

SPEAKERS

Leah Capaldi, Kelly Lloyd

Introduction (Kelly Lloyd) 00:34

You're listening to This Thing We Call Art, a podcast about 'being in a space and sharing that with an object, a person, an animal... something that is helping you [to] define time and, and [something that] you measure yourself in proportion to'.

I'm your host, Kelly Lloyd, a visual artist, essayist, and educator currently based in the U.K. I've been interviewing people in the arts about their livelihoods since 2017, and today you're going to hear a conversation I had on the March 3rd 2021, with Leah Capaldi who is based in London.

The crossover area between the disciplines of sculpture and performance are of particular interest to Leah Capaldi's practice, with echoes of the seminal performance work of the late 1960s and early 70s. She explores the pivotal relationship between object or subject, encouraging the audience to question themselves in relation to the work and playing with notions of surveillance and spectatorship.

I was put in touch with Leah by one of her former students who knew I was interested in ACME's Fire Station Residency, where Leah was a resident from 2015 to 2020. Leah was kind enough to agree to meet me, and we had coffee one Fall day in 2019.

Our conversation on the 3rd of March was two and a half hours long, and while I wish I could share it with you in its entirety, today, you'll listen to excerpts from it. I'm going to drop you in at the beginning...

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Leah Capaldi 01:51

Well, I suppose that is the thing, isn't it? Like, the people like, that it does just play into these ideas of, of artists being sort of something which fits really easy into a kind of commodifiable structure, you know? That you that you make the thing for the retail park, it's in a nice shade of lilac, because that's the shade they're promoting. And that thing that you've done as an artist, you know, fits next to the, you know, WH Smith and the shoe shops and all that kind of stuff as well. You know, it's like a way of, of kind of minimizing,

and I think, ultimately, sort of silencing the power of artwork, isn't it, you know? Maybe that's actually what it is with performance art though, it's always always been this kind of way to critique the art market. To not make the painting, to not make the object, to make something which is kind of sticky, and has these, kind of, strange movable edges to it, you know? We talked about representations of artists, you know, on TV and stuff, and I just think that brilliant bit where they try and rip off Marina Abramovich in *Sex in the City*. She kind of wanders in, and says, 'I wonder if that artist is still there?' That's it! Performance artists are always sort of absolutely nuts. They exist outside of the, I wouldn't say like the rational world, but they there's this kind of, like, time that you that, that you might go meet somebody for a cup of coffee, or you go to work nine till five, and the performance artists on screen is always the person who's up late, who's living outside of the kind of, like, I suppose, could you call it, like, the capitalist day, or the capitalist hours or something like that? The performance artist is always the total weirdo, you know? And I wonder if that's because what they do doesn't fit into the, you know, the systems that nine to five fits within.

And it kind of makes me think a lot about where we are now. Because, obviously, because of Corona, like, nobody's in that nine to five system really in the same way that they were anymore. Like, you're using time, time has become like bread dough, you know what I mean? It's so, like, difficult to grab a hold of now. It's always falling between your fingers and moving and stretching, and it doesn't feel certain anymore. So yeah, I don't know, like maybe it... I'm really keen to think about what happens to performance after Corona because you can't, like, I've got a show coming up in a couple of months. It's playing on my mind every day. I'm thinking I don't know if I can do the idea that I was you know, that was due to open like a week before lockdown. I've don't think I can do that idea anymore, because if I make that that work, it's not really going to be relevant because we have such a different kind of interaction with other bodies now.

Kelly Lloyd 04:52

You know, and it's quite interesting, all these grants that came out around Coronavirus about like, yeah, you're making work about the effect of Coronavirus, but then, like, the effect that Coronavirus has had on the arts has a lot to do with these, also these intangible things that we make work with, like, time and presence and... yeah, what... tell me more about that.

Leah Capaldi 05:20

Well, I think it has opened up a different space that has become available to use in performance, whether it's like live stream performances of, I don't know, from your bedroom or whatever you're doing. I think it's also... there was a piece that, I think it was Eva and Franco Mattes, made a couple of years ago that I saw at a gallery in central London somewhere, and they made this this piece of work where you walked in, and it was like a virtual space. And I remember thinking, 'Like, what even is this? This is like... 'I just, like... yeah, okay, they're doing this kind of virtual world stuff, but like, it just felt a bit like frivolous in a funny sort of way, and now that is a completely plausible and completely valid way of working. So, it's opened up that whole different idea of presence. Presence, I've always thought is about being in a space and sharing that with an object, a person, an animal, like, something... like something that you that is helping you, like, define time and, and you measure yourself in proportion to it. But now like, you know, meeting someone in an online gallery, and like virtually viewing work, you're kind of having to time travel all the time, between being here, and being on your laptop, and then being in this other space as well. And that, to me is like *Star Trek*, do you know what I mean? It's like, that's unbelievable that you can do that. And that it stretches time, it's like the bread dough again, it stretches time, and it changes and it's, I don't know, it feels like it has become something else. Which is always been kind of daunting, right? Because time has always been the constant. That's always been the thing that we, you know, can rely on that's always been there. And now it's starting to move.

Kelly Lloyd 07:29

I think on a good day, if I had the day just to do my thing, I mean, I think I sit, you know? I stare out into space for, like, hours every day, you know? And, and at first, I was like, why am I not being (like, in my life, in my way of existing every day), I think like, why am I not being productive? Like, how am I using all this time? Like, I should be reading, I should be whatever. But then I've just started to try to classify this, like, staring out in space as like thinking time. And so, I think I just kind of leaned into this just kind of endless stretch of time.

Leah Capaldi 08:10

Space is expensive generally, though, isn't it? Because we've moved into a new house, everything I think about now is about houses. But if you if you've got a lot of space

in the house is an expensive house, because spaces, you know, to have spare space is a big thing. And it's kind of the same for your mind, in a way, isn't it? Like, to have the spare time or space to think about something, is...

Kelly Lloyd 08:34

Yeah.

Leah Capaldi 08:34

Like, we're not used to it.

Kelly Lloyd 08:36

You know, I think about that a lot. And I what I feel like I'm getting acclimated to habits that I can't afford with that, because I feel like especially in cities, like, alone time is only for rich people. And I was thinking about how much I need alone time, especially in London when you're just constantly around people all of the time. Like, I find it exhausting. I was exhausted just by being with people all day that I just needed to live alone, but that's not something I can actually afford.

Leah Capaldi 09:12

Yeah, no, I get that. I totally get that. When I was at the Fire Station, I learned that... it was the first time I lived with my practice, so, I got to have this very intimate relationship with making, and I got to value the times where I was just staring out into space, thinking of whatever. And that and I've got to recognize that as part of what I did, what I needed to do to kind of get to the next stage.

And I don't know if it was just something basic, like, just doing that in a space which was a studio space as well as, you know, the space that I slept. But it definitely, like, re-framed the whole thing for me. But then I moved out of there, and I haven't had a studio space since because I just can't afford it, and that has... that's really, that's like pushed me to the edge. That's been the thing which is really like not having that space to... we talk about space a lot don't we in art? It's like a thing, it is like a material, isn't it? And as well as a kind of concept as well, I think. But it's... I mean I've always had studio spaces, but I've never really truly understood how vital they are. You know, how vital they are for making. Like, it's not just about having somewhere to, like, put your plaster collection or whatever, you know?

It's about having the, being able to have a space where you can go to and think freely, and not feel like, you have to put the washing on, or you've got to, you know, pay the bills or whatever. Like, you've got to have that space where you can allow yourself the time which might feel quite frivolous whilst you're doing the washing. But if you can, I don't know, give yourself those four hours a day, or whatever it is that you're able to do, to just be in a studio space.

And I've heard a lot of people during the pandemic, talking about sort of trying to, you know, all the students, I've been trying to do it, trying to set up a studio space in the house. You know, where it's just, you know, on the kitchen table, or, you know, just the corner of the living room or somewhere like that. And it's... God, like, it's hard, it's really hard to, to, like, adjust your mindset in that way to think like, right now I'm in my studio space (which is the corner of the room). Like, what you learn Art School is about studio culture. It's obviously so vast and so varied but to go from that, and then to do all these brilliant things which are, like, about kind of community building in your space that you share with 10 other people, or four other people, or whatever. And then to go from that to being solo, feels like isolating isn't quite the right word, it just, it feels like quite painful, actually. I think it's quite like bewildering, actually, perhaps like not to... because, again, so much of like being an artist is making, and whether it's physical materials, or making videos or whatever, it's about having the space to make.

So, I suppose that's like, heavily heavily, like, interlaced with, like those things about privilege, and who ends up becoming an artist, you know? Who can really, like, follow that route? And what support is there for people who don't have family money, or, you know... a shed at the bottom of the garden, you know? Like, what, what is there? I've been, like, so fortunate to have had things like the Fire Station and to have won a couple of awards and stuff, which really helped me when I got out of Art School. Like, helped me to really believe in myself as an artist. And to know that I was kind of part, like somebody else believed in me, you know? And you have that kind of support. I think that's brilliant. But ah, it's... I get so sad when I hear about this kind of term 'pop-up practice'.

Kelly Lloyd 14:04

What's the term? I don't know it.

Leah Capaldi 14:07

Right, so it's kind of people who, if you haven't got the money for a studio, for 12 months, in the year that you might need it, you have a pop-up studio, and you have a 'pop-up practice' that is in your pop-up studio. So, you get offered a show, and you might do the majority of the work at home, and then for the last, like two months or something, you might rent the studio out. So, you've got that kind of two months of studio time. And I think, I don't know, perhaps there are some people that can work like that. But I've always thought that it's like an alchemy, like making artwork is almost like (it sounds so romantic and daft to say this) but it's, it's almost like mystical. You make this show, you have this practice, and it's all held together by you. Like you're the glue that puts these materials and ideas together to create a piece of work. And it's, it's hard. It's really hard to do that. And to do that well. And to do that in an interesting way. So, I don't really know what I'm getting at here, it's just, I think that space is so important for artists.

Kelly Lloyd 15:25

I mean, I think what you're talking about in terms of studios is really, like, what it means to be socialized in a studio space. How studio spaces are so much about having a place where you think, not necessarily like you said where you store your plasters. You know, so I'm also quite interested in, um, because whenever you see an artist in film and television, they introduced them by panning their studios. Or like panning their exhibition spaces, or something like panning our living spaces in this way where like you can see their creativity, like, through their, like, incredibly barren loft or through like an eclectic house or whatever. So, I'm really interested in, like, how people also conceive of the studio space as this site of production, but then how much of the work of artists is, I think, kind of this immaterial work. Of like, you said, alchemy, of thinking, of community building, you know, of considering materials but not necessarily, like, always making stuff with them.

Leah Capaldi 16:41

Definitely. Absolutely. And I think like, I've always had a really weird relationship with the studio. Like, I remember being in my BA and going into a studio every day for the sculpture course, and thinking like, what do I do here? I just couldn't get my head around having... because I've never had that in my life before. And I've never known anybody who'd had that in their lives before. What do I do? What is art? And how do I make art? Like, what is this space for? What do you mean it's for thinking and for testing out glues?

Like, what's the... what do you mean? Like that doesn't...I didn't have any kind of reference point for that at all. Apart from like, I don't know, pictures of, like, Brâncuși's studio, or, you know, some of those, like, images from Lucien Freud's studio. And that's kind of what I thought probably an art studio was; it was kind of really like, masculine, and, you know, throwing things about and you know, just chucking stuff everywhere and, you know, place to be sort of emotional and angry. And definitely a place that I would just be in by myself, because that's the only kind of type of studio I've ever seen on TV. But I think that definitely my understanding of the studio space developed the more as I went through that. Like, you learn a lot about community in art school, you learn a lot about like about friends, and about how to, like the value of studio space goes beyond what you're making there. It's about the kind of chewiness of it, like... the kind of camaraderie in a way of knowing that you're all going through something together at that point.

And then I had a year out where I went to work in a...I had to go get some money, basically. So, I worked in a bronze foundry, which was brilliant, because I learned loads of skills. But I also learned I absolutely never ever wanted to make people's art for them again, because I craved that engagement. Working in a foundry, it wasn't the studio. It was a production place. Which is not what a studio is, the studio isn't about just production, it's about so much more. So then going back and then being in the RCA. I found that really paralyzing for like a good year. Like, that thing about what you're saying with Oxford and that kind of stamp. Like, knowing that I was in a Royal College of Art. I couldn't, it was just so overwhelming. And it stopped me from making anything because I was constantly thinking, is this good enough to be here? What is this? Is this sculpture at the Royal College of Art? Am I doing this right? Like, what am I doing?

And I think I just got real, kind of nervous about making anything until I wrote a dissertation and started to understand that there was this long, serious history to my subject matter. And then it kind of felt like, oh, okay, now the studio becomes something else. It's not that place that I'm just going to, for like, you know, 12 hours sitting there getting really pissed off that I can't, I mean you do have those days where you get pissed off that you haven't done anything, and you can't think of anything to do. But it also became like, a place to generate, like, a new knowledge about things that I was interested in. And that's when things started to really change with my practice because I started to, I don't know, it became about like bringing things together rather than the pressure of creating a piece of work.

Okay, so that's one thing. And then when I graduated, and I had this shared studio with some with some friends above the TFC on Ridley Road Market. And we had a space up there, and there was a bunch of us in there for a couple of years, and that worked really well, because it was cheap. And we could, there would often only be a couple of us in there, even though there was like 10, or 15 of us renting out. So that was good because there was like a support. it was like a sort of community center in a way, like, you could go in there and know that there'll be someone in there for a cup of tea, and you could talk to them, or you did not talk to them. And I needed that support in those first couple of years after graduating. And you know, and it kind of develops and develops, but like... it's, yeah, I don't... I don't think your studio can be a laptop. I don't think it's got the flexibility and the potential. Like, we rely on technology for so much, and we think about phones as being so flexible and so, like, versatile, but they can't be a studio space. You need, you need much more than that. It's about that thing we we're talking about the beginning with this thing about conversation being about reading, reading bodies and reading voices. It's about reading objects, reading material, reading the world around you. That's it, isn't it? That's kind of what sculpture is. It's about knowing how ... well, it's not, it's an element of it, like, knowing how the world is made. And, and feeling so empowered because you are part of that, you know?

Kelly Lloyd 22:15

That's all really very beautiful. [Laughter] Um, and I wonder, so, yeah, there's this one residency, which I applied to, and then I stopped applying to because the application fee is like \$40, and I've just stopped applying things that cost that much money. But it's Bemis, have you applied?

Leah Capaldi 22:41

I haven't applied to them, but I've seen the residency.

Kelly Lloyd 22:45

Yeah, in the studio spaces are just massive. And it's funny, because I don't, yeah, I don't know what I would do with that space, but I want it.

Leah Capaldi 22:55

Yeah, totally. But then do you think [Laughter] that that feeds into your idea of artists like the big loft?

Kelly Lloyd 23:01

Probably yes. But I also, [Laughter] I have this idea of one day, I'll magically change back into a painter or like, one day, I'll start making things, you know, and I'll need a lot of space to do it. And, but I mean, so much of my... it's interesting, you said like, pop up practice. I mean, I feel like I had a 'pop-up practice'... So, I graduated art school in 2015. And then I just couldn't, like I couldn't afford a studio, and I also couldn't afford materials. I got a studio space around the corner from my house, and then for like... it was like a desk for like, two months. I didn't even use it. I just used it as a storage space. And then I eventually I moved into one of the larger rooms in my apartment with my friend. And so, I was like, I have a desk here. I have enough room here, like, I'm using these studio spaces is just storage space, so I won't have a studio space.

So, then I didn't have a studio space until I started going on residencies. And, and that was the trade-off. It was like I could either have a larger living space, or I could have a studio space. And I always kind of chose a larger living space because I wasn't entirely sure what it was like to have an expansive practice anymore, because I had dematerialized, to kind of, because that's where my art was going, but it also met all of these criteria that I needed it to meet. Like, if I dematerialized, I wouldn't need storage, I wouldn't need to buy materials, I wouldn't need a studio space, I wouldn't have to pay for transportation. It kind of, like, fit my needs.

And then, at a certain point, when I started to have access to these studio spaces again through residencies. I don't know like I, it's like I wanted my practice to change to, like, fit this bigger pond that I was in but then at that point, you know, it's the same thing where, like, if someone gave me a \$30,000 grant only to make work (like, separate from my living costs) I wouldn't know what to do with it. I always hoped that my practice will change into something that can fill up the space that I'm given occasionally but it takes time. I think it took like a good month just to kind of get, like, all the materials I needed, and to put them in the right place, and to develop some kind of a schedule getting to the studio. And so, not only is there like this runway for getting my studio in order, there's also like this runway for learning how to work with physical stuff again.

Leah Capaldi 26:08

Mmmm. Yeah. 'Cause it's been a long time for you as well, though, right? Like, it's been a long time since you've had your hands on stuff.

Kelly Lloyd 26:14

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, it takes a while.

Leah Capaldi 26:18

It takes a while, it does. And then, it takes a while to stop making the work that you think it should be.

Kelly Lloyd 26:26

Because there is this weight of like, I have this body of work in me that I'm not making, and as soon as I get into the studio, we'll be able to make it! Or as soon as I get money, I'll be able to make it! Or like, as soon as I have time or, you know, one day, I'll really just get to the bottom of my practice, or I'll, you know, really figure out what I want to do. Or, like, you know, there's this fictional clarity, there's this like, fictional ideal body of work.

Leah Capaldi 26:55

I totally understand where you're coming from with that I so understand. But again, like, that really relates back to this idea of like, the, like, artist on screen, doesn't it? Like something which we can kind of, like commodify, and understand, and measure, and all that kind of stuff. But, like, yeah, I completely... yeah, you have that kind of yearning for like the time when you can just sit down and, like, do a line on the wall and feel like, that's perfect. And you don't need to do any more, because you've reached this like zenith in your practice where I absolutely understand everything, you know. I get it. I'm totally present in the world in my work, you know? And I think that's... you have like, ebbs and flows, don't you? You have points where you feel like you're getting towards that, and then you have other points where you're just like, you're in the trough of despair, thinking like, I have no idea who I am or what I'm making. Like, what is this? Am I just making the same work over and over? But yeah, like, I get that 100%, I totally understand what you're saying. And that's the battle, but I think that you can overcome that by making. Like, you have to make your way through that.

And often the fantasy is all the time that you don't have the facilities to make it. And then when you have the facilities, you start you start arranging your stuff, you start collecting materials, and then you have this other doubt that comes in, which is like, oh, am I going to live up to my expectations of myself now? And you start making stuff and thinking God, this is shit. Like, what? This isn't what I thought I should be making right now. And then you kind of ease into it. You've got to get over these like humps, but they keep on coming back again. And I think the thing that brings you back is having a bit of confidence in what you do. Because when you see the stuff that you are making, when you see when it works, and you feel genuinely excited by these things coming together, like, that's... that's like... My mouth is literally watering talking to you about that moment, because that's the best bit, I think. Like that's the best bit when you're like (I'm fictionalizing it now) when you're like, you're just in it. You're like living the dream because you feel really satisfied by your practice, you know? And sustained by it.

Kelly Lloyd 29:22

When does the best bit happen?

Leah Capaldi 29:24

Two times. I get the best bit twice. So, the best bit is when I've made the work and I've installed it and that moment just before private view when I've had all these really intense like conversations with the curator or working with the gallery really really intensively and we've probably remade the show like 15 times. And then this kind of moment happens where it's like, just about to open, and you kind of walk in and you see it fresh. You see it with all the space, you see it with the anticipation of what it is. You see it clearly, because it's separate from you. And I love that. I absolutely love that. Because you recognize something in yourself, and you recognize this other, this other thing that you've made. It's, that's incredible.

So, it's like being able to recognize it because it's out of the studio, but then, like this other thing that happens in making where time leaves you. You don't have time, like there's like new stuff that you're developing, new stuff that you're learning about how things come together, how ideas and materials come together. And, and it's, like, you recognize yourself and you recognize your interests. You made like 10 things in one day, and maybe you only like one of them, but you recognize it. And that clarity of, like, the recognition of your work, I love that bit. I love, like, recognizing what I'm interested in and being really, like, delighted

and really sort of satisfied by it, you know? Really kind of like, ah, like... literally, like, it fills me, you know? And it makes me feel excited for the next day and thinking I'm going to pick that up again, like I'm going to re-edit that thing again, because now I know that the shape of it has changed slightly. I'm going to work with that silicone again or something, you know? It's a new knowledge, it's the only way I can really describe it, like a new knowledge of how things work. Like those are the two best bits in my opinion about art, about making specifically, is that discovery and then the recognition.

Kelly Lloyd 31:50

I feel like we're talking about such salacious stuff.

Leah Capaldi 31:53

Oh my god, yeah. It feels really erotic, doesn't it? Like it's...

Kelly Lloyd 31:57

I feel like I've had these like longing conversations with people, and I like them because they make art seem like... because whenever I think about how fucked up our world is, or like, how no one's ever gonna pay me any money to do anything, or how I'm never gonna get anywhere. Like, the thing that brings me back are these, these best bits. And I feel really very lucky to have been able to experience them often enough. And to, like you said, been supported by people at crucial points in my career, or like, as I grew up, that I have been able to experience those best bits and experience them with other people, and experience them in public, and experience them with no one giving a shit about it, and experience them when other people give a shit about it, or like, so it is it can be like this constant, you know. Which is, like, at the heart of, you know, what my career is, I guess... or what my profession is.

Leah Capaldi 33:11

Yeah, but also, it's that kind of moment, then when you realize that art isn't an output, it is a moment, it is an engagement with something. Like that's... I think that's quite freeing. And also, completely terrifying at the same time because you know, the edges fall away from them, which is great. But like, that could be something that we're, in this time, that we can take a bit of comfort in that. Like, knowing that it's not all studio, like, it's about how we go out and negotiate with the world around us. And yeah, that's, there are so many,

I want to say like there aren't so many like barriers to that or something but that's not quite true, like there are. Like, perhaps with who you get to have those conversations with as well, you know? Oh, God, I don't know Kelly. I just don't know. [Laughter] I'll feel quite sad talking about it because it's making me long and really miss it, you know? But that's okay, it's not gonna be like this for much longer. But that's what it is also gorgeous to have this conversation, like I feel really excited by it and really, really quick giving me something to kind of get my teeth into.

Kelly Lloyd 34:43

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, maybe let's move off of this [Laughter], like, moment of longing for a second. Um, so we've had a lot of conversations about housing. Because I met you and you were graciously willing to, like, talk to me about the Fire Station. And I don't know if I... I mean, a) thank you for that. It's really lovely to know you.

Leah Capaldi 35:13

Pleasure. My pleasure.

Kelly Lloyd 35:15

Thank you for, you know, being willing to talk to me then and now. When you got this opportunity, were you hanging things on it? Like, do you feel like you were able to, you know, take better care of yourself and your practice and your larger community through it? Or like, what was, yeah, what was it like?

Leah Capaldi 35:38

It's a funny one, you know, Kelly. Like, having now had this year away from it, I can honestly say to you, when we...well I was living there with Al, my partner. So, it was the two of us in a very, very, very small space, but it was designed for one. So, when we, when I got it, it was we were living in a really crappy situation. Like, we were living in a place in Telegraph Hill, New Cross, and there was rust coming out of the taps. The boiler had been banging for like three weeks, and I've told the state agent about it every day for three weeks. And they hadn't done anything, and then one day, I woke up to the front of the boiler actually, like, being thrown across the room as it died. It was, it was like, what the hell is going on here. And we were paying like £1200 for that place. And that was, I mean, that was like, I work two days a week as a lecturer, you know? That's not a lot of money.

[Laughter] So, so I was just like, what the fuck is going on here, and we were at the point where I was saying, look, I can't afford this money anymore. I can't afford this; I cannot afford to stay here in this flat with rust coming up taps. That feels unsafe, you know? I might die of bloody carbon monoxide poisoning or something. So, I applied for it thinking this could be the way that I can stay in London. And then with the rent as it was about £400 a month, or maybe a bit more, maybe like 450 or 500. I can't quite remember a few years ago, it did go up every couple of years. But we thought well, we could move in there and then we can live, first of all, we can live. We can afford to stay in London. I don't have to pay for a studio space, so that will save me some money. And also, we can save for the future as well. Like, we can try and build a future from being there. And that in turn will make my practice better.

So, I think I wanted security, I wanted knowing that I was going to be there for five years, and I wanted to be part of a community of artists again. I'd missed that so so much. It was quite different to how I thought it would be in that sense. Like, I didn't think it would be like halls or anything, but I did think it was going to be perhaps a little bit more... Like we ended up, it wasn't like enforced community, so it was quite loose, you know? There were still people who by the end of the five years I didn't really know very well there, but I've made some fantastic friends being there as well, so it swings and roundabouts. But I got that from it, definitely got that, kind of like, we're at a similar point in our practices, and we're supporting each other through that. That was great.

The thing though, was it was quite it was difficult living on the A12. You know, one of the bloody biggest A-roads in Europe, that was difficult living there, and it was. And I suppose we changed a lot, because you have to put everything on hold for five years, you know? Unless you want to leave early which, if you do, then what's the point in being there for five years, you know? So, we had to basically just kind of put our lives on hold for five years. And we, as a couple, we discussed that and said, you know, like this is, this is time which can help us to achieve much more in future, either we do that, or we end up moving to, I don't know, like, Slough or somewhere, you know, to try and save. And this, this seems like a better way forward.

So that was why I applied for it, and then I got it. And that was great. It was really good to be able to bring curators, and friends, and people there, I've never really been able to do that before. Like, I had a studio space before that, but it was always like so cold that I remember I was getting carpal tunnel in my hands. And my thumbs would go black with the cold. Like they would change color from these freezing cold studio spaces. So, and they

were expensive, *so expensive*, and you just can't afford that. So yeah, it really gave me a bit of breathing space, actually, that's the thing I really valued from it. And the community. And also, with the breathing space comes time to focus on my work, which I had, I had time. For the first time ever, I had time to sit down and be around it, and I listened to it, you know? So, it was great.

The downsides of it, though, were also present, you know, it's, it is difficult to ask somebody to live in a bit of a... you do find that after a while, I felt like I was kind of performing artist-ness you know, being in there in that community of artists. So that was something definitely to, like, be aware of.

Kelly Lloyd 41:08

How so about performing artist-ness?

Leah Capaldi 41:12

Because, like, you're around this community, you're this, it's that thing of funny thing about a studio, like, going to the studio to make work. So, living in the live/workspace, but in order to do that, you have to be an artist. So, you have this kind of, you know, there's also that dialogue with like, artists often being the first people into these, kind of, industrial spaces that you know, 10 years later, they've got lovely cafes on and things you know? So, if you go to the area now, they've put up loads of flats all along that part of the A12. And it's like they're making Bromley by Bow a destination. Like, and that's, it just seems nuts to do that. You don't have any of the infrastructure there to support that level of kind of community that they're trying to put into the place. Anyway, but I think you end up kind of performing artist-ness because you're in this, this place where you think I'm here because I'm an artist, and what do artists do? And that's something that you have to sort of combat because I think that that's a really unhelpful way of making, because you just, you're just being cliché, you know? So, I don't know, I feel quite emotional about it in a funny sort of way, because I look back on that time now. It's only a year ago. And I remember thinking like, I didn't think it was going to last that long, in a funny way, like the five years seem to go quite quick. But at other points they seemed to drag as well.

Kelly Lloyd 42:45

Is there anything that you would like to ask me? Or is there anything that you thought we would talk about in this conversation that we haven't talked about? Or is there anything that you just want to say?

Leah Capaldi 42:56

Well, actually, I kind of am interested in like, what you think about this whole presence stuff. You know, how is your presence kind of changed? I think that, like from what we've spoken about, that this time has been so like, topsy turvy for you, and I just wonder how you getting on with that, you know? Because, like, it's that conversation we're having about presence and about being there and, like it's one thing to do that not in Corona, and when you haven't got all of the stuff happening, but to do it in Corona in a time where everything then becomes so like purposeful, and so self-aware of every move that you're making, and every decision, and every walk, and every coffee, and every thing that you do in the studio, and every loaf of bread that you buy. How are you kind of dealing with this new path under this massive microscope?

Kelly Lloyd 43:49

Yeah, whoo, um. Hmm.... You know, my skin started breaking out. [Laughter] And I am, like, just one of these people that my skin just like, breaks out. But then I have these glorious chunks of time, where I don't break out at all. And then I'm like, maybe this is it. Like, maybe this isn't for the rest of my life. And then something changes and, and I swear really was like, when I went to the RA, and I had a year, where I didn't have to worry about money. Like, my hair grew, my skin cleared up, and I realized how much money stresses me out. And so, when I started school, truly, like, fucking not a fucking mark on my face. And so, it's funny to see my stress, like, see the physical effect of starting this new life under these less-than-ideal conditions.

And I'm one of these people that I think tries to, like, enforce my will on the world. Like, I try to, like, move things forward, you know? And so, it's just interesting seeing the like, collective weight of all that stress and feeling of failure, like on my face. [Laughter] And then it getting worse, because as soon as you start trying to fucking make it better, and you try different face products, and your face freaks out. And so, it's like, you can see not only your need to control something, but your inability to control something, and the physical effect it's having on you, even though on a day-to-day basis. You're like, 'I'm fine.

Everything's fine. Everything is totally fine.' Like, your face is like, 'I'm fucking freaking out right now!' So, it was really quite interesting to, like, see it on my face. [Laughter]

Leah Capaldi 45:56

Hang in there, do you know what I mean? Like, it's going to get so much better, it's going to be like, fucking euphoric, when things start to gradually, like, the oil starts to move around the system, you know, and, like, the whole thing starts to warm up again. And I think that this time, especially if you're in education at this time, like, you have such a unique and indescribable experience of learning, you know? Because you really have got to be so independent at this time to really drive your work forward. And the kind of skills that you learn through doing that, which are sort of the things that perhaps aren't really kind of focused on in the course, but those kinds of skills, that's like, gonna get you... that's so valuable, like, that's such a strong foundation for, you know, tangible things that you can draw on later in life. I know it's not what you signed up for, but I think that it's still something, you know?

Kelly Lloyd 47:02

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely.

Leah Capaldi 47:05

Kelly, I've really enjoyed this, you've, you've really, it's so... I want to say a gift, but it's not really a good enough word. It's such a precious thing to be able to have this level of a conversation with someone, you know, who is thinking about these things, and doing something about them. So, thank you for talking to me, and thank you for asking me to be part of it.

Kelly Lloyd 47:33

Ah, yeah, definitely. You said so many important things that I think are like really important and relevant and like, you know, and so anyways, it's this thing that I feel really lucky to be able to do. And yeah, lucky to be able to talk to you, so...

Leah Capaldi 47:49

My pleasure.

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Epilogue (Kelly Lloyd) 47:58

On the 13th of January, Leah wrote to me, 'Since this podcast Leah undertook a month-long residency at the British School Rome with New Contemporaries to research the male heroic body through sculpture in western antiquity to better understand toxic masculinity in 2022. She has also been awarded the Arts Council Develop Your Creative Practice Grant for a studio build in her garden which she is currently undertaking. She has also just got a puppy who she hopes will grow up to be a thoughtful studio buddy.'

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Outro (Kelly Lloyd) 48:33

If you are interested in hearing more excerpts from conversations I've had with people in the arts over the years, head over to the website thisthingwecallart.com

This podcast was funded by the Arts Council England, Artquest, the Gane Trust, and TILA Studios. If you would like to help, make the next season of this podcast a reality, please consider rating and reviewing this podcast on iTunes, becoming a Patreon member, or donating through the Paypal link on the project's website.

The logo was designed by Eva Duerden, the episode artwork was created by Fiona Reilly, and the theme song was made by Alessandro Moroni. This podcast was produced by me, your host, Kelly Lloyd.

Thanks so much for listening, and tune in next week for my conversation with a London-based artist who would like to remain Anonymous.