

FA - Natalie Sharp Interview - Audio Only

Bella Milroy 00:00

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 00:25

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 00:43

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 01:00

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 01:10

And just for a brief image description for you, for the audience, my pronouns are she/her, and 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. And for my environmental description, I'm working from home. There's a grey sofa with some cushions in the background, and a couple of sleeping dogs and possibly a cat wandering around from time to time.

Bella Milroy 01:40

Today I am so lucky to have with me Natalie Sharp, a disabled artist based in Todmorden, West Yorkshire. Her creative journey traverses sound, vision, and costume, weaving together ambitious interactive multimedia performances. Her artistic practice embraces composed sound, electronic music, video, performance, and lighting, all underscored by a profound commitment to body activism. At the heart of her work lies a dedication to accessibility and disability, intertwined with a passion for promoting queer-centred and intersectional approaches to environmentalism.

Bella Milroy 02:24

So Natalie, welcome. It's an absolute pleasure to have you as part of the series. Thank you for joining me today.

Natalie Sharp 02:29

Thank you. Yeah, thanks thanks. Thanks for that lovely description as well. Yeah, my name is Natalie. My pronouns are she/her. My artist moniker is Nat Sharp, formerly known as Lone Taxidermist. And I, my visual description is I am a yellowy brownie woman and I have a square face, kind of square face. I'm wearing very bright clothes. I've got a suitably bright hoodie on and my tracky bottoms because I've just been doing some Pilates. And I'm in my studio, my lovely terracotta studio. It's like my recording studio. And around me, I can see lots of plants and a Nicolas Cage shrine. And out the window there's, it's a bit grey and miserable, but I'm feeling, I'm feeling bright on the inside.

Bella Milroy 03:31

Ah, that was such a fantastic description and a lovely introduction. Thank you so much, Natalie, thank you. Well, maybe we can start by you just telling me a little bit about your work and what you're up to at the moment.

Natalie Sharp 03:46

Yeah sure. So, um, like as, as you introduced me, I do all kinds of art. So sometimes I like to call myself a janitor of art or an octopus art is because interdisciplinary just takes too long to say and it's sometimes a bit too vague, really. So yeah, I at the moment, I'm doing a few really interesting things. After this interview, actually, I'm gonna go and see one of my favourite filmmakers is an artist called Andrew Kötting. Have you have you heard of Andrew? Hey, bark if you've heard of Andrew.

Bella Milroy 04:29

Yes, Sadie the dog has quite clearly a big fan. Apologise for the.

Natalie Sharp 04:35

Oh no I love it.

Bella Milroy 04:38

No I haven't, Sadie the dog has but I haven't.

Natalie Sharp 04:40

Right. Well, he's essentially filmmaker, but he's sort of a he's a bit of a sort of an interrogator of, of, you know, the medium of film and he did probably possibly like one of my favourite like most important meaningful films to me, called Gallivant, with him and his daughter, Eden, who is disabled, and she's got a form of neurodiversity that is quite rare. And he took his his daughter and his grandma in the sort of 1994 around the coast of the UK. And they did this film about about the coast of the UK through their eyes, and it was called Gallivant. And it was, anyway, I went to his, he has a little Q&A screen up in Cumbria at the weekend and he's now made this new work, which is a VR work. And it's about his house in the, in the Pyrenees, which is like really dilapidated, in the middle of nowhere, kind of impossible to get to, really isolated. So you start to step into him and his daughter Eden's world via this VR headset and it's a really interesting piece. So I'm on my way to see that, which doesn't really describe what I do, but I think yeah, he, I'm very kind of influenced by his his work and he's kind of in my mind's eye quite a lot at the moment. So that's why I sort of mentioned him.

Bella Milroy 06:20

No, that's a lovely way of giving us a little glimpse into some of the things that you're interested in at the moment, like you say, living inside your head. That's, that's lovely. Thank you. And I didn't know his work. Can you say his name again for me?

Natalie Sharp 06:33

Yeah, he's called Andrew Kötting, k o t t i n g. And he's film, he's essentially he's a filmmaker, and he's done lots of films, done lots of stuff with like, he's kind of like the filmmakers, filmmaker. If that doesn't sound too pretentious. Yeah, so yeah, I'll leave it at that. I would just, I would encourage anyone to go and find his work, because it's really magical to see.

Bella Milroy 07:06

Lovely, thank you so much that, I'll definitely be be, have a look into that. Thank you, Natalie. That was a really lovely introduction. I'm going to, I'd love to start off by talking to you about your work, Marra. You were artists in residence for Ariel, a festival of contemporary music, literature and performance taking place in the Lake District. And this residency resulted in this body of work called Marra. The work is described as a deeply personal reflection on growing up as a second generation immigrant in small town, Cumbria, a lucid dream set against the arcane esoteric rituals and traditions that bubble under the surface of everyday life. This work is so striking and your performance recordings are just incredibly powerful to watch. Can you tell me a little bit more about this body of work and the process of creating it?

Natalie Sharp 08:05

Yeah, um, so Marra kind of came about, I don't know if it was an accident, or maybe it was like an intentional accident but basically, and I was approached ages ago like before the pandemic, to write a new piece, perform a new piece of work about about Cumbria. And I wanted to sort of like dig into the sort of, the underbelly of this stuff that you, that you don't know why you don't necessarily associate with Cumbria. Because you know, when people think about Cumbria, they think about the Lake District and all of that and like William Wordsworth and all of those people but and also like, there's, there's always been like a big focus on on the Lake District and not so much unlike where I'm from, which is the northwest of Cumbria and the whole of the West Coast really, you know, from like, Whitehaven and Maryport, all the way up the coast there. So I wanted to do something that sort of lifted and celebrated those kinds of voices that you don't really hear of or a sort of associate with Cumbria, but I wanted it to be like very personal as well. So it ended up, it's kind of always been continually in the state of change but at the moment, it's it's gone back to what its original form was, which is, I'm now recording it as an album but because the pandemic happened, the performance was put on hold and I ended up handing over a series of short films, again, very inspired by Andrew Kötting's work, particularly Gallivant, that was to do with all of these kinds of strange esoteric rituals that you mentioned, but also like, it's a bit of a call and response to the patriarchy of the Seychelles, which is where my mam and brother come from. So, so yeah, it ended up being like a sort of a short mini TV series. And then it went back to being a performance when the when the restrictions kind of lifted. And now it's an album, or it's about to be an album.

Natalie Sharp 10:29

So yeah, so it's sort of done lots of things. And it's been like a, I think it's one of those things where it's like, maybe it'll never be over this work. It'll just kind of keep sort of congealing and changing. So yeah.

Bella Milroy 10:29

Oh wow.

Bella Milroy 10:44

It's it's, I mean, I think it feels like a work that has the capacity to do that. It feels so, there are so many like, you describe yourself as an octopus of art. They feel it feels like there are so many tentacles...

Natalie Sharp 11:00

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 11:01

amongst it that like could expand and contract at various points, depending on your response to it. So that would be so interesting to hear the album when that that comes out.

Natalie Sharp 11:11

Yeah yeah. I don't know when that's gonna be but but hopefully, I mean, it was supposed to be like two years ago, and then I don't know things just keep kind of keep ,time just keeps being weird. And other things keep happening. So yeah, it'll, it'll come out when it comes out.

Bella Milroy 11:30

Yeah, yeah, I definitely find crip time versus pandemic time is just like, yeah, what is that.

Natalie Sharp 11:36

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 11:40

Great. Well, um, I'd like to talk to you a bit more about a project you're currently working on, titled SPUME, which you describe as a radical departure from conventional performance norms, SPUME transcends the boundaries of art and ecology. Central to this venture is the transformative act of lying down horizontally. A deliberate choice symbolising interconnectedness with the coastal landscape, where Sellafield meets Ravenglass in Cumbria. This unconventional performance mode, challenging orthodoxies becomes an embodied narrative of symbiosis, mirroring the exchange between sea algae and land fungi, embodying the interconnectedness between my Seychellois heritage and Cumbrian roots. Can you tell me a little bit more about this, this really fantastic sounding project?

Natalie Sharp 12:37

Yeah, so so SPUME was kind of like almost a bit of a response to Marra in a way because I've done like a few performances of Marra even though the album's not out and what I kind of realised is that I can't continue to fit, well mentally and physically continue to perform in such a way, so I decided to sort of take up the act of lying down almost as in itself as a form of activism. Like but I think body activism is

like, quite kind of central to a lot of my work, like placing your body in the, is always it's always been like central to the, whatever art form kind of projected outwards so so it initially SPUME started off again, it was it was a commission for new work and I got a bit of seed funding through Sound UK and when it first started, it was again a very different sort of like, beast to what it is now because initially I want to build a kind of a giant coiling seashell that was like a receiver and a transmitter, so a transceiver that was that was that took the form of a seashell, kind of like a listening device that would live, erm listening transmitting device that would live on the coastlines of Cumbria and the Seychelles. That's not to say it won't happen it's just that like I think that would need you know, a huge amount of funding project grant you know so so from that it kind of, I ended up going back to Ravenglass, which is this really sort of weird magical place and I spent two months there pretty much with no phone signal or internet with the intention of writing Marra but I ended up just making this pilgrimage to the to the water to like surrender my body to the ocean. Pretty much every day I make a pilgrimage to the water.

Bella Milroy 14:48

Wow.

Natalie Sharp 14:50

And what came out of it was like this fascination with the with with the that bit of liminal space that you mentioned the the sort of, the potential or the vestibule of that whole area of where the where the sea meets the meets the meets the land and my mam from the Seychelles kind of came to represent the sea side and the sand and my dad being a Morse code engineer came to represent the ocean and I was kind of dancing between the liminal of both of those spaces and in a kind of like push and pull type situation. But I didn't want to do it standing up. So I sort of started to envision this whole mode of being horizontal because being horizontal to me felt like I was more in tune with the landscape which is a horizon and so it came I started I started doing this like body act of horizontalism. So now SPUME has become a sort of full sensory exploration of the act of lying down and performing lying down but in also inviting audiences to sort of join me in being horizontal and what that could be and how that could feel. And I kind of now I'm sort of more gearing towards making an indoor installation that will potentially tour, I'd like to do it around the coastlines, but just doing it in venues that kind of understand and support and like, you know, those sort of soft spaces that would lend themselves to the to the to the project. So, yeah, and spume, a lot of people say to me, well, what is spume so spume is that like, weird, bubbly, a sort of gluttonous look in seafoam. And it's, have you ever seen spume like in person?

Bella Milroy 16:54

Yes, it's kind of, it's got a kind of flabbiness to it hasn't it.

Natalie Sharp 16:57

Yeah totally, yeah. It's like, you just want to get inside it.

Bella Milroy 17:02

Yeah.

Natalie Sharp 17:03

The reason that spume happens, and I suppose is the other thing about being in the UK, as well and about being in a rural area for me like, is that it, it's caused by basically like, the way I see it is like, the sea gets really angry and it sort of basically, when there's a storm, it's it takes all of the like dead algae matter from the ocean, and it chucks it up, and it spits it out on the coastline.

Bella Milroy 17:35

Oh wow.

Natalie Sharp 17:36

And all of that stuff is like the detritus of like, of what used to be in the sea, but it's like, it's all the good stuff as well, like it's sort of like the history in a way. It's like a kind of a little history of the sea happening on the coastline. So yeah, I'm into it.

Bella Milroy 17:55

Yeah, that's such a lovely kind of visual kind of imagery to end that, end that kind of initial snapshot of of spume there, thank you so much. I was so interested in the way you you talk about this particular project in in how engaging directly with the potential of what lying down offers, when used as a creative material in itself. And you talk about this saying, and as you're already kind of referred to that, like lying down becomes a form a form of resistance and inclusivity serving a dual purpose, it becomes a protective measure for my well being allowing me to sustain a career that has until now grappled with the demands of live music performance. I was so drawn to the way you describe that lying down both as a creative inspiration and protective measure. Could you could you share a bit more with me about how this creative shift came about and how it has informed your creative practice going forward?

Natalie Sharp 19:03

Yeah, so lying down is, it's sort of, I think I associate lying down also, like to add to that with a sort of a softness and a safeness and a, like you said, like a protective measure. And so just just the act of of lying down is kind of like okay, well, that that makes my body kind of release itself and I'm not so tense because if I'm lying down I imagine that I'm, you know, I'm in bed or I am in like a kind of a safe zone in a way. So it's sort of I've never really to be honest with you, like it's even though I've I've been performing like stood up for years, I've, I've never felt I've never felt comfortable doing it and so, it just it just seemed like a really like, oh, well, this is like an actually really easy solution in a way to all of that. It's just like, well, I won't perform standing up anymore, I'll lie down and I'll invite others to do the same. And I think in lying down, it completely does shift your your whole experience. And so like now with, especially with Spume, I'm thinking about like, well how do I play instruments laying down? Or is there like a, is there, is there a, is there a, sort of what is the like, ultimate ergonomics of lying down to like, listen to sound, to see sound, to perform sound like, what would those elements be? So what ends up, what's kind of ended up happening is that I'm now thinking of like, really sort of lateral like interesting, creative ways to perform lying down because, you know, like, sometimes when you're at a gig and the person's on their laptop and it just looks like they're sort of, you can't see what they're doing. And even if they're playing synthesisers, or whatever, and you're like, well I can't see what you're doing so, and I just sort of like, well in this way, it's like, the other part of it is that it takes the sort of, I don't really want the spotlight to be on me anywhere, like I want the work to be sort of experienced, but it's not, I suppose it's again, in line, or like, it's sort of parallel with nature is that like, there's no, there's no ego in

nature. And so like, I don't want to have an ego with it, with any of this with any of this work. So like, by, by everyone lying down, their kind of their gaze is kind of elsewhere, their focus is elsewhere. So I think the just the act of lying down, has like opened up all of these new ways of thinking about like, what performance could be, you know.

Bella Milroy 22:09

And it sounds like as well, like, the more you kind of centre that as a format, you are, it becomes less about how you apply a kind of, you know, standing non-disabled kind of script of a of how a live performance happens and applying and trying to make lying down happen on top of that, but more actually kind of completely reconfiguring the format to centring that kind of horizontal experience at the heart of it, which I think is always so wonderful when when access can be centred in that way, the creative possibilities that come through that are really exciting, aren't they?

Natalie Sharp 22:56

Yeah, totally. And like, it's not to say that, like, I know that loads of other artists have done, you know, performances that have been about lying down, but they tend to be more about, you know, like there's like, lots of sleep concerts and stuff like that. But I think with this, it's more like, well, let's completely rearrange the whole experience around the, the act of laying down if you like, so that's the focus of it instead.

Bella Milroy 23:27

Yeah. And has a further embracing your experience of disability in this way and finding a more accessible way of producing work, has that facilitated a greater sustainability in your artistic career?

Natalie Sharp 23:41

Yeah, totally because I think like, I suppose in a way, it kind of gives you the power because it's like, well, the, this is what I'm going to do and this is what works for my body, so I'm going to invite you along for the ride and, and in having that power it gives you, it just gives you the sort of the the impetus as opposed to like, sort of forge your own way of being and your own way of doing things that is more sustainable. Yeah.

Bella Milroy 24:14

yeah. And I imagine that kind of shift as well would kind of lead you to other other artists and other performers who were also working in similar ways that have, that are incorporating those kind of crucial access points like that in and innovative ways of performing amongst that. That must, has that led you to kind of...

Natalie Sharp 24:36

Yeah, yeah, totally. Like I've been, I've done a lot of work with an artist, a neurodivergent artist called Nwando Ebizie. And the last project that we did together was specifically for Deaf disabled audiences and it centred, centred their experience. So the main sort of performer in it was a, is a BSL artist who uses really interesting somatic movement in her BSL, she's called Chisato. And then the experience itself was done with a series of videos that I made that were projected onto very large balloons that were filled with helium, because we learn through the process that other Deaf audiences, their bodies

responds really well, to, they can feel sound basically through through the balloon so yeah, so yeah, and then on top of that, there's been there's been a lot of other artists along the way. I've been working with an amazing artist called Lou Barnell as well, who, she actually just had a, just did a, perform her sort of like, Zen of performance at the weekend, at the Theatre Deli in Sheffield. But yeah, I think I'm just I'm just like, more drawn towards these people anyway, it's sort of, I feel like it just has happened in a in a really like, natural way anyway, it's just sort of, you know, like, when you sort of you start putting out those, that feeling has been horizontal, there's and you end up working with other people that kind of resonate with it.

Bella Milroy 24:36

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, totally. I think when that shift happens, it's like, I only want to ever be over here doing this, you know?

Natalie Sharp 26:44

Yeah, yeah totally.

Bella Milroy 26:47

And has there been some things that have supported you to make this shift shift happen in your work? Have there been any particular arts organisations, collectives or opportunities that have really helped in this way?

Natalie Sharp 27:01

Yeah, I mean, obviously, outside of speaking to you as well, because, you know, this is all very helpful. This is all very helpful, just having the time and the space to talk about it. But yeah, also, excuse me, there's been so, Full of Noises, up in Cumbria have been really big supporters of my work for a really long time. That's kind of basically how I was given the time and space to just be in the in the landscape. And that was that was hosted by another organisation who, that's ran by someone that's become a friend of mine called Bob and he runs RE Drift so. And the way that they work is that like, basically, they they nurture, they nurture artists, but they don't, there's no like, there's no, it's not about like, a new commission or making new work, or like any kind of like timeline, they're basically like, Okay, we're here for you, we'll do whatever you need us to do. And we're not going anywhere. So just tell us what you want. And we will we will seek to, to provide you with it. So like, they're amazing people as an organisation, but just as people as well. And they're up in Cumbria, which is great.

Bella Milroy 28:26

Yeah, yeah. They sound fantastic.

Natalie Sharp 28:30

I mean, there's been quite a few like, Sound UK have been amazing. And there's an organisation called Interior Motive who have helped me with getting DYCP funding. Yeah, there's, there's probably quite a few, but I can't, I can't think of names now, now that I've been asked but yeah, there's quite a few.

Bella Milroy 28:52

No it's wonderful to know that they're that, you know, because I think what I'm hearing in the way you describe this, this shift, there's a kind of urgency to it in no longer being able to sustain that, a previous kind of format of performing. And, you know, quite often, as disabled artists, we can find ourselves at our limits, and, you know, the sustainability of our work is really put into you know, there's a real kind of vulnerability to you know, our work continuing the personal cost of how we work is often so great, isn't it?

Natalie Sharp 28:53

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 28:53

And yeah, that's wonderful to know that, that, you know, you've had such positive and supportive experiences with with organisations like that. That's great.

Natalie Sharp 29:47

Yeah, totally. And it's also like, it gives you the kind of the courage in a way to be like, okay, well, you know, here's my access rider, these are the things that I need in order to do this performance, because it sort of, it sort of validates what you do in a way. You know, when you're supported so like, wonderfully. So yeah, in a way, it's a kind of it. It's like a real sort of boost of momentum to, that you're on the right path kind of thing.

Bella Milroy 30:18

Absolutely. Ah that's fantastic. I'm so pleased that that's, that's been a positive shift for you in that way. And I'd really like to talk to you about a project you're currently working on, which is a sensory installation and community project in Cumbria and it's aimed at neurodivergent, autistic and learning disabled adults. Could you share a little bit more about this project and what it's been like returning to where you grew up in Cumbria to make work in this way?

Natalie Sharp 30:46

Yeah, totally. So like, you know what we were saying before about like, how you ended up sort of manifesting these organisations into your life, I feel like in doing Spume, that must be what kind of happened because I kind of got an email out of nowhere, you know, about this organisation who are relatively new. They've, they've just actually rebranded themselves, they're now called Everyone Here, which I think is an acronym on eh, which is what a lot of people from Cumbria say [laughs].

Bella Milroy 31:16

Oh right [laughs]

Natalie Sharp 31:18

So *Everyone* Here is, it's part of the sort of creative people and places, but it's like the Northwest division of that. So you know, like how the Arts Council has been trying to, like, syphon all of the money out of London and take it up north a bit more. So like, a big chunk of it's gone to the northwest, which is really good news. As far as I'm concerned, you know.

Natalie Sharp 31:44

My locals are kind of concern, my comrades. So yeah, so they were kind of, they've kind of been set up out of that. But what they want to do is like hand over the reins to the actual people of Cumbria. So they've set up this kind of citizens assembly, and the way I understand it is, it's a bit like sort of Camelot where like, you know, it's an egalitarian approach where everyone kind of gets to say, and it's sort of like, I imagined them all sort of meeting around like a round table and it's a total like, pure democracy kind of situation. And part of the kind of remit of *Everyone* Here was like, okay, there's two areas that Cumbria needs to cover in its arts and culture, and that is LGBTQI communities, and learning disabled communities, because they're the two areas of the two marginalised communities who were just not getting the platform and not getting a voice. So the work that I'm doing with them, centres learning disabled and autistic neurodiverse people, like you said, adults, and it's taking place in in West Cumbria, hopefully, at West Lakes College, which has quite a large student, community of learning disabled adults, audiences that are going to do, experience this work. And so at the moment, it's called the Sensory Worlding Experience. And it is the the space is going to be divided into all of the different sensory zones. So listening, sounding, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, and the audience's will be invited into the zones to experience those zones. But there'll be like, a crossover between the zones like a sort of an interconnectedness. And they'll be able to travel through the zones and have very sort of, I'm hoping, quite visceral, kind of unique experiences in each zone. And so just to sort of talk you through what the zones might look like. So when you enter the space, there'll be like a giant maypole in the middle, and it will have ribbons on it and those ribbons will correlate to the zone that the audience member might want to go to. So for example, if they take a silver ribbon, they'll go to the soundings zone, and in the sounding zone, there'll be lots of like mirrors and reflections and there'll be microphones hanging from the ceiling, that they'll be able to make a noise through, and there'll be able to, again, lie down on the floor, which will be made of clouds. And, um, yeah, they'll be able to sort of make a sound in that room and then when they go into the tasting zone, for example, that's the pink areas, so they'll take a pink ribbon. And there'll be a giant Puffalumps, which is my teddy bear who's called Puffalumps. And Puffalumps doesn't stand up, he lies down, like that's.

Bella Milroy 31:44

Oh perfect.

Bella Milroy 31:44

Yeah, oh definitely.

Natalie Sharp 31:48

Yeah, so he's like, so I want to make a costume that is impossible to stand up in. And it's like a giant Puffalumps sleeping, essentially, it's a sleeping bag, but it's huge, so you can get inside this teddy bear. And the teddy bear will like hand out pink candy floss, and there'll be pink smoke, and you'll be able to sit on pink clouds and eat popcorn and get ready for like a party to happen.

Bella Milroy 35:39

Oh my God, amazing.

Natalie Sharp 35:39

So that's just like a little taster of, of what it might be. But yeah, so and again, that was another, that's an organisation that I should like, that I really want to champion and support because working with them has kind of like, made me kind of realise why, like, it's kind of like, totally changed the way that I work. So like, for example, as you know, like, I don't do like videos/ Zoom calls. So they have, they made it possible for me to travel to them or them travelled to me, and we'd be, we'd all be in the space together. So that would be me, Kieran, one of the directors and Unique Spencer who is an access worker, and we'd use our bodies to come up with the ideas. So we would do these like body in, like somatic exercises. And to me like doing stuff like that is like, just, way more fulfilling and satisfying and there's just so, there's so many other ways that the project can go or directions it can go into just through like working with people like that, because they just get it. And you know, like what, they'll say stuff like, you know, if money was no option, what would you do in this zone? So like, they've kind of made it like limitless and boundaryless. And so that's, that's allowed my imagination to like really like, okay well let's make like a giant Puffalump and eat candy floss and all of this kind of stuff. And so yeah, that it's the, the whole experience so far has just been, it's been really beautiful. And I'm like really, really enjoying working on it. And I just, I don't know, I just feel like, this is the direction, this is the trajectory that I want all work to kind of live inside and go towards really.

Bella Milroy 37:50

Yeah. Oh, that's wonderful that that's that's you know being, that's a source of great inspiration to make the work happen but also in the collaborative process in itself actually being like so fulfilling and furthering your your practice at the moment, your way of work.

Natalie Sharp 38:06

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 38:08

That's wonderful.

Natalie Sharp 38:09

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 38:11

Thank you so much for sharing about that. I'd love to talk to you about where you're now based in, which is Todmorden in The Upper Calder Valley, in Calderdale, in West Yorkshire. I wanted to give the full [both laugh] description definition there.

Bella Milroy 38:27

Do you know what, do you know what Todmorden means?

Bella Milroy 38:31

No I don't, please tell me.

Natalie Sharp 38:33

Todmorden [Natalie laughs], it's actually quite morbid. Tod-mor-den translates in Germanic as double deaf dead.

Bella Milroy 38:39

Oh wow.

Natalie Sharp 38:41

Which is kind of interesting considering, what a sort of strange and unique area it is like, it's the UFO capital.

Bella Milroy 38:50

No, I had no idea. Really?

Natalie Sharp 38:53

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 38:54

Oh wow.

Natalie Sharp 38:54

Yeah, there's been lots of goings on here. There's a policeman called Alan Godfrey that famously got, well famously in these parts, got abducted by aliens.

Bella Milroy 39:05

Wow.

Natalie Sharp 39:06

And it's yeah, it's a very beautiful but unusual landscape and I feel like it draws certain kinds of spirits towards it. Like there's lots of witches and pagans that live here. It's a it's like a very, sort of, it's just a really unique place, Todmorden. So I ended up making roots here. I've got a house which I can't believe I've got an, I, I own a house it still doesn't seem, it doesn't seem possible. You know, as a self employed starving artist or whatever, who's lived in London for most of my life. So So yeah, so I've met I've made roots here and like one of the reasons that I ended up making roots here was because of the landscape.

Bella Milroy 39:55

Oh wow.

Bella Milroy 39:55

Yeah.

Natalie Sharp 39:55

So yeah, going back to like spume and lying down and stuff. Erm, one of the sort of big erm, one of the big, I'm going to call it like an achievement that I've made for my body is that I've been able to sort of

put it inside, dunk it inside cold water and kind of come out reborn in a way [Natalie laughs], that sounds a little bit holy, but like, it really is like the water around here and getting inside the water around here has really really healed my body.

Natalie Sharp 40:01

So yeah, that was sort of like one of the big pulls, of draws of this area. So yeah.

Bella Milroy 40:28

Oh, that's that's such a, I love the description you've given there of Todmorden, of what the the atmosphere and the space is like. Maybe you could tell us like, what's it like being an artist there? What are some of the positives of working as a disabled artist? Obviously, the the environment and the landscape itself and, but perhaps, what are some of the challenges as well of being rural in that way.

Natalie Sharp 40:57

Yeah. Yeah, totally. So like, I think being an, being an artist here is, it's great because you know, you're surrounded by lots of other artists, you know, like, there seems to be like a real sort of intrigue and draw for people, especially during the pandemic, a lot of people who couldn't afford Manchester or wanted to be in the landscape ended up moving here and even people from like, you know, Hebden Bridge, who kind of have been priced out of Hebden Bridge have moved here. So we've got kind of, quite a unique, I don't know, a gene pool [both laugh] of people. And so yeah, it's great being an artist here, I've got a studio down the road that I share with a really good mate. There's, there's tons of good art that happens as well like, there's a, there's an amazing venue called Nan Moor's, in the middle of Todmorden, and they run, they, they're an independent venue and like a grassroots venue. And they run all kinds of stuff from like, they have like non non-binary queer DJs pretty much every Sunday, and they do scrabble night and they do like build, build your own synthesiser night and they have like Madonna karaoke and plop karaoke [Natalie laughs]. It's like a really like, sort of Willy Wonka or like a funhouse type space.

Bella Milroy 41:00

Yeah.

Natalie Sharp 41:35

So you know, having spaces like that and also, the other thing I should say is that everyone's just up for it so, you know, like, when you move well, when I moved out of London, it's like, okay we're gonna have to make our own fun.

Natalie Sharp 42:41

And so like, I said to the, the people that that run Nan's is that I love Fun House, so like, can we do a version of Pat Sharp's Fun House in Nan Moor's, and so I ended up filling the place with with slime and we were doing sheep shearing, like.

Bella Milroy 42:41

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 42:58

Oh wow [Bella laughs].

Natalie Sharp 42:59

And all of this like [Natalie laughing], all of that's stuffs like, it feels like anything could be possible here or anything is possible, like, it's just like, you make and you build your own fun. But it's not without its challenges, like the landscape itself is hard and it's cold, and it's, I have arthritis, and so like it's, you know, it's it's always damp here, so it's like, it's terrible, it's terrible for that. It's really steep, like it's in a valley, so like, just walking around is hard. And like some days I just can't do it at all. And erm it's, it can get quite, if you allow it, it can get quite isolating here as well, like, especially especially in the winter months. It feels like nothing's open, like Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, like nowt's open apart from the supermarket so it can feel, it can feel quite sort of solitary sometimes. And I love solitude but I don't want it three days of the week during the winter.

Bella Milroy 44:11

Yeah.

Natalie Sharp 44:11

Yeah

Bella Milroy 44:13

And that's that's wonderful that you, that amongst those challenges there there is a kind of an essential creative community that you feel you can be a part of. Can you like articulate or give us any kind of indication of what what makes that accessible for you? What makes that something that feels like you can, you've kind of got on board and here you are, a part of it. What makes, what makes that possible, do you think?

Natalie Sharp 44:42

Well what, as in like, what makes it within Todmorden?

Bella Milroy 44:47

Yeah, like what what what makes that creative communities feel so, so present and so and also so, so feasible for you to be included in that as a disabled artist.

Natalie Sharp 45:01

I think I think it's to do with the people here. Like, I also think that like, Todmorden is a bit of a, well, it's, it's definitely a queer utopia but it's also, it feels like a matriarchy here as well; a bit like the Seychelles. And so like you sort of, you're surrounded by, I feel like I'm surrounded by people that allow it, and sort of like, own it and make it sort of possible. And because you're around those kinds of people, they sort of, their enthusiasm or their, like, willingness sort of rubs off on you. So it's more like [Natalie laughs], I was gonna say, it's a state of mind. And I know that sounds really cheesy, but it just sort of is, it's sort of like, it's just like a real belief, I suppose. And, you know, like, there's some really, like, am I allowed to swear?

Bella Milroy 46:00

Yes, you're allow to swear [Bella laughs].

Natalie Sharp 46:02

There's some really like, batshit [Bella laughs] people here as well, like, I've got a mate whose pornstar name is Heidi Priestess, but she's, her real name's Hailey, and I've never like met anyone as like singular, or like, unique as her before. Like, she needs her own, she needs her own TV show, you know like. And I think it's just like being around these sort of like, alternative thinkers is, is, that's kind of basically what it is, I would say, it's to do with the people.

Bella Milroy 46:37

Yeah, that's so interesting. I mean, I don't know if this is something I shared with you of, when we when we first spoke over the phone, in preparation for this interview, but like I always like to kind of, say like an informal, you know, title for Further Afield as it, as a project is like, where, where are the weirdos? Where are they? [both laugh]

Natalie Sharp 46:59

Yeah [Natalie laughs].

Bella Milroy 47:03

Where are the weirdos at? Yeah.

Natalie Sharp 47:03

Come to Tods, yeah.

Bella Milroy 47:04

Yeah, that's what I need to do, I need to spend more time in Tods. No, it's just, that's really, you know, it's really, just so interesting to hear, hear more about that artistic artistic community there and, and kind of wanting to kind of engage in, in, in kind of art and experiences that, don't kind of fit into a prescribed expectation of what the countryside embodies in that way, I think that's yeah, thank you so much for sharing, sharing about that.

Natalie Sharp 47:33

Yeah, I've just remembered as well, someone that I met a while ago described it, and this person is American, they described it as a queer Sesame Street, which I thought was really accurate [both laugh].

Bella Milroy 47:47

Oh, my God, that is, wow, that's like, such a strong, that gives such a strong sense, I think with like.

Natalie Sharp 47:55

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 47:56

That's perfect.

Natalie Sharp 47:58

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 47:59

Brilliant. And so also you are a member of Ebert Studios. Ebor Studios.

Bella Milroy 48:07

Ebor yeah, yeah.

Bella Milroy 48:08

Which is in Littleborough, which is, is that the next town over from you?

Natalie Sharp 48:13

Pretty much, yeah. Yeah. It's it's like to two train stops along from Todmorden. Yeah, going towards Manchester.

Bella Milroy 48:23

Okay and and just for audiences, Ebor Studios is an artist-led organisation that provides exhibitions, events and workshops via a contemporary gallery, community garden and public arts programme. Could you tell me a little bit about what's it like being a part of Ebor Studios?

Natalie Sharp 48:42

So yeah, Ebor's great. It is, I've been there, pretty much, I think maybe for the whole time pretty much that I've lived up here I've, I've I've had a space at Ebor and because it's because it's artist run, again, it goes back to this, whole sort of democracy egalitarian system which I'm really down with. So, for example, like I'm on the board for the events committee, so we get to decide what the gallery space gets used for, and then we have an amazing programme manager who's also an incredible artist called Maryanne, who runs a really brilliant programme and sort of you know, does a lot of fundraising and stuff for Ebor and what it means is that we ended, we, I, I was, me and a bunch of other artists, were able to use the gallery space for a month to just have a think about our work so and get paid for it as well. So so yeah, I was in the gallery space, which is called Gallery FRANK. It's named after the the grandad, he's dead now but that was, it was, it was his, he was a, oh god, I don't even know what it was, I think it was a woodworking space, anywhere, so I was in Gallery FRANK for like a month, working out the Spume performance and what it might be. So just to have, to be in like a 3d space, you're able to like spatially design and understand the world that you're trying to create, much better. And I opened it up as a kind of presentation for anyone that could come into this, into the gallery FRANK, take their shoes off, you've got a popcorn and herbal tea. But the whole floor was covered in recliners and soft foam floors. And I even brought a bed into there as well, there was like a reading room, which was all Spume based. And people could just, any any of the Ebor or even people from outside, come in and take the shoes off and just lie and be in the space. And then on the ceiling, there was like a sea, like this, the ceiling is the sea basically, that was projected onto and in this instance, it was like, just this like really thin, plastic stuff that decorators use when they're painting walls to keep things clean. And I use that because I mean, I've had it for ages and I wanted to like recycle it. But it

sort of sounds a bit like the sea, so like when you lie down on the floor in there, you're able to like, look above and see the sea and it would have watery projections on it. And so Ebor is really good at like fostering and sort of allowing artists to come in and use the space and, you know, basically like it's a place where I can go and experiment with with different ideas that I'm having. Erm, sort of next to the gallery, I have my studio and I share that with another musician, composer, artist person called Sophie Cooper. And yeah, so I've got like a desk space in there as well and to be fair, I haven't really been there that much because I've been in my, where I am right now at home, in my sound sound studio, which needs to be like a, kind of a quiet acoustically healthy space. So I'm really again, this is another joy of like, getting out of London and living in the place like Tod is that like, I'm able to afford, you know, to have two Studios in London is just like, you know, I'm not [Natalie laughs] that's not, that wouldn't be possible for someone from my background so, so yeah, so so Ebor's great and like it's, and they affiliate with really great artists as well. And it's like a really sort of rich programme of stuff and they've got a billboard projects outside so there's like a, an always forever changing billboards and like you said, a really beautiful community garden where they have like beekeeping workshops, and yeah, it's it's, it's brilliant. I love it. I know, I should go down there more, really, but I'm not gonna give myself a hard time, for not being there.

Bella Milroy 53:30

No. And does does Ebor, do you feel like Ebor engages specifically does it feel like it engages with its rural surroundings and the creative communities that are that are based there? Do you feel like there's, they do that in a particularly interesting way? Is there, is there any kind of points of that, that that make that particularly accessible for disabled artists?

Natalie Sharp 53:58

Yeah, so I think that just that the nature of it being where it is, just inherently makes it a place where you can go and engage with the rural setting that it's in because, it's just on the very edge of the Calder Valley. There's quite a few artists in there as well, that are very much sort of thinking of the landscape and the environment like, this one artist who is a forager, and does a lot of sort of traditional Yorkshire/Lancastrian folk songs. There's another artist who, who I think they already mentioned called Maryanne, who is also autistic, I think or neurodivergent I should say, and she makes work around the, there's a lot of mills around here, so she, she's been making work around, called, Any work that wanted doing, I think and it's about using old mill machinery and tape loops to sort of like remember, or like as a form of like remembering the sort of the mill history of this whole area. In terms of accessibility, I think they're trying their best but, but it's, it's like a bit of a kind of work in progress. So like, they have ramps, and they have a disabled toilet, and the whole of the ground floor and the garden is accessible. However, the upstairs floors are not accessible because it's, it's stairs, and you know, they've put in handrails, and I mean, even stuff like I have, I can't be in environments with fluorescent strip lighting. So like I've, you know, there's stuff like that, that I will say to them, you know, make sure that there's no strip lights on in these areas. And they're very, you know, they're really understanding and accommodating of those things. But with the nature of the building with it being an old mill, it's like, with them being like an independently ran organisation. Yeah, so like, they're they're doing as much as they can but, but I always think there's more that can be done with, with everything like this. So you know.

Bella Milroy 56:33

Yes, yeah. But that's interesting that they're, they're aware and open to that. And, you know, I guess, you know, inviting you to spend a month making a project like Spume, talking about wanting to make art laying down, like engaging with disabled artists and the value of their making and the ways in which they make I think, is just one of the most incredible things that organisations can do in terms of the the learning and the investment in their own infrastructures into how to better support artists, in general, I think is surely surely simply your presence there, you know, the work you're making, hopefully, that that has a positive impact in their in their ways of doing things.

Natalie Sharp 57:22

Yeah, I think it does. And I think like, you know, there are other disabled and neurodiverse artists at Ebor as well. And like some of them are making work about that as well. So it is, yeah, they're really I think they're really like open and up for it, I would say.

Bella Milroy 57:42

Well, it's been really interesting hearing you talk about Todmorden, and where you're based in Ebor and the kinds of ways in which that's facilitated a different level of accessibility within your making, that perhaps hasn't been there since, since before you were, you moved there. Would you say that's right?

Natalie Sharp 58:03

Yeah, I agree. I totally agree. And I think it's, it's more that also, like, I would say, I, I almost haven't really had the capacity or the language for it until I moved up here. And again, until the pandemic really, like, there was probably like a big part of me that I would, I wouldn't have even had the gumption or the confidence to describe, self described my, you know, as as a disabled body, you know, I would just say, well I have these forms of chronic pain, but like, but like, I think moving out of London and coming up here and the pandemic happening and all of that, and that the, just the act of slowing down is like, oh okay, so yeah, this is this is where I'm at, and this is what's going on for my body and, you know, so yeah.

Bella Milroy 58:59

Oh, that's wonderful that that's, that's facilitated that for you. And really, and really generous of you to share. Thank you so much. So, you connected with this project via an open call to connect with global majority disabled artists who were rurally based. Just for audiences, the open call, aim to reach, excuse me, the open call aimed to reach artists, learn about their practices and gain a deeper understanding of how they cope, survive, thrive in rural settings. We wanted to make sure that the, that global majority artists were included in this work as part of the project's mission to broaden the current understanding of what the countryside embodies, who experiences it and what kind of art is made there. Would you kindly share your thoughts about what this process was like for you?

Natalie Sharp 59:52

Yeah, so um, the process was fairly straightforward. The, I found out about it on Instagram and it was, there was a site, I don't know if you've even heard of them called, I don't really, I don't really like the name. It's called Starving Artists Opportunities.

Bella Milroy 1:00:14

Okay.

Natalie Sharp 1:00:15

And they, they advertised it, so I clicked on their link, but in order to see that, so there's a bit of irony here, because in order to see the opportunity, you click on the link of Starving Artists Opportunities, and then it takes you to a page that's like, well you've got to pay to see this opportunity [Natalie laughs]. So I was like, okay, this is kind of, kind of continuing the starving artists sort of aesthetic if you like. And so I just did a bit of digging, and I found, well, on the top of it, it said Further Afield at Level, so I was able to find it on the website directly. And that's how I applied for it. So once I applied for it, it was it was relatively straightforward.

Bella Milroy 1:01:03

Yeah. And do you feel like this was a useful or meaningful way of connecting with global majority artists? And you can speak really freely here, that's, yeah.

Natalie Sharp 1:01:14

Yeah, totally like, I would say, so like, I tend to, like, go for things that like, really sing to me. So like, I think it mentioned about being in a rural setting, and also being a disabled artist. So I thought, well, I'll definitely go for that because it's, you know, those are the things that I am and it's very much like my, the especially Spume is very much about those things as well. So it's like, okay, well, that's, that's a bit of a no brainer, really. I would say though, like, in like, more, sort of, broadly speaking, when arts institutions and organisations put up listings, and they just put up, open call, it kind of, I feel like they, the onus is on us to sort of do the work if you like, and we're the ones that kind of, you know, end up having to sort of, like, put together an application, and, you know, you're not getting paid for that time, and you know, if you are learning disabled or autistic or, however, you know, it might be more difficult for you to do all those things. And, you know, I know a lot of institutions say, well, you could do a video application, but again, that might not be something you know, I'm not able to do a video application so, yeah, I would say that like, the nature, or the or the sort of the language can be a bit of a boundary, when institutions put up, you know, they use phrases like open calls, or like pitches or stuff like that, it's okay, this, this is this is going to involve, like work that I'm not going to get paid for. And, you know, however many people who are going to apply for this, I might not even stand a chance, and I might not even get any feedback. And it's like, well, that's just free labour, you know, happening. So yeah.

Bella Milroy 1:03:18

Yeah, it's really challenging isn't it, with with that kind of, yeah, wanting to, you know, respond to things that like, float your boat, that you're interested in, that you think would be appropriate, and then also, yeah, recognising the amount of time and labour and, which goes unpaid, you know, it is it's, yeah, I think that was, that was really helpful feedback on on that process. I think a part of what we included in that was people that applied, people that shared their information with us are going to receive copies of books from people who were part of the programme.

Natalie Sharp 1:04:03

Oh, that's a good idea.

Bella Milroy 1:04:05

Yeah. So you will be getting, you will be getting, as someone who who, shared, shared shared with us via the open call, you there'll there'll be a book on the on its way to you, as a small, a small token of appreciation of the of the unpaid, unpaid work that goes into that. But you know, even then, you know, that's like, you really, it needs to be more streamlined, it needs to be more straightforward.

Natalie Sharp 1:04:30

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 1:04:31

It's definitely something that, you know, going forward, I'd like to kind of carry out in it, you know, I'd love to be able to, like I say, be able to streamline that and find other ways of reaching people we don't know about, that don't necessarily require a lengthy form or something like that, you know.

Natalie Sharp 1:04:49

Yeah yeah, I think that's it. I think it's like making that, making this process of application as streamlined as possible like, in the, in the last sort of three weeks or so I've done like, I would say, maybe four, more applications. So I've done quite a lot. Didn't get two of them, you know, they're not able to provide any feedback and it's just sort of like, it's, you know, I think I'm maybe a bit better at handling [Natalie laughs] rejection now as, with all that kind of stuff, but, you know, it's still, it's still too much. It's still like, too much work, you know. So, the more streamlined or like, just, I don't know, maybe like, the easier or like the sort of the nicer the experience of applying the better really.

Bella Milroy 1:05:42

Yes, yeah.

Natalie Sharp 1:05:43

Yeah, there's, there's, there's, I'm sure that there are ways like, you know, offering, offering a book or offering, just more like so that the the people applying don't have to do all of the work for free would be, would be good.

Bella Milroy 1:06:00

Yeah. Yes [Natalie laughs], I think that I, agree with that. I agree with all of it [both laugh]. And and, yeah, thank you for it, thank you for sharing, sharing your, your kind of experience of what that was like. And, you know, it was it was wonderful coming across your work through through that. Even even though, even with the the flaws of that, that initial open call. When, when working in curatorial roles, when I'm collaborating with art organisations, I'm always really trying to strive to ensure that I can trust the art orgs I work with, to offer the most accessible and flexible, and hopefully enjoyable working experiences possible for disabled artist. It's something I really try and do as much as I possibly can. But it's really hard to know how to trust whether or not arts organisations are genuinely invested in wanting to make things better for a margin, for the marginalised artists they work with. And it can sometimes feel like those seemingly good intentions are just hollow and tokenistic and they actually fail to invest in the process of working with these artists in a meaningful and supportive way.

Natalie Sharp 1:07:16

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 1:07:16

And often with really harmful consequences. And I'd like to ask you, what, what signals do you need to get to know that this is a space or an opportunity, or an organisation that you can trust in this way? What are some of the things you need to.

Natalie Sharp 1:07:29

Yeah, it's so important. I feel like this is like, the most important question in a way. Yeah, so what signals I think, I mean, it kind of comes down to the who were whoever the person is, whoever your point of contact is, and who you're dealing with, and like, what, what their forms of communication are. So like, for example, with *Everyone* Here, I knew that they were good people to work with, when they were like, I said to them a while I don't do Zoom, so like, they didn't even bat an eyelid or ask anything, they were just like, okay well, let's let's make this, let's make this possible. And they were like, okay, so obviously, like, we'll pay for your, your transport or whatever, and we'll, and I sent them through my access rider and all of that kind of stuff. And we had like a meeting in person. And so and it was just having them having the the initial meeting in person just made it so much more personal, like, so I think it's to do with, like, whether the people within the organisation who are your point of contact are able to really like listen and really understand what your needs might be, and work with them. And, you know, just and also like harness them, like another really good example is there's a place over, an arts, an arts space over in Newcastle called Cobalt Studios, who work in a similar way really, like they, they make sure that everyone is, eats together before a performance and they make sure that like, there is like enough rest time before, during and after. And like they'll they'll proactively, like ask you like, you know, what are some of the things that you think you might need and just simple stuff like, you know, checking into, on like, you know, what your energy levels are like, and so stuff like that, and I think you just you end up just having a bit of an instinct, or a bit of a sort of a nose for like, you know, are you are you a decent human being or not, it's sort of like, and again, like, I don't know whether you can do that so much over like a video call. But I think you can get like, you can just get a vibe for someone's like energy, you know, when you meet them, like you just get a good vibe from them. So.

Bella Milroy 1:10:14

Yeah

Natalie Sharp 1:10:15

I think a lot of it is, is that you just have to kind of go with your gut really.

Bella Milroy 1:10:20

Yes.

Natalie Sharp 1:10:20

Your gut instinct.

Bella Milroy 1:10:21

Yes. And that's, I think on a, if you only hear that expression on a surface level it can, that that can be, you know, yeah, go with your gut, okay cool. Actually, that's such a powerful thing for disabled people to do, isn't it because we live in a non disabled world that tells us we're wrong and bad everyday, and tells us that, to go against our gut everyday. And I think kind of like, you know, thinking about listening to that gut instinct of, of how the, how this experience is, you know, coming across, and how these people are coming across to you is like a really powerful kind of thing to be really mindful of as disabled artists. I think that it's really, really difficult to, to actually kind of act upon because it's so hard, especially in really challenging working environments. But it is, that's that's kind of, you know, trusting, trusting that gut instinct, and yeah.

Natalie Sharp 1:11:29

Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, it's sort of, I don't know. I mean, it's almost like you could sort of treat it like a dating profile in a way [both laugh], like, you just in the, just in the sense that like, I don't know, you can kind of like, understand someone's like, atmosphere and mood and like, vibe, from like, checking out their profile or wherever, it's sort of the same when like, someone gets in touch or like, reaches out to you, you're like, okay do I like this person's vibe, you know, like [Natalie laughs], I'm not like, am I attracted to them?

Bella Milroy 1:12:08

No totally.

Natalie Sharp 1:12:08

But just like, are they a good human being?

Bella Milroy 1:12:11

Yeah.

Natalie Sharp 1:12:12

It's just a human, a human connection, you know, that's, that's kind of all you can do really is like, just leave it to your body to, like, tell you what to do next.

Bella Milroy 1:12:23

Yeah. I think and again, I think it's, it's, it's one of those really overlooked, you know, and it's something that you and I talked about when we, when we first spoke, about that kind of like, the overlooked, you know, nature of the communications of a collaboration and how that, how that comes about. And like, just the difference it can make when you get an email from someone who is really speaking the same kind of language as you, is just, it's so powerful.

Natalie Sharp 1:12:52

Yeah

Bella Milroy 1:12:52

And it transforms a collaborative experience like that. And I think organisations and lots of, you know, other kind of collaborative things, maybe forget that actually, you know, just just an email alone can make or break something in a really positive way.

Natalie Sharp 1:13:10

Yeah, totally, totally. And it's also about, like, I guess, being an ally, and sort of like being close to making sure that there are people within the organisation that have some kind of lived experience as well I think, because then you just, they just inherently get it, you know.

Bella Milroy 1:13:29

Yeah.

Natalie Sharp 1:13:30

So yeah.

Bella Milroy 1:13:31

Well, thank you so much for sharing with me about that. And and also, knowing that the the, there are some really positive experiences that you're having of working with, with rural arts orgs. You know, *Everyone* Here sounds fantastic. And I'm really excited to see what, what comes of that collaborative work you're making at the moment.

Natalie Sharp 1:13:53

Yeah, totally. I'm excited, too. I mean, I don't, I genuinely don't know how it's gonna manifest at the moment. But like, I don't feel anxious about it because, you know, I just feel very like, safe working with these people. So it's all good.

Bella Milroy 1:14:08

Oh, that's brilliant. That's so great. That's exactly what you want.

Natalie Sharp 1:14:11

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 1:14:11

I feel like, that's all I ever want to happen for disabled artists is to like, you know, feel feel like the art you're making is inspiring, and you're having a good time doing it.

Natalie Sharp 1:14:20

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 1:14:20

And you're looking after each other and it's yeah. Oh, that's brilliant.

Natalie Sharp 1:14:22

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 1:14:25

Great. Well, I think I'd just like to finish off with just a couple of last points, and I always have this as like a last point, that feels really like always just a little question, but it's like, it's like, quite a big question really.

Natalie Sharp 1:14:38

Is it a can of worms? [both laugh]

Bella Milroy 1:14:41

Yeah, probably a whole other podcast episode dedicated to that. But I guess maybe in the context of our conversation around Todmorden and you know, about Todmorden being the queer Sesame Street that it is [Natalie laughs] and your, you know, really positive and accessible experience of that, as a disabled artist, within that creative community. You know, what, what would you, what are the things that you think about when we when, when thinking about how we can foster more diverse, creative experiences in rural spaces for both audiences and artists alike? What what does that speak to you in that way?

Natalie Sharp 1:15:15

Erm oh, can you ask me that question again [Natalie laughs]?

Bella Milroy 1:15:23

What do you think we, that that is needed to foster more diverse creative experiences in rural spaces for both audiences and artists alike? I say it's a, it's a pretty big question.

Natalie Sharp 1:15:38

Yeah it's a big question, I think that's why I'm struggling a bit. What is needed to foster more?

Bella Milroy 1:15:45

I guess, if I think about, you know, the, you know, Todmorden in the way it is, we don't, we shouldn't expect all rural spaces to be Todmordens you know, every place is so different and offers a unique kind of nature of their creative communities. But I guess, how could, you know, there are so many rural creative scenes that exist, so exclusively on, you know, perhaps more expected artistic outputs, like, you know, landscape painting, and contemporary craft and things like that, and, which is all really important parts of, of art making, but also, sometimes hard to kind of, like, think about different kinds of art making that occurs in those spaces and how we could enhance.

Natalie Sharp 1:16:31

And yeah, I think I think it's to do with like it, again, it's, it sounds a bit basic, but it does actually just come back to the people because the people who are like, you know, fire starters, and who were like, you know, sort of leading by example, just make more people want to kind of follow suit in a way. So it's almost like, you, you need artists, who are already doing these things, in order to inspire other people and other audiences to be like, oh okay, so this has happened in here, maybe that is, like possible, where I live kind of thing. So it's almost like, yeah, you need a kind of, openness and like, like, almost

just an acceptance and an openness and an understanding, or, like, I sort of see it more as like a surrender in a way, like an allowance or giving in or a surrendering of my body to, to just sort of allow things to kind of happen. I think, like, on a more practical level, and I would say, I think there definitely needs to be, a deeper, wider, kind of understanding of what disability is, and look at it through the lens of, for example, like the social model of disability, and yeah, like having a better literacy around that is kind of, is important and needed. And yeah, I think I think it's those two things, I would say, I'm not sure that that fully answers the question, but like, I'm kind of struggling [both laugh] a little bit to, to, I don't know, have like a real sort of fine tuned idea. Because there's lots of things that are needed, I suppose.

Bella Milroy 1:18:49

Yes.

Natalie Sharp 1:18:49

And I'm sure like, when we get off this call, I'll be like, oh, yeah, there's this this and this but like, yeah.

Bella Milroy 1:18:56

As I say, it's a really, it's a really big question to ask it, and doesn't really have any kind of finite answer does it?

Natalie Sharp 1:19:04

No.

Bella Milroy 1:19:05

But it's always one I really like to ask the artists I'm talking to, because I think it's an important thing to think about when we're, when we're asking these questions about rurality and, and the kind of work that's made there and who gets to experience it and things like that. So yeah, that was a really brilliant, is really fantastic to hear, hear your thoughts on that question. Thank you for bearing with me on that slightly large way of ending [both laugh].

Natalie Sharp 1:19:33

I'm kind of curious to hear what all of the other artists have, how they've responded to that as well.

Bella Milroy 1:19:41

Yeah.

Bella Milroy 1:19:41

I look forward to hearing the responses.

Bella Milroy 1:19:41

Nice. And I guess lastly, which is a much more, an easier question to answer, which is, maybe just tell us just to finish off, what what's your favourite rural space that inspires you currently and what about that makes it your favourite?

Natalie Sharp 1:20:00

Ooooh, that's a good one. I'm only allowed to choose one. So I would probably say Ravenglass, where the sort of, Spume was born, which is the coastline, and it's a strange little hamlet, between, it's near Sellafield, which is like a nuclear power site in southwest Cumbria on the coastline. Erm, that's like, my, it's my kind of hidden place. It's the sacred place. It's like, the place that I go to, to like, reconnect with the land and reconnect with my body in doing so. So I, and I actually just, I was there at the weekend as well.

Bella Milroy 1:20:47

Oh wonderful.

Natalie Sharp 1:20:47

So um, I got in, I got in the sea, so it's sort of fresh in my, in my mind, so I would say, yeah, Ravenglass, but it'll probably change tomorrow [both laugh].

Bella Milroy 1:21:01

Oh Natalie, thank you so much for speaking with me today. It's been absolutely wonderful hearing more about your practice and exploring these kinds of questions about disability and rurality like this. Thank you so much for joining me.

Natalie Sharp 1:21:13

No, It's been a pleasure and a hoot. I've really enjoyed myself. So so thanks to you for making it so so nice. Nice and good [Natalie laughs].

Bella Milroy 1:21:24

Oh I'm so glad it's honestly been an absolute pleasure. So yeah, thank you so much.

Natalie Sharp 1:21:30

Of course, yeah.