reasons for making the work, maybe I'll start is, yeah, I think I think growing up and not kind of seeing class talked about in terms of a rural context but being really aware of that a lot of the people around me, you know, having multiple jobs or kind of, yeah, struggling, but not necessarily talking about it and that kind of hidden element of class in the countryside. But I guess also, you know, as working class people are often the subject and not the artist. And I think there's, there's something about that being, you know, wanting to present your community and I think it's really difficult because when I kind of talk about this, I think that there shouldn't be like a monotone or like a mono version of who gets to present stories and I think that's what arts do really well, you bring all these like different diverse voices in. And so for me, like I really wanted the chance to kind of represent that community, and to work with these kind of women. So that was like the main motivations for the project, but also kind of seeing this place that's seen as like, really beautiful. And, you know, I can't deny it, it is beautiful but there's also like, all these histories to the land you know, there's like one piece of land, you go for a walk on and you can see a hush, which is where it would have been used in mining, and it's where they would have kind of blown up the hillside to extract minerals, but you see this kind of structure and then you have the coast to coast which is a really famous tourist walk that goes from the northwest to the northeast of England or you can do it either way, I think actually. But you can see this kind of like really popular tourist spot and then you see this kind of remnants of industry, which would have been the lead mining industry. And you see these kind of like gangmasters huts, which is where they would have made the workers like pay, so the workers would have been in debt to them and then it's a grouse moor. And so you see this kind of, and then it's also owned by the sixth wealthiest man in the UK. So like all these things in one place and I think quite often, we don't really see that side of the countryside explored in that way. So, again, I was kind of, and these are things that I kind of bump up against every day and kind of think about. And so the chance to actually, like explore that within the work was really important to me. I guess important to make it multi-layered, because I think it's really important to look

at the past and these, like elements of the past, but also to kind of look at what's happening now. And then to think about, so how can this work have like, what's the impact I want it to have, which for me is nearly always kind of like, to raise class consciousness in some way. And that can be like in a different matter of ways but social change is like a big part of my work, so I'm always kind of thinking, so how, what can it have on this impact on the future? And I think that yeah, you know, these, the women do have their own voices and what happened is I did an open call and you know, there were six women that came through that who I didn't know but also, it kind of turned out that the women that I work with, one of them had said to me, Well how come you haven't asked us? And it's because I'd kept those parts separate, so I was always like, and, you know, no one told me to do that, that I did that myself.

Bella Milroy 11:17

Yeah.

Joanne Coates 11:18

It was just something that I had imposed on myself for no reason. And actually, I was like, why have I done that. And then as soon as I started working, these people know me really well, like when we like work together, we chat and we go on walks together. And they're really like, they offer me such a lot in terms of like friendship and solidarity in the countryside. So to work with them meant, that it was a really like exchange and collaboration. And it brought this whole new level to the way that I worked. Which was really interesting.

Bella Milroy 11:51

Oh, wow, that sounds like such a, yeah, I really like that, like you say that, how that project must have offered totally new, different perspectives on what you, like the kind of roots through to those kinds of creative ideas that you initially had. And the things that pop up that were perhaps unexpected, and the things that maybe were right in front of you that you hadn't quite considered before. That must have been really exciting. And a different kind of, adding a different kind of experience to, to those kinds of existing relationships as well, that must have been really wonderful.

Joanne Coates 12:29

Yeah, it was. Sorry. And I think it was, you know, sometimes it's nice to be challenged as an artist. And what I quite like about that familiarity is someone will be like, well, so what's the point of this? Where as, I don't I think sometimes because of the way humans work and interact, sometimes someone who doesn't know you, well, doesn't feel like they can say that. And I'm actually like, no, please do say.

Bella Milroy 12:58

Yeah. And that must have been so, so nice to kind of like cut through some of the kinds of kind of creative fluff, I guess, of the project in that way it could, you could really have those conversations with people who weren't really like who were just like, yeah, asking those quite really like direct like, but what is this? What are you doing? And having to really kind of listen to that, that must be really interesting.

Joanne Coates 13:26

And sometimes even the language that we use, so like, I kinda like to say making a portrait because I don't like the language of photography is like kind of very, like, shoot, or, like, it's very, like kind of

aggressive. But then what I realised, I was talking to one of the women, Kim and saying, can I make a portrait with you. And she's like, what does that mean? You want to paint a picture of me? So, it's and it's just, like having someone who can be really direct and say that and saying, like, I don't really get what you mean by make a portrait. And you know, like, because that to me, when someone's clear like that, I might well actually, that doesn't really probably make sense. So like even things like that, having the language around how you talk about arts to a wider audience challenged is like really, helps helps me think about my practice, I think.

Bella Milroy 14:17

oh, wow, that's that's wonderful. And maybe you could share a bit about what the what the work embodied that because it was exhibited in London, wasn't it?

Joanne Coates 14:31

It was exhibited at the Jerwood space. And yeah, had these different elements. So like, I think I am someone who uses photography and photography is my main kind of tool that I use. But I really, like the sound is as important and the structures that I build up in the space and I kind of see it as like, creating these worlds that really help to kind of bring people into that situation and understand means that kind of like past, present and future within the space. And so I was really, it was really important to me to kind of think about the creation of that. So I'd built a structure in the space, which was a wooden structure, it was kind of square, it was black, wooden, and it's called a grouse butt. And it was, the reason I'm describing it, is because I realised, because a grouse butt, where I live is something that everyone would have kind of grown up with. And I think a lot of people in rural areas will know. But a lot of people don't know what a grouse butt is or recognize that structure. And it had, usually, it's used by the, you know, the people who were paying maybe like £10,000 a day to go on a shoot and not by the people who had paid, maybe £60 a day to like manage that land or so, it was kind of interesting to ask people to come into this structure and think about these women's voices in the work and it had a sound bar at the back and some headphones, so you could kind of choose how you listened, and then sit down and listen, but you could still see over the top and see the work. And it was kind of really important for me to think about that. And also, I think when when designing for space, things like making sure you know, the entrance of that structure is wide enough and accessible. And thinking about, I almost like to think about is there like almost a safe space within that where you can sit and like not be overwhelmed by things. And kind of thinking about how do people navigate the space? And yeah, so all these kind of different questions. And so it's made up of all these different elements. And the the sound piece was really vital to the work. And it was I was asking the women like how do you identify yourself to other people? What words would you use, and obviously, they had come forward as part of the call, as low income or working class. But the words they used to identify didn't have to necessarily be to do with that. But the words that they use what kind of like wonder or wise or woman or matriarch, maker, milker and all these words that I think are really rich, and then one of the women Lynn, I'd photographed her object that identified who she was. So it's kind of like from a brass band, and that kind of that history of brass bands within the area. And so she's still in this brass band. And I'd said, can I record your rehearsal. And at first, it was kind of like but they're rehearsals, because the brass bands are so, you know, it's all about being perfect and performing to like, so at first, they were like, Oh, we don't want the imperfections. But I was like, the imperfections show that like humanity. And so if you would allow me, I'd really like to have those imperfections. Because as we're speaking, you

know, there's imperfections in the way I speak, it's kind of the way human nature works. And so I recorded them playing a piece that kind of like references the Spanish revolution and workers revolution, but also, it's from a film, *Brassed off*, and it kind of, so that you've got this piece playing behind the women's voices. And I think all these elements for me together make up the work. So I am a photographer who uses photography, but these other piece pieces and parts are as important to kind of creating this vision and story. And I guess, yeah, how people feel in that space and respond to those people. And also kind of thinking about the audience. So like, I kind of knew that that audience was largely gonna be probably like a middle class audience who maybe don't understand the place that I'm talking about. So I kind of build in this world and like bringing them in. But also, you know, like, kind of being, you know, it is kind of an act of resistance for me. So, you know, you can bring that into the space and kind of be like, I want you to, I don't want to tell you everything. So like, each photo, I could kind of I could have captioned and given you like exact details, but I wouldn't be able to have to kind of work to figure it out. And that was a decision I had to kind of, you know, did I want to do that or did I not want to do that, because I still want the space to be welcome to so, these are the kinds of questions I'm thinking about. And yeah, it was a really interesting experience.

Bella Milroy 19:15

I think that's why I chose that quote, to introduce the kind of like yeah, the the mission of of that body of work and that kind of you know, the kind of well meaning ideas around wanting to kind of highlight marginalised experiences like giving voices is is is in itself an erasure isn't it of the voices that already exist. And I think that I think you captured that so beautifully in that quote of like your ask, it's not about giving them a voice, you're asking the audience to listen to what's already there. And it's part of why I really love getting to connect with you and other artists in this way is, is it's I'm not giving you a voice, I'm like, lucky enough to get to listen to you this morning and, and share that with with an audience as well. And I think that's yeah, it's just a really powerful kind of skill in your work in this way. And as I say, yeah, the lecture that I referenced is on YouTube. And I'll link it in the description of this of this recording. And it's, yeah, I highly recommend it. And I also listened to that, that brass band piece after I listen to the lecture as well, and that was really, really lovely to kind of think about within the context of that work as well. Thank you so much, Jo, for, for giving us a little snapshot of that, that body of work. I think another, in another interview about this, this this work, the *Lie of the Land*, you talk about classes being this really multilayered thing, it's really complex, and it's not just an identity marker. Can you share with me a bit about how your experience of being working class intersects with your experience of disability? If you wouldn't mind sharing about that? And, yeah, can you tell me a little bit about that?

Joanne Coates 21:17

Definitely. And it's such a good question. And one that has, again, like so many layers, but I'm so glad it's being asked. I think accessibility is one that really stands out and so this could be something like transport, or it could be access to a studio or to a warm space or to safety. And I think what really stands out is what, you don't have that safety net to fall back on. And I do think, class, and specifically low income can affect disabled people more, because of the challenges that they face. And because of the extra money that they have to spend on things that are essential for their, you know, they can't survive without those things. So it's, it is an addition. But you don't have that kind of safety net. So whatever it is, for different people that could be different things. But whatever that is that you need, you might not be able to have and that's not just something that you want, or that gives you

comfort, it's something that you need to function. And I think sometimes you don't have the access to that. And then in terms of the arts, if you kind of think of how that's going to impact you, it kind of means that you're already in a space of like high alert. So you're already quite stressed, and you're already quite, and those things can have an impact on your health, regardless. But if you have anything additional, that's going to have a really big impact on you, so then maybe you need to take more rest days, maybe you can't work enough, and but maybe you can't take rest days because you don't have that income. So it's kind of like this cyclical thing of like, that can be quite damaging. So that was one that like, I guess, yeah, accessibility really stood out to me and, and thinking of like access and and what that means in different, you know, is like, what does that mean for different individuals? And what do they need to get by? And can they access those things? And I think sometimes when we kind of look at disability, the answer's no. But also, when we look at class and low income, the answer is like no exclamation mark. And it's, and I think you might be used to living in this kind of high alert situation anyway, if you're from that background. And I just think that sometimes it can have a more severe impact on your health, and, you know, in in different ways for different people. So that's one that kind of like really stands out for me. And another one is confidence. And I think even, and this is something like, you know, I can't speak for everyone, I can only really speak of my experience, and hope that other people it relates to but it might just be me as well. So you never know, like the confidence to actually say like, I have a disability, or the confidence to be comfortable with that. Because I guess, like how the media represents you and stereotypes, is sometimes as a working class person, you're seen as someone who like doesn't work, or someone who, you know, there's all these kinds of really negative stereotypes that I do not believe in for a second. But you're kind of taught these stories about yourself growing up that are quite negative. And so you try and do everything to not do that. And so sometimes you're like, I can't say I have a disability and that I need a rest day or I need this because of that, the media representations of me, or because you know like, these really awful kind of headlines that just have no truth in them at all. And I think disabled people know that they don't have any truth in them. What is it's the kind of stories that you tell yourself and that kind of like internalised ableism that has kind of like fed into yourself, and, and how that affects your self confidence and your ability to like believe in yourself. And I think those things really stand out for me. And I definitely think you know, confidence sometimes can stop you asking for the things that you need. And sometimes you have that fear of, if I asked if I'm, if I'm too difficult, I'm not people aren't going to work with me, and I'm not going to get this job. And that I really need the money. So sometimes I'm not going to actually say that I have this need, because I don't feel safe to say it. And I mean, again, I think that it is a class thing, but also that is a universal experience for people who have a need. But I do think sometimes you're forced into situations because you need that money just to get by. Whereas realistically, it might not be worth working with people who don't support your needs because if they're not at that level where they're going to do that, then they probably aren't, you know, they really need to think about how they're working with people who have additional needs in any form, and what they can do, like it shouldn't be the artist who's thinking, Oh, I should have to hide that. And like, like, logically I know that, but I think sometimes class tells me like, no, it's you. It's your fault.

Bella Milroy 26:20

Yes and it has that, has something that you have found like, it further intersecting with your experience of, of rurality in that way? How do that, how did those things intersect because obviously, there's so many different kinds of experiences that kind of fall into that.

Joanne Coates 26:43

So I think with this question, I kind of think of that the different nature of work in rural and urban settings, as a kind of standout, and this isn't, I guess, it's not universal, so this is a massive generalisation as well but sometimes the physicality of labour, of some of the labour in these places, whether that's like hospitality, or agriculture, or there's a number of ways, you're kind of like, there's an expectation expectation that your body needs to be fully functional and this strong functioning, and sometimes that is not the case. And so when there's that physicality of labour, and there's this kind of culture of like, you can't ring in sick. So just just as an example, like with, with farm labour, there is, you know, it's kind of expected that you will work if you have flu, if you have all these things, but sometimes if your body or you know, whatever, you, if you are so exhausted that you cannot work, how do you show up in that situation. And I think it's difficult because I'm not by any means saying that that physicality of labour has a place over labour in a different way because I think sometimes the reason why I do farm labour as my additional job is because it's not stressful, so it doesn't mentally drain me. And it means that it's quite an enjoyable experience. And it's not, I don't leave really drained, and I don't get exhausted from it. So that is one of the reasons why that is my chosen way of working. And I whereas I think if I was kind of doing something that was even like, you know, it could be I'm trying to think of jobs around here, it could be like a receptionist at a hotel, I would find that really draining and really intense. And I wouldn't get to have that kind of more restful time from it. So I might not be able to do that as an additional job. And even I think when we think about like desk work, or a lot of like, arts labour is hidden, and we're kind of like doing all this different admin that can be really, really emotionally testing, and really difficult and exhausting in a different way. But I do think there's something about you know, like, there's this expectation of people to be able to work no matter what, and when you're someone who's, you know, within this space, and you're like, I cannot, I like physically, literally like that I'm not able to plug in, I just cannot, like I can't, you know, there's no spark to it, like, I'm just, I'm empty. And if that's not understood, it's really difficult to communicate that. And I just think yeah, the way that the infrastructure is set up is not necessarily kind of helpful, and it's not it's, I don't necessarily think it's on purpose, but I think there's a misunderstanding around disability and that kind of, there's a lot of learning that needs to go on in these spaces around disability and what that looks like and what that can feel like and how that can be challenging for different people.

Bella Milroy 29:58

Hmm Thank you so much for your generosity in sharing that, Jo, that's, you know, these kinds of conversations are really vulnerable in that, and I think, you know, we can say it, like a million times about, you know, the nature of our experience of disability. But sometimes, in many ways, it's obviously it depends on the context but if it's a space that we don't feel completely safe, and completely comfortable in, those, those kinds of sharings never really get any easier. There's always a kind of personal cost of that. And, as you know, as we've been talking about the kind of various different intersections of identities that come into that, you know, further compounded by things like, you know, race and gender and, and things like that. And, yeah, I think, like you say, it's kind of the, there are the systems and expectations of labour, and of, of a way of a body performing. And then there's, you know, the permissions that aren't given to certain people, especially when it comes to you know, things like class, doesn't it, that like, there is just not the permission given of that being an okay, way of being. And that's really, really hard to come up against when you're, it's seemingly a straightforward practicality. But

actually, quite an entrenched kind of expectation of of how, how should someone should perform, and the safety that isn't granted with that. Thank you so much for sharing that that was that was really, really generous of you. I would like to talk to you a little bit about some of your creative experiences, living rurally. You've talked about how living really has lacked some of the creative networks that facilitate your ability to grow, and develop your working practice, lacking in places to show your work and peers to collaborate with etc. You talked about how the Jerwood Photo Prize award really changed your access to creative networks in this way. Can you tell me a bit about what that was like and how that was a positive experience for you? .

Joanne Coates 32:36

Definitely and yeah, thank you, again, so much for offering this space to talk about these things. And again, another brilliant question to kind of think about, and I think it was it was one of those, firstly, I would say, sometimes, even if you think I'm not, you have that impostor syndrome about applying for something because I'd put the application together for this and I really, I nearly didn't send it off because I was kind of like, oh, maybe I'm not the right fit.

Bella Milroy 33:05

Oh wow.

Joanne Coates 33:06

But and then I ended up sending it. And so like that, that's just like, kind of, sometimes you have to challenge yourself, like in that really, like, I can do this and like, but so like, apply to things, especially if they're free and accessible and definitely, but it was, so the award, a little bit about the award is, two artists get the Jerwood Photo Works award, it's bi-annually, I think, is that right for like bi-yearly. So it's every two years, and it offers you basically a wage so that you can make the work that you need to make without the pressures of lots and lots of additional work that you might need to keep going. And it offers you a production budget, and a space in which to show your your work in and then mentor support and support from people from both organisations. So that might be as curators, or it might be like, you know, producers or, so you have this kind of this group of people who are there to kind of support you and talk about things with you. And there's really like practical things. So for example, when I was staying in in London, Mirren, who was the assistant curator there, who is also an artist to herself, so that's Mirren Kessling, if anyone wants to look up her work. So she was working there and when booking the hotel, set it over a number of days, so that I would have time to rest for one but also, because Mirren knew that as a rural artist, I can't access exhibitions, and I can't meet with people and I can't, so she was like I'm gonna book this but you have these two days. You could set up meetings, you could bring them to the Jerwoods space, you could. So like, knowing that you might not have that, and creating that, you know that that space for you to be able to actually say, oh I'm gonna go for a coffee with someone because, you know, I like even I find private views really, really difficult, like big network things, but how can you know, thinking about how can that person do it comfortably, if they don't usually have access to, like, somewhere where there is those people, so, you know, a space for a coffee, and you can walk them around the exhibition. And you know, and you also have a room to go and rest and if that gets too much. So, you know, something like that is, I think, really forward thinking and obviously, like, I know, when thinking about networks, you might think, well, how can that operate but it means, you know, like, that's that just that space to be able to say to someone, would you like to go for coffee

and a walk around my work, I can go for a sleep after or I can go lie down, I might be, I might have some work that I need to do or, you know, I might need to just have a breather after that. And I think the whole process of even the day where you have the opening, then you have like press, and then sometimes you go out for a big dinner, and then sometimes you have this like, that is really intense for people who kind of like, what, it's intense for anyone to be honest.

Bella Milroy 36:25

Yeah, definitely.

Joanne Coates 36:26

Especially, like for disabled artists, I just think it's too much sometimes. And so like, Mirren, especially within that process was like, would you actually like to go out for that dinner? Or would you like to, you know, have some time to relax after that. And I was like, I think that I would like some time. And you know, it's really difficult because you want to be thankful to the people you're working with and you want to go for dinner with them. Like all those things together. You've, like for me, I've really got to think like, can I actually do that?

Bella Milroy 37:00

It's so challenging as well isn't it because one of the things I find, and a lot of the conversations that I have with peers, other disabled artists is about that kind of personal cost to the work we make. And you know, these, really, when it when these really wonderful, amazing, you know, quite career defining opportunities come along, it's really wonderful, and can come at quite a great personal cost as well. And it's really wonderful to hear that, you know, the experience with with Jerwood/ Photoworks was something that really seemed to kind of quite actually listen to the format that would actually work best for you because I think that's another really interesting thing about making something accessible, making something feel good for a disabled artists is less about, sticking to the original plans of, you know, like we're doing a fancy dinner to say congrats on the show. But like, if you're not up to it, it's okay, if you don't come instead going, does that even make sense for you, maybe a dinner isn't actually what you really need, maybe just like a nice kind of extra time to rest in between the opportunities to be amongst a space, you don't usually get the opportunity to do maybe that's far far more kind of, you know, something that's the works better for you. I think that's wonderful to hear that that was part of that process.

Joanne Coates 38:34

I think it really helped in terms of that creative network part of it, because there was like, I wanted to invite students from, so I went to LCC, which is the London College of Communication. And I really wanted to invite students from there to ask me any questions about everything, like ask me about money, ask me about whatever. And like open that. But if I hadn't have been able to rest, like, again, you wouldn't have been able to do things like that. Or even yeah, like being like, I really want to meet the like, you're coming back to do a workshop in the space maybe. And you really want to give someone a tour of the exhibition. Can you do a workshop with 12 young people, giving your like maximum and like preparing and show someone the space and do a tour of the and like, and so there was, it wasn't just the private view, they did it, they did it for the private view, but they also did it on those occasions as well. And it really meant I was able to show people around in a way that was really

comfortable. And again, I think like having like for the tours. Mirren was there for the tours as well. And you know, sometimes I think I can like almost freeze and so having someone who who kind of has got to know you quite well and kind of kind of take over that conversation and just give you a minute to, and so like, I think in ways like that, that creates networks and opportunities that you might not have had before. And it's just and it sounds great when you actually say it, it maybe sounds like not such a huge thing but it makes a massive difference.

Bella Milroy 40:19

Yeah it is, it's often one of those things that can do that though, like something seemingly straightforward as just a little bit more time, can you know, completely transform an experience like that, and I think that's particularly important within the context of, you know, working with artists who are based rurally, who are based in places far away from, like centralised art centres, centralised art centres, you know that like, that the component of getting there, as you say, for anybody doing that kind of journey is like, substantial, that's a substantial effort, time, money, cost, you know, that's, that's a substantial effort in that, especially within the the nature of a disabled experience within that is, you know, just having that, that time for, to allow for that to be, you know, recovery time, to rest, you know. It's almost kind of like, it both enhances the experience, and also, you know, simply makes it achievable. It's kind of like a false economy otherwise, you know, if you're just like expected to come down, and not given that, you're not able to do what you need to do when you're there, you know, you can't, you don't get the benefit, and also, you're not turning up and being able to, like, be amongst it in the space in a way that, like, you're able to engage in fully because you're exhausted and burnt out and, you know, so yeah, that's, that's, that's really wonderful that that was, that was the case. And it makes me really happy to hear that.

Joanne Coates 42:03

And even, so my dog, I have a border collie called Glenn, who's very fluffy and he's 6 years old. But he, he's not a trained dog, he's not, but he really helps me in situations, and it's comforting for me as a person, and even saying, and I would you like Glenn to be able to come. And so like, they made sure that the hotel that they booked could have a dog, and that he could come to the private view and like, and so, you know, and, and so like having things like that, that makes me feel a bit more comfortable in those situations that I find really difficult.

Bella Milroy 42:43

Wow, oh, that's so wonderful. And again, that's wonderful that they, they I think there's something really different that happens with access when it's invited, you know, when you're not having to like, can I, would you mind, you know, when someone is actually like, would you like your dog to come with you, like that must have really signalled a sense of, you know, really positive experience of of that, that must have been a really good signal from them, that these are like, these are people that understand what you need.

Joanne Coates 43:18

Well, and I think it opens the space for you to actually ask and say, so I think sometimes what can happen is, if, if that doesn't happen, and even if you send an access statement in, there's there might be these different barriers, you might really need something, but if you're tired, and especially

exhausted, it can actually be harder to ask for what you need, because you're feeling all the feelings and sometimes you can be quite or like, definitely I can, I can like turn on myself and be like, you can't like, you know, like, why is this an issue? Or why am I getting upset? And like, be quiet, like, mean to myself about it, and then I'm less likely to ask for what I need. But when someone's offered you even like, it's not a big thing. You might just say, can I just have a glass of water and like sit for half an hour because I just need to rest.

Bella Milroy 44:07

Yeah. And what are the, what are the things that, I mean obviously, we've talked about some great, just some really straightforward things that are really great to that that Jerwood did and the other arts orgs could, you know, easily pick up on on that but like what what are some of the things that are there are organisations, collectives, networks, could learn from for this positive and enriching experience, especially within the context of rurality where, you know, you're facing these kinds of barriers in isolation, particularly for disabled artists, you know, what, what are some of the things, key things that you would, you would, kind of, that other arts orgs could do?

Joanne Coates 44:50

I think having a conversation with the artist, so like you might say, can I have your access statement, your access document or, you know, but actually being like, can we have an actual conversation together about what you need. So and kind of like, maybe talking like practically over things and how things are going to go and thinking in those steps, because sometimes it's hard for the artist to know what they need. So like, sometimes you don't know what you need, and it only happens when it comes up.

Bella Milroy 45:23

Yeah.

Joanne Coates 45:23

But kind of trying to think, like, preempt that. And even then you might not, you know, so kind of, like, it's not just one conversation, even it's like, it's a conversation that flows throughout, I think is really important. And just, you know, like, it's nice for everyone to check in, you like, as as the artist like, you want to know that your, what you're doing is nice for the people you're working with as well, and that they feel comfortable. And I think having those conversations creates this, like just better way of working for everybody. And so kind of having that throughout. And then something I think is, like, you know, even if you're like the director of the organisation, because sometimes you might work with like the curator, or, like, you'll probably have a relationship with one person more, but you can feel quite like nervous in that space. Or like if that person's not there, and you need to ask for what you need, or, you know, it can, you know, maybe other people don't know, or it can be quite difficult. And I remember something, again, with Jerwood was Lily, who would have been like really busy, would have been just really being like, not really hierarchical and saying like, hello, when like making sure to come up and be like, I really love the work I'm really glad to like, or even like from the start, like you did really well in your interview and really happy to be working with you. And like little things like that can make you feel comfortable in a way that you feel safe to work with that organisation. And like, again, I think lots of organisations do that. But sometimes it's not, you know, people are busy. But when you, it's about

safety, and when you don't feel safe, it's harder to ask what you need, to talk about that or, like say if the person left who you were working with and you didn't feel safe, then you might not kind of get to ask for what you need. Or you might be frustrated, because you'd be like, but I've sent this and we've had these conversations, and then there's no one here now that knows, like, how that's gone or so I think, yeah, communication being like really clear throughout the organisation and thinking of it as like, a continuous thing that happens. And not just like a full stop, like, because different times different, if someone says to you, what do you need right now, that is going to be different from what do you need right now next week.

Bella Milroy 47:44

Yes.

Joanne Coates 47:45

And so I think it's like thinking, thinking of that and knowing that it is that kind of continuous experience and also that people might have an additional health problem that comes up. And so that it is kind of like connected. So it's kind of thinking of that, and like they might not have put that or had that conversation with you. And actually because they're dealing with that, they might not necessarily want to focus on it. But it could be really challenging in that situation. So kind of just just having that continuous talk, I think. And really, I mean, I think Jerwood and Photoworks did it well, like but when I was kind of saying like, I really want to talk about accessibility and when I'm curating and being like, yes let's do this. And kind of not being too much like, well that's not, I think sometimes it can be like, well how is that part of the work. But I think for me, like all of these things form the work because they're kind of part of your politics and who you are as an artist. So they are really important parts of the work. And I think understanding that as well. But I'm trying to think of anything else. But I think those are the main things.

Bella Milroy 48:55

I think they're fantastic things that very much speak to a kind of like core approach to access that I love to talk about, especially within, as you said, like the what the opportunity of approaching access as a continuous conversation gives for everybody that like with, yes, we're facilitating access for an individual who needs things in order to do the thing you're asking them to do. But actually, when we when we offer it as a conversation, it becomes a dynamic exchange, doesn't it? That's something that informs how we can offer that for everybody, you know, that it can inform better experiences for everybody involved. And I think, yeah, it's something that I am really excited by and also really frustrated in the sense of like, guys we're always out. It's so good when we do it like this, you know, everybody, everybody enjoys it when it's like this, you know. So, so yes, I think, those are fantastic points Jo. And yeah, thank you so much for kind of, you know, offering that I think I think, yeah, that's that's, that's really and I'm really glad that that was your experience of of the Jerwood/ Photoworks prize, that's wonderful. And I'd really like to talk to you about the arts organisation that you're the director of called Roova Arts. Am I saying that right?

Joanne Coates 48:55

Yes.

Bella Milroy 49:27

Roova. Cool. And just a little bit about Roova, it was formerly Lens Think, and it has the aims of, which is described on your website, of fighting for class equality and more, a more creative industry through participation and radical rural community arts. The organisation works with schools, and provides mentorship to three artists per year. Can you tell me a little bit about this work?

Joanne Coates 50:56

So I set on Lens Think in 2017. And what it kind of came from was, I had studied in London, and I came home and I just there was a lack of like, coming togetherness. And I was like, I really want to do something that's like coming together and like, like happenings or social things, where people can just come together and like chat. But like, as with me, class is always kind of involved. And so I was kind of thinking, well, class is a really important part of this. And I want it to kind of, to think of like, you know, I've I found it difficult, but I did get to go to university. And there was, there's people who don't even get to go to university, and they don't get to ever meet an artist and they don't get to that, how can you open it up to those people. So it started with socials and talks. So we'd like host an artists, have a talk. And, you know, have these kind of like things of like networking, but trying to make it like not networking, like how to introduce people to people. And like let people meet each other and meet other artists and do it in all these different kind of places, around mainly like Yorkshire in the Northeast of England. And so it was it was that, and then some mentoring. And so I didn't mentor to start with mainly because I was like, a year and a half out of university. So I didn't really think that I had anything to offer people. So I only started mentoring and kind of like 2019 time. And like, and I almost think of like mentoring thought of the wrong way because, like, I think the most amazing mentoring sessions I've had, is with a peer rather than like with you know, this amazing artists, but actually, like it can just be mentoring can be like, between friends and between people who are like, it doesn't have to be such a hierarchical thing either. And then the some of the schools in like, where I am, they don't have, like arts GCSE is anymore. And so I really wanted there to be something that was like connection. But what I'm gonna say is, like, it's okay to rethink and like, so I was doing this, and I was doing it all for free. And I like I loved it but actually, like, each one was like burning me out a little bit more. And I was getting like, to the point of just like, like the flame was just going out like and it wasn't like healthy. And also I couldn't do it well, because it was getting to that point. So I was kind of think like, what can I offer without burning out? And I really had to take that step back and say like, is this the organisation that I wanted, which is to offer these and I think what kind of happened as well is like with socials and things like that, they are great but it's really hard to make them inclusive, the bigger they get, the more people come and especially when you don't have any budget and you're just kind of like finding spaces and doing it. And I was like, it's not really what I want it to be. And I want it to be a bit different. And so like I made the decision to like not do that anymore, and to kind of like rethink what I wanted it to be. And I think for a long time. And the reason that I'm kind of talking about this was because I felt like I couldn't do that. So I was like I have to carry on because people are asking me when the next one, I have to do that. But I was like, you know, there's organisations who are paid to do things like that, and they get, you know, like, so you don't need to like burn yourself out. Or you could collaborate with someone or you could like, different ways of doing it without completely burning yourself out. And I think like I decided to take a break for it for like from for two years. So for two years, it was kind of like, I had first had people doing takeovers, I still did the mentoring and still did stuff with schools, but I was like, I need to just not do that thing because it's like, I just can't do it well, and I'm not in the capacity to do it well. So I did that. And

then I thought like what do I really want to do? And I was like well, the kind of idea is to encourage community. And I really wanted to do it in spaces that were more rural because as well with the socials, I would be like travelling for like 45 minutes to an hour to these places. And I would just be like, I'd just be exhausted from it. And I'd be like, I really want this to happen. But that's not, it's not really working with the things that I have. And what I've like I've got near me and like, the same situation. And then Roova Arts is like, there's a big dream for it, of having this kind of physical barn space, that's probably quite far off, to be honest. But it's kind of thinking. So I want it to be this space where people can think about how they get in the arts, where they can work like interdisciplinary, so they can work with like, farming, arts, sociologists, ecologists, scientists, like all these people come together. So how can I do that with what I have now. So kind of like using the space we have to do in like farm walks or picnics, or things like that. So like, that's what it's kind of gone into more. And I had a meeting that was really exciting yesterday at the farm of like, how can you do that and working with an organisation to do that. So I'm not just doing it on my own and not kind of thinking, and because I think the thing that I found hard as well, you'd have people who'd be like, oh well volunteer, and I'd be like, but I don't want to do what I'm doing to myself to you. I don't want you to have to do. And I think that, like if you have that guilt, and it's probably not working well. So you kind of know that. And like and now and what was really like fulfilling about the conversation yesterday, it was like one of the questions was like, who is important to be part of this? And I was so excited by that question because like someone's asking you, who else would would make this work? And who else would you like to see here? And like, how can we make that happened? And I think, yeah, like thinking about that, and like who's missing from those conversations? And sometimes you need a bigger organisation to answer those questions, like it's really difficult to do on your own. So basically, where it's going is this kind of like, a rural arts organisation, and I really want it to eventually be a space where people who from urban areas can kind of come and access the countryside in different ways. So at first it's probably going to be quite small. So like walks and picnics and things like that. But eventually, I would really like to do something like an artists in residence and kind of thinking about how do we find a safe space in the countryside for people to reflect with different ideas from that community and to kind of like, form work and come together in different ways. That is the kind of the dream, but at the moment, it's a little seed, and it's just kind of sprouting.

Bella Milroy 57:37

Oh my gosh, wow, that sounds amazing. I'm so happy to hear that that was such a positive meeting yesterday, what what is it taken for an arts organisation to to, like, make that kind of, you know, to like, show that interest and actually kind of offer a sense of investment in that idea and like wanting to make that work for you? Is that been something that is, obviously, you might not be able to reveal all the all the nuts and bolts of it right now. But is that something that you're collaborating with an arts org, who's not in a rural place? Or yeah, what's what's that kind of been like.

Joanne Coates 58:16

So I can't reveal too much, but they're not an arts organisation, but they are a charity.

Bella Milroy 58:21

Right.

Joanne Coates 58:22

But they work with lots of different people. And what it actually came from is they were asking me about a photography commission, and thinking about how I work. And what I was kind of talking about is, like, I kinda like to work in longer ways with people, I get to know people more and, and just being really open and honest and saying, like, you could hire me to make portraits with people or like, do a one, one off image. But that's not like, I really like to think of like hope, and I want to focus on, like, social change, and like, and so so basically, they asked the question, like, what would it take for you to be the practitioner that you want to be? And how could we help you do that?

Bella Milroy 59:03

Wow.

Joanne Coates 59:04

And like, I've never, no one's ever said that before. So I am a bit like, how exciting that people are asking those questions. And, like, be and because they were talking about kind of like change and follow up in different ways, and being able to kind of like really think of like, you know, how can we work together so something that can start off as a meeting about something can and because we just ended up talking for two and a half hours, and this was like about a month ago, and so it came from that conversation, and then another conversation. And then I said, you know, would you like to come here and like spend the day and we'll like walk around the land and like, meet some cows and do so. And so it kind of comes from I guess those conversations but yeah, I think sometimes putting that like, that idea of like what you want to do out there and being honest and being like so like, I do work with photography, but I don't necessarily want to be a photographer full stop. And like, it's fine to say that if your practice is changing, because I think you know what you really want. And again, like, it's taken me like, what, since I graduated in 2015. So it's taken me like, nearly 10 years to be able to say that, but I think otherwise, I'm not going to be able to do the things. And there's like the famous saying, like shy bairns get nowt, which is true, but then I feel like you have to to, you have to like, I had do little steps to like not be shy.

Bella Milroy 1:00:32

And is that something that you think that arts organisations could do more of, to kind of like invite those kind of collaborative engagements with artists, particularly within rural settings that are a bit more speculative, you know, a bit more like, a bit less of a kind of, we'd like to invite you to do X and more, what do you need to make the your hopes and dreams as an artist come true? Like, how can we help you along that way?

Joanne Coates 1:01:08

That I mean, I think that that would be such a great way of thinking about it, and also being like, like, what's the what do you need to survive as an artist? Like how much like, income would you need each month and I know that like, say, in Ireland, you know, that trialling like universal basic basic income, and things like that, but as an artist we're so often not meeting those levels, and an especially for disabled artists, it means that we can make the work that we really want to work, or like, like it's, you know, the potential for things that sometimes you like, I think when you did that talk at Wysing Bella and you were talking about being at your allotment, and like thinking of making and like, sometimes it's really difficult

for, you know, someone says, what do you need, you would be able to answer them. But if it has to be this kind of like brief commission, where there's this, like big outcome, sometimes you won't meet those things of hopes and dreams, because that's not possible with, like, they just don't go alongside each other. Yeah, sometimes just like, I think for centuries, for years, artists have been given space.

Joanne Coates 1:02:20

And what I think now that's, that is what worries me about the arts is that it's very, like transactional, or we're not given that space. And I think it's, you know, it's like that, you know, like, like, like Roova, you need to cultivate things to grow, you need to like, give them some sunlight, give them some water. And like, what, what do we need to grow? And how can we grow best? And I think it is like, that the answer is different from like, a cactus to like a daisy.

Bella Milroy 1:02:20

Yes.

Bella Milroy 1:02:48

Yeah, yeah, totally. And I think it's really wonderful as well within a rural context as well, because and within, you know, in that, I think that's why I love being able to talk about these two kinds of things rural and disability in that way, because I think what the things that often make those kinds of experiences really challenging when, when being invited to think about the things that you really need to make your hopes and dreams as an artist, come to life. You invite those conversations into those spaces, and you can see what's possible within that, rather than, like, removing them, you know, so it's less about, like, I need to, like, remove the barriers of rural, you know, like isolation or, for example, or remove the barriers of like, yeah, disabled and chronic illness isolation or something like that. And actually, like, how do we, how do we come over here, and sit in here and see what's possible within this space and the actual, like, the imagination and the opportunities that come when collaboration happens in that space, rather than trying to kind of like, push us all into the kind of the kind of rigidity of like, you know, normative and non-disabled and centralise urban spaces, you know, I think, yeah, and I really want to caveat that with it's not like a problem-pportunity, you know, like, it's not every, every every problem has, has an opportunity to or whatever, but I think that's what's really interesting about inviting it in that way and that's wonderful that's happening for Roova. That's so cool.

Joanne Coates 1:02:55

And, I mean, we'll see where it goes. And I think as well, taking it slow and like allowing yourself to be like, these small conversations that happen are actually really valid.

Bella Milroy 1:04:34

Yes.

Joanne Coates 1:04:35

And you know, like, and I talk about something like a picnic, a picnic can have so many creative potential opportunities but sometimes if you went in for like a funding application, you went, I want to do a picnic, they'd be were like, what. Like think, thinking of like, you know, the the connections that can come from there and the way that something like having a picnic can offer people rest and respite and

that, you know, you can literally just go, I'm just gonna walk over there and I have a walk around, and I feel like everyone can kind of, it's quite a restful activity and, and thinking, how I always think, you know, when we're out and open in these rural spaces, sometimes it allows us just to think a bit more as well and be open and be who we are.

Bella Milroy 1:05:25

Yeah, that sounds that sounds wonderful. I'm so happy that that's, yeah, it sounds really exciting. I look forward to kind of learning more about that in the future. In your 2023 Lie the land lecture at Photo Frame symposium, which I referenced earlier, you talk about how you're really interested in exploring the rural beyond the aesthetic, beyond the picturesque. You describe how this, this makes people stand apart as observers of that beautiful landscape. And in this way, community is erased in favour of the image. There's something about the way you describe that, I really just loved how you captured a really important aspect of, of how the rural is, the rigidity of the narrative of rural spaces exists within culture, particularly within culture in this country. I really love how your work engages directly with the landscape in a way that moves beyond just the image alone. And instead, you create art both of and with the land, and those who live there. Your work pushes the boundaries of what landscape visual art can do, and opens it up to be something really vast and complex, asking vitally important questions of what the rural consists of, and who gets to be there. One of the many reasons I really love talking to artists in this program is being able to showcase the art and artists that subvert the expectations of what the rural embodies, and who exists there. And likewise, what kind of artists exists there and what kind of art exists there too. What excites you about making and connecting with rurally base art and artists who are, who make a more diverse and perhaps unexpected ways, like what what excites you about that kind of art making?

Joanne Coates 1:07:26

I think I mean, it's a really good question. I just want to say thanks again, and it's so exciting talking to you Bella, and these questions like really, kind of like, yeah they really nourish me and my soul, the kind of like the talking, it's really exciting. And I think, I think that's, that's kind of one of the things for me is, quite often you feel, or you can be quite isolated in terms of, but actually the artist making work in those rural spaces, they're working like, against these barriers. And I think actually, like, it's often the way disabled artists work, but they shouldn't have to. It kind of makes you come up with like creative, like ingenious solutions to your things that you face that might be like a hurdle. And it makes you come up with these, like really creative ways of working because you have to do that in order to be able to make the work. And I think that's what's really exciting about artists who do that and art organisations who have to function slightly differently because, you know, if they do an event, who's going to kind of come to that event, or, you know, people trying to really, like, make these different changes, and like, what is an arts organisation and what's kind of, like, what what's slightly different. So there's a talk tonight, about this, it's like common ecologies is is the name of the program. And it's like bringing all these people together to talk about sustainability of the rural spaces across Europe, and what the farmer process have to do with that, but it's not advertised as an art event. But the logo was this like, really beautiful, kind of like green tractor with like a purple. And you know like an artist has designs that, I know that. I know, there's been an artist here, I can see. But I think that, things like that, you know, artists kind of making these events happen, all these things happen, where they're bringing communities together. That at a time, I think like you touched on, like, at a time when these

communities are becoming increasingly disparate, the nature of work in these places is changing. And art organisations and artist, I think, have a really big role to play within that through how that they've had to find ways of working.

Bella Milroy 1:09:47

Wow, that's that. Yeah, that was such a great answer, thank you. And exactly, again, exactly the kind of, you know, motivations behind having these kinds of conversations because there is so much more to be said beyond those those kinds of like, rigid narratives of the art and the artists that we expect to exist in rural spaces like that.

Bella Milroy 1:10:15

What do you think, I mean, it's a pretty big question, but like, how do you think we can draw upon the ingenuity and resourcefulness and imagination of rurally based disabled working class artists, to better, to inform better experiences for artists across the industry?

Joanne Coates 1:10:33

It's a really tough.

Bella Milroy 1:10:34

What do we, what do we do?

Joanne Coates 1:10:37

I think it's a really tough question but I mean, I think things like this is what we do. We're having conversations, because I think the main issue is that, you know, something really, really exciting could be happening in the Highlands of Scotland and that person only has so many resources, so much time, and they still need to look after themselves. And on top of that, they have a disability, that means that they have to rest or that they have, they have things that they have to face, just to live, just to get by. How do we make that easier to see what they're doing and to like, there must, that's I'm always thinking there must be some kind of way and I know, like Wysing have talked about, like a rural Arts Network, and something like that. And like, I just think there has to be like something. And I think, again, thinking of the rural differently, so there's an artist that I really, really love, called Jen de los Reyes, and she's based in Chicago. And she's she is like a community artist, really socially engaged. But what she did is she set up something called Garbage Hill Farm. Now this is in Chicago and so you might think, well Chicago's definitely not rural, it could not be defined as rural. It's not, you know, the population isn't like, it doesn't tick any of the rural boxes. But what Jen is doing is kind of thinking of like indigenous land use and how that land was used and like originally, and her background, and her resources in community art, and as a visual artist, and she worked with musicians and kind of like, this DIY ethos she kind of grew up with, has always informed her arts practice, now bringing that to the Garbage Hill Farm. And doing like seed swaps, and all these kind of like really creative things that bring people together in a way that is like very much borrowed from rural, or what we think of rural. But I kind of think, like, well everywhere in the UK was kind of rural at one point. And I think, thinking like, not thinking of people as remote, but thinking of like, what, what things can we do to like bring them in or to like, how do we see what they're doing. And in reality, we won't be able to visit everything, like my absolute favourite gallery in the UK is Timespan, which is in Helmsdale, which is in the Highlands of Scotland. And it's very far

from me. And it's, you know, not easy to get to, but I can still admire it from afar and see what they're doing. But also kind of think, well, they function in a way that's like really great for their community. And, and I think something that art should do, is see a space like that, as important as a space in London, and the work that they're doing and the exhibitions they're doing are as valid, as that space.

Bella Milroy 1:13:30

Yeah, and maybe it's less about needing everybody to go and experience it. Or like, as like a catch all for like this, like that being like this, the successful outcome that every single person goes to that place and experiences the art that happens there. And more recognising that the stuff that happens there is, is important in and of itself, that it serves a community that it has an interconnected, that it's interconnected with other things, across geographies, and that we can do more to support it, to invest in it from afar as well. And that's that bit, that in itself is a valid a valid kind of way, route forward I guess in that way that it doesn't necessarily have to be about like, how do we get everybody to go there and more actually just like recognising that it has value without our presence all the time, I guess maybe? Yeah.

Joanne Coates 1:14:33

And valuing like some of the work, they'd like one of the things they did, was it was a creative nail foam because there was no, there wasn't like a nail salon in the town village. And so they kind of had this creative but talked about issues while they were doing it and like it's, you know, this creative but it was what the those young people wanted. Now I think that's like brilliant. And the same with Jen's project, Garbage Hill Farm, and I know that Jen has talked about this in a blog post but that work isn't seen as important as her work that's been in a big gallery. And I think like rethinking about what spaces we think of as important, and where those spaces are and yeah, it's something that I would really like, because I think it's a very like western viewpoint that the gallery, the white cube is the most important space. And if you have your work in there then you're successful, that means that you're an artist to be credited. And I think, well, you know, you could be making the most beautiful work in a field somewhere, and maybe 10 people see that, and that has a real impact on them. Is that as valid as that space?

Bella Milroy 1:15:40

Yeah.

Joanne Coates 1:15:40

I would say yes but obviously, it's not measurable in the way that we give out grants and the way that our our art system works.

Bella Milroy 1:15:48

Yes. And again, I guess it's a bit like, just kind of coming back to how you describe Lie of the Land as being like, you know, our finding the value in listening to what is already existing, and what already what is already there, rather than kind of, yeah, give, like the idea of like, giving something in a sense of like, yeah, like I say, our presence, and actually just like recognizing that there is already a presence there, that it's valuable, that it is that you know, as part of a community. Yeah and there is I think that as you say, that kind of, finding the and enhancing the interconnectivity of those things that exists is, is probably the most exciting kind of way of, of investing in in those things further, I think. Yeah. Oh that

was really exciting to talk about that. I just like to like, just like one last little point. Something I always like to ask the artists in these conversations of just like, what's, tell me like, what your favourite rural space, that is, that inspires you currently? And what is it about that, that makes it your favourite?

Joanne Coates 1:17:07

Does that have to be like an art space? Or any space?

Bella Milroy 1:17:10

Literally, like any any place you like, what's what's what's doing it for you at the moment.

Joanne Coates 1:17:15

I think the barn on the farm, because it's like, that's the potential of ideas that could happen. But also like, there's like, we all walked in there last week, and there was a hare that was kind of passing by, and like rabbits, and kind of like this owl flew by. And I think like, what made me think is that how can we, through the arts create spaces where like, all these different people and different, like, can flourish and function well, like, like that barn is doing. Like how can we replicate that? And it just made me really think about kind of, yeah, like ecologies but in a different way, and like biodiversity, but in terms of the arts, and I don't know if that makes sense. But it just made me think of that and just kind of like that space and how it's like this really traditional building that goes but it has so much potential as well.

Bella Milroy 1:18:05

Oh, that's such a lovely image to finish on. Thank you so much. This has been such a wonderful conversation to have with you. And yeah, thank you so much for joining me on this part of the program.

Joanne Coates 1:18:19

Thank you for having me so much, Bella.

Bella Milroy 1:18:22

It's been wonderful. Thanks.