

# Further Afield 2 Zoom Webinar

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

artists, disabled, abi, practice, studio, art, people, programme, space, centre, thinking, based, bella, conversation, creative, question, feel, loom, talking, big

## SPEAKERS

Bella Milroy, Abi Palmer, Level Centre

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**A** Abi Palmer 00:00

**L** Level Centre 01:22

Thank you so much for joining us this evening. I think we are about ready to go. So first of all, my name is Kerry Andrews, and I'm the Executive Director at LEVEL Centre and welcome to Further Afield. This is the second in a series of conversations curated by LEVEL's Artistic Associate, Bella Milroy, who is with us today. Before I hand you over to Bella, and our guest speaker Abi Palmer, and they're going to introduce themselves at that point. I just have a little bit of housekeeping and I'm also going to tell you just a little bit about LEVEL Centre for those of you who are new to us today. So first of all, I'm a middle aged white woman with dark curly hair. I'm working remotely at home, with a tall cupboard behind me and my pronouns are she/her. The conversation and question and answer session is estimated to last approximately an hour. We have two wonderful BSL interpreters with us today who alternate throughout the conversation. We have Sherry Eugene Hart, who you can see is currently signing and then we're also going to be joined by Erin Siobhan Hutching. In addition, we have a live transcription and closed captions available. But if you experience any difficulties throughout this webinar, we'll do our best to resolve any problems, so if you can let us know in the chat function. We ask that any questions you may have are put into the chat function, and at the end of the conversation, we'll do our best to answer as many as possible. Please note that by posting a question, there is no guarantee that it will be answered, or could be deemed similar to another question, or we may simply run out of time. When you post your question, it would be great to know if you're an artist or an organisation or representative of somewhere and whereabouts you're based. Please note that this conversation is being recorded and will be available on LEVEL Centre's website and other social media channels following this event. For those of you who do not know us, LEVEL Centre is a contemporary arts centre based in rural Derbyshire in Rowsley in the Peak District. We are a National Portfolio Organisation supported by Arts Council England and Derbyshire County Council. We work across visual, performing and digital arts practice. We currently have four freelance Artistic Associates which Bella, who has curated the Further Afield programme is one of them. We run performing and visual classes on site and online for learning disabled adults and support disabled artists through our residency

programme. Further information on what we do can be found at [levelcentre.com](http://levelcentre.com). We also host exhibitions, conferences and performances. The art that difference makes I'm now going to hand you over to Bella and Abi and they're going to introduce themselves and then Bella is going to start the conversation. Thank you and we hope that you learn something or inspired over the next hour. Over to you Bella.

B

### Bella Milroy 05:51

Hello, everybody. Thanks so much for that Kerry. I'm going to do an introduction of myself and the programme and then Abi and I are going to have a really nice chat through about some of the things we're going to be talking about this evening. For my image description, my pronouns are she/her. I am a white woman in my early 30s I've got an oval face, round cheeks pale white skin with a shaved buzzed cut hairstyle and round glasses. I'm also working from home where you can see a white wall with sofas and maybe some dogs in the background. So yes, my name is Bella Milroy. I'm a disabled artist based in my hometown of Chesterfield in Derbyshire not far from Rowsley where LEVEL Centre is based. And welcome to the second in a three part series of Further Afield exploring the practices of rurally based disabled artists and creatives. A really core aspect of my personal practice strives towards better visibility and the broader cataloguing of disabled artists across contemporary art. So getting the chance to apply that to my work here at LEVEL Centre was a really exciting opportunity, and one that I immediately thought of as connection with a number of people who now make up this programme of events. Getting the chance to talk to Abi this evening is a joy and I hope you all enjoy yourselves as well. The project in general seeks to find support and platform rurally based disabled artists and creatives, both on a local level here in Derbyshire and further afield too for those living rurally anywhere. We also want the project to be a way of not only capturing the existence of these disabled experiences and rural spaces but also as a way of creative tool sharing of disabled practices in this professional context as well. Also acknowledge the ways in which many people who fit into these categories of disabled and or artists may well not consider themselves as such, but this is a space to explore the many nuances of those experiences, and consider how we might well make rural creative spaces more accessible for everyone. Whilst we're really interested in connecting with and championing disabled artists that this project might be able to support and reach out to if you really have an interest in disability, arts and culture and have a desire to connect more with your rural art scene and this programme is very much for you. So in this particular session, we are focusing less on the where and more on the how. Exploring the details of contemporary studio practice as disabled artists. Disabled artists like so many marginalised groups aren't well catalogued as part of the canon, and this is even more so the case for rurally based disabled artists. This session is a reflection of this and whilst we aim to include as many rurally based artists as possible in the series, sometimes that simply hasn't always been possible. When considering this, I reflected upon some of the most significant moments in my own career, which undoubtedly, has to be the discussions and conversations I've had with other disabled artists. Regardless of your location, there are some universal experiences that all disabled artists face, and it is in this respect that I immediately thought of one of my favourite artists and a good friend of mine, Abi Palmer. Abi and I have spent many hours sharing pro tips and just general thoughtful insights into how we operate as disabled artists. I thought speaking with her today would make an invaluable contribution to the series. So today will be a kind of conversation of resource and tool sharing that I hope many of you will find helpful, interesting and thought provoking too. As we apply these more general insights into this particular focus of rurally based creative practices. So that's my intro out of the way. Abi, thank you so much for joining us this evening.

A

Abi Palmer 10:13

Thank you for having me.

B

Bella Milroy 10:16

Would you like to do a short visual description for us and just then we can get started?

A

Abi Palmer 10:21

Yeah, so I am a white woman, cisgender woman in my early 30s. I was just thinking about how old I am, 33 next week. I have short, bleached blonde hair, it's about bob length, and it's pulled back into a half knot, I guess. I'm wearing a black and white jumper and in the background behind me, it's kind of just a really messy bookshelf, and I have red lip gloss.

B

Bella Milroy 10:58

Lovely! Perhaps we could start off by maybe giving us a little window into what your practice consists of. What are the things that you're currently working on at the moment that you're thinking about?

A

Abi Palmer 11:16

Yeah, so at the moment, I was laughing at the irony of talking on a panel about rurally based artists, because I do live in a city London flat. I think something that is, can be quite universal for certain types of disability is an inability to access the outside world, no matter where you are. London has undoubtedly been a huge advantage for me in so many ways. In which I'm sure we'll talk about in my relationship with the art world. But during the pandemic in particular, my inability to leave the flat and access nature has become a huge obstacle and just accessing the outside world in general has always been quite complicated. So my practice at the moment has involved building small micro climates or kind of miniature forests for my indoor cat. I bought cats at an early stage in the pandemic to cope with my sense of isolation and inability to go outside and instantly found myself getting really absorbed in their world. Then sort of creating these boxes in which they might be able to feel that they could access the outside world. Then sort of zooming out from that and realising that I, just like the cat was sort of a human in a box. Trying to make my box feel more like an artificial outside environment by bringing cats into it and now my work is doing the same for them.

B

Bella Milroy 13:21

Yeah, I think that being able to witness that process of engaging with that new part of building your family and engaging trying to kind of broaden your horizons in what was a very very cramped set of circumstances. Yeah, like you say that is a kind of core fundamental part of both of our disabled experiences. Like I thought that was a really perfect way of summing up,

it's complicated leaving the house. I'm very excited to keep talking about the cats and the film and everything. It all just sounds really exciting. Especially because you're doing that seasonally, right? You're exploring that and there's a kind of seasonal nature to it. Is that right?

A

Abi Palmer 14:16

Yeah, at the moment the part of the project that I'm doing is called Abi Palmer invents the weather. It's a series of four films that are recreating weather sensations for my cat indoors that they will have never experienced outside. One of the aspects of it that I think will be quite familiar to you Bella in our relationship and friendship as artists is I've been keeping an audio diary, which has basically like prolonged voice notes to myself. Which is such a huge part of I think our mutual creative practice as artists discussing it. I guess this kind of gets into the nitty gritty already, but having a space that is context lives in which to have kind of an intimate discussion around creative ideas has been really invaluable. Both with discussing with other disabled artists in other parts of the world, but also I've then ended up having those conversations with myself and that becoming my practice also. It feels a bit like Derek Jarman's 'Modern Nature' these fragmented bits of story that I'm pulling together. I keep thinking about that, and I think that was also a book that you recommended to me, like that's quite nice.

B

Bella Milroy 15:45

Yes, I think we have spent quite a long time talking about that book because it is really relevant. In the combination of sick experiences of those cramped and limited horizons in which your attempts to engage in those wider worlds through this very disjointed and fragmented way. I think your description of what you're thinking about and making at the moment alongside 'Modern Nature' is a perfect kind of embodiment of what we're going to be talking about this evening. Highly recommend that book, if anybody has yet to read it. I read that last year and it was wonderful. So I guess one of the things that we spent a lot of time talking about last year and something that I think would be a really essential tool and resource, is sharing conversations of what an ideal studio space and bodies when they've been with chronic illness. I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about your current studio setup, because you actually moved your studio space to your home not that long ago. That's right, Yeah?

A

Abi Palmer 17:04

Yeah, I did. I just did my tax returns again this year and remembered one of the main reasons why I moved my studio last year was because I did my tax returns and realised that just the amount of money it costs to have the studio space in London, and my incapacity and inability to actually get there was becoming a real hindrance. It's really interesting, the moment when I took on a studio was the point where I saw myself as valid of being a practising artist. It was a real wrench initially to say, well I don't think this is working for me. I now share my spare room with my partner, he is working from home teaching on zoom at the moment. While I am filming and making, currently this disgusting, quite smelly meat cloud. It's not meat, but it looks a bit like rotting meat. Made of foraged autumnal elements that I've been fermenting in jars for ages, and it's in some ways it looks really beautiful to me, and my partner is horrified! He's been very accepting of a lot of the things I've had in my house as a as an artist. An entire

casino at one point, but this disgusting cloud has really horrified him in brand new and interesting ways that have ended up working themselves into the movie! The movie I'm making, because well he's he's ended up being a storyline in it. Unfortunately Paul got in.

B

Bella Milroy 19:06

Oh, wow! Yeah, I mean, I think it's real though, isn't it? Like I think one of the things that I'll often share with you is just the eternal struggle of my studio space being my laundry room and where my cat eats, sleeps and goes to the toilet. I love my cat very dearly and I'm glad she's in my life! And you know, it's the only other upstairs room that we have. I myself have also tried having a studio outside of my home, here locally. You know, on a really practical level, it really just comes down to are you going and are you using it? And I wasn't because as we have said, leaving home is complicated when you look at chronic illness. We've talked about the kind of pros and cons of that compromise. A) having more than just one room other than your bedroom, the additional space to kind of shift into a workspace like that with greater accessibility. But also, there are some greater compromises that come with that as well. There are sometimes frustrations that are greater than others. I think it's also fair to kind of reflect upon this, given the nature of both of our practices being fairly interdisciplinary and broad ranging. I feel like there's not many spaces I couldn't work in, in that respect, I could make things happen. Of course, if I was a potter or you know I needed a dark room or something like that, you know, that would be a very different kind of situation to figure out. Where do you feel like you're at at the moment? We were talking the other day about how you went into the studio, and it was the first time you've been back and there was some sad feelings, but also feelings of like, Oh, yes, I realised why.

A

Abi Palmer 21:51

Yeah. Sorry to cut in. Definitely, I had to go back to one of the reasons I left my studio was something that happens a lot in London. And I guess a lot in the world, in general at the moment is studios are being knocked down and turned into luxury flats. That is a real problem, particularly in London it's happening at a faster and faster rate. So when my previous studio moved, the new premises were further away, and slightly less accessible for a number of reasons. Even though they were really accommodating and hoping to work with me, I just felt that it wasn't tenable. I went back to visit the printing press Page Masters, they do some really amazing work with risograph printing. It was really emotional to see this incredible space and remember what it's like. Something that I hadn't realised before I had a studio practice in London was, because I'm not a professionally trained artist, I didn't go to art school. I hadn't had that opportunity to kind of meet and collide with people and have crits and even just informal problem solving over a cup of tea where you say "Oh God I'm really struggling with this one thing" and somebody says "Oh, have you thought about X?" or "have you thought about Y?". Seeing how other people think and how they work, I really felt like that was an important part of my experience of living in London, and making a community of like minded people where you can kind of be the weirdo that you are. I can be openly queer, I feel safe, I can state my access needs and have them listened to and that was there. It's very bittersweet to have had to have left that, but at the same time I didn't regret how cold it was. After a day of being there I was in quite a lot of pain and felt like, oh, the idea of being in this space is really

important to me, but how else can I access that? Now I know those things about who my community is, where I feel I fit? How else can I access that without having to physically go into a space that doesn't work for my body everyday?

B

Bella Milroy 24:35

Yes! I think you touched upon something that I often think about a lot. Whenever I'll be in a teaching spaces with art students or considering my own experience of going to art school, understanding that the best resource that you have are the other artists around you. It's those really special places like shared studio spaces and the cheap studios that you see everyday in art schools as well. Like you say those kind of colliding moments that aren't really planned or scripted or seemingly important at the time. Those are the things that I miss most, not being able to access those spaces. I think essentially that's why I wanted to plan this evening the way it was, because I wanted to open up the ways in which we have built these kinds of virtual extensions of those collisions. Where we have those conversations, sharing those voice notes is absolutely some of those like mundane, boring, fascinating, wonderful exchanges of critical thinking and greater understanding of what we're talking about and feeling and all the rest of it. I wonder how it has affected your making, having your studio at home, because it's been about a year now that you've been?

A

Abi Palmer 26:27

Yeah, it's been about a year. So I guess what I should say is I had a studio practice for a few years and before that I lived in Cambridge. I wrote this essay while I was living in Cambridge, it's called 'No Body to Write With: Intrusion as a Manifesto for D/deaf and Disabled Poets'. It's in a book called 'Stares and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back' and at that point in my life, my practice was very poetry centred. Partly by default, because it's something that you can do from anywhere, you don't need a studio practice for that. As my body became more and more ruptured and fragmented so did my practice and became more interdisciplinary. The main thesis of this essay, I was thinking about it a lot before today's session and I've been thinking about it a lot in general recently. The idea is that basically that as a disabled body you've experienced so many intrusions that stop you from having a practice that works in the conventional creative way. In which you're meant to practice everyday, get into an ongoing flow and kind of be completely absorbed into your work and that's the only way you could possibly have any kind of practice, either written or visual or anything in between. I felt like such a fraud even just as a poet, because I can't even hold a pen every day, you know that is impossible. So I was thinking about all the ways in which the disabled experience intrudes upon your ability to conform to that kind of very capitalistic idea of what a practice is. I was thinking a bit about Virginia Woolf's book 'A Room of One's Own' and this idea that the dream is always to have a room of your own from which to work in, in order to develop these ideas. I kept on thinking about what use is a room of your own if you can't sit up straight in the room, or climb the stairs to get to the room, or when you're in the room all you're thinking about is the pain in your back, or the next medication you take, or a carer has to keep coming into the room to check up on you, or you're having intrusive thoughts that stop you from being absorbed in your work in the room. I sort of started making this argument that isn't entirely fleshed out yet, but that if it's the case that as a disabled artists or a disabled poet, we don't get to have those kind of consistent experiences. We should sort of use the intrusions of our body. We should find ways to identify those and use those as the starting point from which to have a practice

because only by understanding the limitations of our body or how the intrusions impact us can we begin to have a practice that actually works for us. I before that, I'd done a lot of pretending that I wasn't sick, you know, like going to book launches and standing up and being in pain or writing and not telling people that it was hard to hold a pen. Writing essays and not leaving gaps you know, and after that my work became more fragmented, but also more multi sensory because my body is multi sensory, you know, all my experiences are multi sensory. Not having a studio practice, I started working within the confines of little boxes and creating tiny little studios if that makes sense?

B

**Bella Milroy 30:48**

Absolutely! I think it's just really striking to kind of hear that said out loud now! I've kind of existed in making work in this way for some time now, you know, there's still part of me that is still trying to tier to that entirely separate holistic space in which the art making happens. I bring my body to that room, and the thing occurs in that space, and then I leave it behind. I was running a workshop yesterday with Raisa Kabir who's another favourite artists of mine, who is also a disabled artist, and she was running one of her amazing loom building workshops. I have it here actually. Where we were building these like clay looms, and they're beautiful and it was really interesting because I found myself building, it was just a recording of it between Raisa and I so it was just us two. And as I was building the loom, I kept trying to be like, Okay, so the lines go from A to B and across like this don't they? They need to go that way? How many? How far apart? And which way? like this? It was just amazing, the part of why this workshop is just so stunning is because Raisa is wanting to use the loom as an opportunity to rebuild a body in your own shape and apply a kind of way of finding structures in a way that is from your body. That is beautiful, and yeah it's a really stunning workshop. So I was there still trying to kind of apply this fix standardise way of doing the weaving on this blob of clay. I think it's really interesting, the parallels with that because I feel like perhaps I'm still trying to apply that standardised idea of where the art should be made and how it should happen to the interwoven blob of my life.

A

**Abi Palmer 33:09**

Yeah, that makes perfect sense! Yeah, I also really love Raisa's work, she's also in the Stares and Whispers book that I mentioned.

B

**Bella Milroy 33:19**

Oh really? How interesting!

A

**Abi Palmer 33:22**

Yeah, I think I write about her writing in that essay.

B

**Bella Milroy 33:28**

Oh wow...

Oh wow.

A

Abi Palmer 33:28

Yeah, I saw pictures of your loom on her Instagram yesterday and was already very moved by it. It's interesting that you talk about that physicality because of the need for it to conform and be this thing, there's such a humanity and fleshiness to the loom. Its imperfections and nature itself isn't, I mean, the thing that makes a tree beautiful is the fact that the lines are surprising, right? You know, and the thing that makes a mountain scape beautiful are the rocks that you don't expect to be there and the bits that catch your breath. I think it's really interesting that so much of art is structured around cities which are designed in these sort of straight lines with these big buildings and we're expected to have this very straight performance of a very capitalist model. I think Tracey Emin has just opened or talked about opening some studios in Margate. It's meant to be like a low cost studio space and she's been very emphatic that the artists who joined the studios don't have a part time job because they should be doing art and dedicated to doing art full time and there's been such a big backlash to that remark!

B

Bella Milroy 35:15

Yeah, it's interesting, I think about sometimes the way that idea comes from ease of kind of like, a legacy of the art school model, like output, output output. This incredible saturation of an immersion of the thinking, the making, the being with others and all the rest of it. Which I feel it in my heart like it is amazing, like it is amazing. Also, it doesn't add here to spaces beyond those moments in that is not real, the way it is outside of that. It's interesting talking to you, given that that hasn't been your background of how you're still trying to shake off those ideas of adhering to that kind of defined standard of making. I guess one of the things that I'd really like to talk about is, well I just want to ponder about is, if you're based rurally and you want to you have those collisions with others, with other creators, with other like minded artists in that way. I struggle sometimes to consider how to think about opportunities or solutions to finding those networks, building those networks beyond the wonder that is online spaces. I mean, you and I know each other through the wonder of the internet. Maybe it doesn't need to be a bit like, how can we think of another thing? I don't know, what do you think about community building?

A

Abi Palmer 37:13

I think that definitely, for a long time when I was living outside of London, I mean, I've always lived in a city, Cambridge isn't exactly rural but it has its own little bubble that that feels sometimes quite disconnected. I'm also very aware that is a very different experience from living in a small town or a village or even more rurally than that where there's nobody around who might be your age or have similar interest to you. I think that can be a uniquely difficult experience but the people I know who are in those situations often find Facebook as one of it. I think it's about finding platforms that also do what you need to do. There are differences between social media platforms, and I think my first entry into kind of activism, disabled activism, disabled poetry, disabled arts was via big conversations on Facebook, but in very specific groups. Shape Arts set up a disabled artists networking group, which I think is very well inhabited by disabled artists from all over the UK and beyond and has a quite a big rural presence, I believe. I think on Twitter, there's a movement of disabled poets who live in rural

spaces, and are interested in reframing for instance, what nature poetry looks like, and which is often based around the romanticization of walking. So Polly Rowena Atkin, I think is pulling together a really great series of resources of disabled artists, exploring the idea of mountains and the Lake District, which I think is a really exciting project. This doesn't answer the question outside of social media.

B

Bella Milroy 39:39

I mean, maybe it's a really important thing that we don't need to kind of be like, okay, because maybe that's actually a very accessible way of people finding the community and building on those networks, that upon which other other things can occur. You know?

A

Abi Palmer 40:03

I think there are some really great resources, like art centres that do a good job of bringing people in from wider places as well. I just joined Spike Island and Bristol have an Associate Artists group that you can apply to join and attend crits online and Wysing Arts Centre just outside of Cambridge have that. I think wherever you live, there will be a nearby town or city, even if it doesn't feel very physically near to you that has an outreach programme. For instance LEVEL, like that's doing the work to reach out and signal to you and I think tapping into those and signalling back and asking, especially if you live locally contacting them, and if you're not sure what programmes they have, explaining your situation, where you're based. Often there's funding available for that which is really important and is an under tapped use of funding. Often people want to reach out and don't often know where to look.

B

Bella Milroy 41:24

Definitely. I think there are lots of reasons why people don't feel able to or have capacity to or have ways to articulate signalling hello, I'm here. I think that is like the confidence to think that they want to hear from you, that bigger organisations even like quite big named ones, I think there is an impression that they've got this list of people. Obviously they do, you know, where do you wanna start with gatekeeping of all that kind of stuff. But absolutely, reaching out, people do want to hear about it and hear about you and especially if you're coming from unexpected avenues of your practice that isn't a straightforward cool studio.

A

Abi Palmer 42:20

I think taking conversations off social media into more intimate group like what you and I are part of our WhatsApp group of what 5 or 4 artists? In various levels, various types of practice. We can exchange and share in much more intimate ways and then communicating through voice notes becomes this kind of floating ideas base. It's been helpful for navigating the complexities of disability, but also solving creative problems in innovative ways. I think finding your tribe and having the courage to say hey, would you be interested in pursuing a friendship beyond the public sphere? Obviously being careful and bounded around who you are approaching. Making sure that you do have boundaries, but I think that we do live in an age where some of my most intimate friendships are with people I've never shared a room with and

never touched. I would, like the sound of your breath or like the intimate sounds of your house and I think that is the kind of creativity that comes from these free floating very long WhatsApp voice notes. Sometimes, like up to like what an hour long voice notes? Where you're kind of thinking, I think those can create those unexpected collisions in a way that no other medium could so that's the boat the best medium for both of our bodies for instance. That's not the only way but it's one of them. I think that's right, and it is a valid way, isn't it? It's about remembering amongst our frustrations for accessing other physical spaces, the validity and wonder of those spaces and how we do that as well. Isn't it? And that would be cool. Thank you.

**L** Level Centre 44:47

I'm really sorry. But if there's any more sort of wrap up because we're approaching that time of the question and answer session. It goes so quickly, doesn't it when you're in those fruitful conversations. Is there anything else you want to ask Abi before we move into the question and answer session that you haven't covered that you want to cover?

**B** Bella Milroy 45:06

There's a few things in my notes, but I think that they could occur within the q&a that would fit well, so let's maybe have some questions and then we can possibly come back to you. I think even just talking about the rurally based artist that you referenced there Abi, I think that's invaluable to bring. Thank you!

**L** Level Centre 45:24

Well I feel like we could listen for hours, there's just so much to talk about and I feel like you're only just starting but then you get to that point where we're starting the q&a. That was really brilliant. So I've got a few starter questions to kick us off. So I'm going to put this to Abi first, then Bella feel free to answer after. What would be the one bit of advice you would offer to disabled artists who are finding their feet in the art world?

**A** Abi Palmer 45:55

I think, don't be afraid to try things that work from the space you most commonly inhabit. If all you can do is lie in bed, bring the art to you. Can you make something in, I mean, I'm not saying a matchbox because that's that's where I started, but a scrapbook? Or are there any small spaces that you can inhabit that can fit around you? How can you use a flare up day or how can you find space in your own confinement to explore your creativity? And don't be afraid to share those experiments on social media.

**B** Bella Milroy 46:44

Yeah, definitely. Really, really great points. I would say, I think part of what was really powerful about leaning into my creative practice in the early parts of my disabled experience was allowing that to really validate, and it allowed me to value my time and my existence in a really

special way. That my creative viewpoint of the way I was experiencing the world brought kind of...It's more than it's not, it didn't bring like meaning to my life, but it allowed value in a way that wasn't me they're going 'Oh, I should be at school right now, but I'm in bed, or I should be doing XY now but I'm really ill'. There became a different kind of understanding of the way in which I existed in the world. I think making facilitated for that, so I think making in the sense of sometimes simply just thinking about things and it wasn't necessarily that I think my making wasn't based on outcomes or based on actual stuff, or drawings or whatever. It was creative interactions with my daily life that really brought a kind of sense of value to my existence in that way. I think that is how I have built up my career and I think those kind of fundamental creative interactions are to this day, a really core part of my thinking about everything. I think this is interesting and how do I exist within that? I think valuing your creative work in whatever formation it looks like is really, really important. Like we talked about earlier, not trying to adhere to the big stuff all the time and knowing that it's sometimes just the small things that are really important and that's really valuable, and a really valuable practice to kind of nurture. I think valuing how you're doing it already, regardless of what level you're at or what stage you're at.

L

Level Centre 49:11

Just a reminder to anyone that's joining us. If you have a question, please post it in the question and answer. So we have some more questions. So where are some good places for disabled artists to find helpful resources or people to speak to? Or if there was one social media account you would recommend to follow? What's your hot tips?

A

Abi Palmer 49:32

Oh, that's a good question. I really like following hashtags on Instagram, so 'DisabledArtists' is a really good hashtag. Any iteration of disabled artists on Instagram 'DisabilityArts', they're all really helpful hashtags. I think I've made a lot of friends via those accounts. Seeing what pops up.

B

Bella Milroy 50:10

Yeah, I again would emphasise what Abi was saying earlier about sharing your practice in whatever way that looks like. In previous years I had shared lots of things regularly and that kind of regular sharing was a really, really important part of how I built up my writing practice. Using Instagram captions for my writing practice was like really, really, really important in that kind of daily practice of writing like that. Some of the accounts that have really flourished under that have things like...Blue Bag Life is a really wonderful example of that that's kind of turned into a whole project in itself, from a series of essentially kind of like diary entries like that. Then also there's like other ways in which it doesn't have to be so...that's not a practice that I do at the moment in that way and sometimes it's not always possible for people to do that kind of constant visible sharing like that. My own website is, I feel sometimes my website is a little bit dusty, but it's just a simple Tumblr. I have a series of audio descriptions of written works, which I think are actually really lovely encounters, other ways of displaying your work like that. We're talking earlier about like valuing your work, not needing to be attached to a big art organisational name, or a big gallery name or a big degree name or whatever, you know. Like

having a Tumblr with a series of your work, I think that's a really valid and important way of displaying work that is very accessible to lots and lots of people. Also, I'd say in terms of like, following people. Yeah, I think Abi that was a really great point of following hashtags. I also think some spaces that aren't always like first point of call for that are catalogues. Disability Arts online have like their catalogue of disabled artists that are part of their archive. They're just like, I've commissioned artists based on just kind of scrolling through and engaging with those profiles and that's a really good place. There's lots of unexpected people that might just be like on your doorstep as well.

L

Level Centre 52:36

Brilliant. We've had another question and that says, How would you approach making new connections with other artists online? Which you've just kind of touched upon and somebody said they find it very hard to know whether people want to speak to them or not?

A

Abi Palmer 52:47

Oh, well, that is a really great question. So, I had a book published during the pandemic sanatorium. It was a really interesting thing because so many people reached out to me via DM on Twitter, emails from my website on Instagram DM, saying like, 'Oh thank you this has meant something to me', and I can tell you that not a single correspondence happened, where wasn't instantly moved and curious about the person who was contacting me. I don't have the capacity to always reply and form full relationships with all of those people, but I can tell you that if you write to someone and say I like your work...I've also done it myself, sent messages to people and been like real fan girl about it. So often, it's mutual, you know, and if it's not mutual, knowing that's okay. If they if they aren't able to reply or can't reply. I was thinking about the artist Lizzie Rose Quartz, who has unfortunately just passed away very recently and the fact that both of us spent so long on social media, circling each other and sending each other voice notes and being enamoured and in awe with each other and never managing to quite make it into the same room but like knowing that that was mutual and that mutual respect, it felt like a really beautiful and sad thing.

B

Bella Milroy 55:11

There are those big, big name accounts that you follow that have 10s of 1000s of followers. Again here we are like adhering to the standard of big accounts are big names, they're big people, they know what they're doing, they've got all their stuff together, they've got it all figured out, you know. I can't go and approach them, I can't go and speak to them or their like their stuff that's, and I think amongst the different numbers and how it's can be that way it can be quite overwhelming to kind of consider approaching someone that you can have a lot of admiration respect for like that. We are all in that space, kind of just talking about amazing stuff and thinking about amazing stuff too, your presence there, you're being there, you're thinking about it, you're engaging with it like that is very much an important factor in that. Again, like valuing the way in which you are a part of that, you know, regardless of the way in which you turn up you know, I would say.



A

Abi Palmer 56:15

And every artist has bad days where they feel very bad about their practice. You might not know but you're getting a message in your inbox on a day like that that can be really moving and transformational. Not every single one will always lead to an intense mutual connection and sometimes it might take years you know, like you might be circling the same person for years. It will only go anywhere if you reach out and say hi to begin with.

L

Level Centre 56:54

I'm really sorry, we are approaching almost half past six. We've still got a few more questions that have come in, but I'm really sorry. Thank you for those that posed the questions. We got as many in as we could in the time scale we had and they were brilliant answers. So we're going to wrap up there and I really want to thank everyone for joining us today, especially to Bella for inviting Abi to join us for Further Afield. Abi we've really loved having you with us and to hear more about your work but really about moving your studio into your home and how that works for you and your practice to hear about your cats. The next Further Afield conversation is taking place on Thursday 31st March 2022 at 5:30pm, so please save the date. Also Bella has an exhibition opening at LEVEL Centre next week called Sick Gaze and that's going to be on display with us until mid April at LEVEL Centre. So if you are anywhere nearby, please make sure you pop in and see the amazing work by Bella who's curated Further Afield. So I'd like to say a big thank you to Bella for developing this project and the LEVEL Centre staff team, you've worked hard to make this happen to Sherry and to Erin, our wonderful interpreters today and most of all to Abi Palmer for joining us as our special guest. If you've enjoyed the conversation, please let your friends and your peers know that it is going to be available on the LEVEL Centre website soon. Also, if you've got any feedback for us, or any improvements we can make for the next Further Afield event. You can email [info@levelcentre.com](mailto:info@levelcentre.com). Thank you everybody, have a lovely evening and goodbye.