

SPEAKERS

Kelly Lloyd, Bella Milroy

Introduction (Kelly Lloyd) 00:35

You're listening to This Thing We Call Art, a podcast offering, 'you these moments... those daydreaming moments that we're all having when we're, like, not doing anything, quote, unquote. And it just asks you to like just pinch it, and just take it down for a moment and just, like look at it and like, pose it... It's like, how do we pose these moments? How do we make them public? Just for a little bit, just for a moment? How do we do that and not lose that kind of sincerity to them, you know? Not lose that kind of, like, earthiness, that comes from those, like, just random thoughts, little spinnings-out of things. It's that kind of posing that offers you the kind of perspective on it that otherwise you might not have.'

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 8th of May 2021 with Bella Milroy.

Bella Milroy is an artist and writer who lives in her hometown of Chesterfield, Derbyshire. She works responsively through mediums of sculpture, drawings, photography, writing and text, and she is also a portrait artist. Her work explores how we touch and make contact with the world around us, with the hand-held being of particular significance. She makes work about making work (and being disabled) and not being able to make work (and being disabled). She is interested in the duality of every-day existence, and how things can be both beautiful/painful, both interesting/dull. This process-based practice is fundamental to her as a disabled artist, utilising and working with the significant limits and demands of living with a chronic illness, all mixed in with the detritus of domesticity.

I met Bella when 12ø (a collective I'm in with Lou Macnamara and Eva Duerden) began working with her on her project *Mob Shop*. Unable to return home for the Summer or the holidays, and feeling isolated having just moved to Oxford, Bella sent me vegan flapjacks in a beautifully wrapped package with fresh pressed leaves, several times.

Our conversation was three 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 about 30 min in.

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Kelly Lloyd 02:50

How are things for you in terms of like, you know, the progression of the pandemic, and also, like how you're managing your time? And...

Bella Milroy 02:58

Yeah. It's I think, for me, the last 12 months were just such a whirlwind of like, increased demand of work in a way that I'd never experienced before. So, it felt like on all fronts, there was like an increase of yeah, things demanding of me. And my work, stuff went up astronomically (astronomically!) for me astronomically in terms of my outputs. It was not good. It made me really unwell. But it was just one compounding factor of that demand, leading to just a disregard of my needs on a kind of mass scale, I'd say. And, yeah, I was also on some really heavy medication for (as part of my chronic illness) that was also making me very unwell. But we didn't really know it was doing that. So that was a factor. Me and Jono have this joke of it being like, choose your player of like, which one is fucking with your mind right now of like, 'Is it living through a pandemic? Is it shielding? Is it, you know, increased work demand? Is it this medication? Is it the fact that you're just incredibly unwell a lot of the time?' And so, we just couldn't see the wood from the trees to understand it all. And well, I mean coming off that medication was a really big part of that and going like, 'Oh, okay, now I don't feel this way quite so horribly.' And that was a big, big part of that, but then also, just reevaluating my whole kind of daily life kind of structure.

Like you say, I think the way we've all examined our routines and how we kind of like operate day to day has been such a focus of all of us, hasn't it over the last 12 months? And so yeah, a big part of that was registering with Social Services and getting set up with them with to help with a P.A. weekly, which was, like, life changing, totally life changing. [Laughter] Also, an (I'm gonna say that really trite word again) astronomically steep learning curve, as well. That was that I had anticipated, but I think it's just a different animal, when you experience it yourself. When you go from that kind of informal family care setup to this, essentially a stranger who is, like, in your home. Especially going from shielding to not having that at all, and then having to cope with that and adjust to that. And just like, you know, all the internalized ableism, you didn't even know you had just kind of spills out into like, oh, yeah, I don't really ask for what I need very often in a very straightforward way. And I find that really hard and complicated.

So that was a really big thing. And I think I'm still learning with it. Like, I've had that for about six months now. I think I'm definitely getting there, and it's easier in some respects, it is consistently a job. Like it's a job in itself, and you have to manage it, and the way that happens, it is a big thing, it takes up a lot of time and energy in itself. Even with how transformative it has been for us. Like, I think I've described in previous bits of writing about how the last year has been. I feel like we were all witnessing just such a lowering of standards like on mass. I feel like everybody has in one form or another had to you know, go through that and that for me getting a P.A. was what felt like a huge raising of the bar. But now, now that I have that, it's a new baseline for me, which makes me also reevaluate that it was the bar was nonexistent, you know? I guess that was an illustration of how, how bad things had got in a way that is so difficult. I think like, so much of coping is you just going along with it and you... Yeah, it's not like you're not aware of things and you're not understanding of things, but the coping is this kind of going along with it. And then when you kind of pause and try and evaluate and do things differently, it's this whole shift of perspective to allow you to see that and be just like, 'What! You were doing this for how long? Like, ah!' And so that was a big shift, and then also getting registered through *Access to Work* as well, which is a government supported scheme for disabled people in employment.

And it can be used for, like, support workers or for like equipment and things like that. It's like the secret benefit that nobody tells you about. And it's very, very convoluted, and there's tons of gatekeeping to it. I mean, it's something that I've only just been able to qualify for now because it's income-based, and things like that. So, there's like tons of flaws with it. But that was, yeah, a really big moment in terms of like, yeah, work, keeping work in its place, and not prioritizing that over everything, you know? That I think that's that took a huge amount of unlearning to kind of be like, oh, like I am a priority too and I get to choose when to do things. Because yeah, I think when you're when you live with illness like that, you get such brief windows to do things. Like you and I meeting today has taken a really long time to do, [Laughter] you know? And so, I think work has often felt in... which is motivated by lots of good things, it's often felt like, oh, I have a moment where I'm feeling, okay, I can do this thing. And quite often those moments come when, like I say, my kind of immediate personal needs are not met in any way, but I'm just not interested in them because, you know, I want to do this fun thing for a bit. But then when you kind of put that into the context of more regular, more frequent output of things, it's just like, completely unsustainable. Like, it's so all encompassing, you know, because I think your basic needs

are disregarded on a kind of bodily sense, because you're not capable of doing those things very often. So that's a kind of understood reality, and that's an accepted reality, and you try and like do things accordingly, to work around that. So that that's a very familiar kind of framework. Basically, I think I was just applying that to just that kind of output, and there's... alongside of that comes not just a disregard, but a kind of resentment of those kinds of things as well. You know, like, I think sometimes I felt really resentful of just being hungry and things like that. And it's just like, such a slippery slope, you know?

I think, like, when you add in those to the mix of those kind of compounding factors of medication that is really not good for your brain, [Laughter] and how you think or feel about yourself and your relation to the world and things like that. So, yeah, I think that kind of structural thing has just been so many so many roller coaster turns of it over the last 12 months, but also, if I think about myself now compared to a year ago, just like night and day in terms of how much better it is. So that feels really great. There's a kind of element of it that feels a bit painful because, like, I found Spring quite hard in terms of, it reminded me a lot of that period. But what feels good is that like just knowing how much safer and better I am in that way. So yeah, it feels really good.

Kelly Lloyd 10:54

A couple of things that I was thinking about when you were speaking. Like, I feel a need to constantly work out of like a fear that all the work will dry up, you know? Which I think is a very different thing than what you're talking about, but also might contribute in some way to making these moments when, you know, you do feel, you know, really excited about working and you're able to work like it kind of puts even more pressure on it.

Bella Milroy 11:24

Absolutely.

Kelly Lloyd 11:25

And also in the arts, like, there's no instruction on how to... you know, because they teach you how to, like, paint, you know, they teach you how to clean your palate, but they don't take teach you how to, like, take care of yourself in the in-between times. Which is how you have the, like, you know, the ability to then do, like, you know, any of the rest of this shit.

And so, and then, of course, this is on like a completely different level, being someone who, like, doesn't have, you know, a chronic illness. So, I understand that I'm speaking from like, a very different position, but also recognizing in some of the things that you say, something that I think is very, like, really, very, like, fucked up about the Art World and also like, very ableist, about the Art World.

Bella Milroy 12:14

Yes.

Kelly Lloyd 12:14

And, and it's something that I find myself perpetuating with other people in ways that I don't check often enough. Like, I find that like, there's this emphasis on immediacy, there's this emphasis on speed, there's this emphasis on more. There's always more, and you have to do it faster. You know, and it's like, all of these things, and once you speed up, then I know that that like creates, you know, even more barriers for anybody, you know? And I think, like, you're treated in the arts, I feel like as somebody who doesn't have a body. Like you don't have to live in a safe and comfortable environment, like you don't have to live someplace close by your friends and family, you know, or your workplace. Which I guess is, you know, one reason why I think I'm doing this podcast is to talk about all the things that are around the work itself to talk about, like, in part, like, how we have to care for those things as well, in order to, like, be able to do the work that we are, you know, that we want to do. That we're theoretically like, this is what we do.

Bella Milroy 13:18

Completely. And I think, I mean, if you look at the kind of framework of Art School in that they are, it's totally set up and designed on that basis of the output being this, you know, tremendous thing that you put out into the world that is incredibly expensive on all fronts, you know: emotionally, physically, financially, mentally. It's this massive thing, and it's so difficult when I think about... if you take Art School, for example, because I don't think we should eternally put that as, like, the starter of all of our creative and artistic experiences like that, but it does frame so many of them. I think these are conversations we've had before, if you look at the kind of, you know, big finale thing of degree show, and stuff like that, it's like, it's so wonderful and amazing. And, you know, I'm sure you have lots of feelings around it at the moment, you know, as a student. The good things about the

intensity are so good. You know, there's so juicy and vibrant and rich and you know, that kind of thinking-thinking-thinking, doing-doing-doing thing is, like, such an incredible catalyst for some people. I don't think it's for everybody.

I guess for me, I think the reason why there's a kind of a conflict in that feeling of being like, oh, but I love it! Is that it's just one way of doing it, and I think it's, it's missing the variety, you know? It's missing that kind of like, well, what if we did it really slow? What if there was like a slow-paced strand to this? Or just an output that isn't so clearly this big firework display thing at the end where we all collapse? [Laughter] Because I think it's really, if you ask, I don't, I don't know a single person that enjoyed their degree show. Like I really, I would struggle to... I mean, maybe now we talk to friends, and we look back and be like, 'Oh, yeah, I love the work I made. But like, it was hell.' [Laughter] It was hell.

Like, I definitely feel like when I went back to Uni, because I had a three-year leave of absence. And when I went back to finish my degree, it was, I mean, it was a totally different experience, just from the fact that I was a little bit older, I've been out of it more. And because I had been so unable to do it, it felt like a win just by turning up. So, like the moment I was in the studio, it was just like, 'I've won at life! This is amazing! I get to do this thing; this is just incredible.' And so, when the degree show rolled round, it really, really just felt like another day in the studio for me. And I remember being acutely aware of that in terms of how different that was experienced by my peers who had done the kind of standard route of, you know, first to third year straightforwardly. Who were, you know, not okay [Laughter] during that time. They were really, you know, it was really, really, really hard, because the pressure, and the kind of, you know, the emphasis on this final result, this final outcome being this kind of really definitive moment. And, and I was on a course where they were trying to stress that as a non-definitive thing. They were trying to address it as it's kind of more speculative, rather than this end point. But, I mean, I think they said a lot of that, but maybe didn't do it enough [Laughter] in practice.

Because I mean, the anti-climax of it all is so real, you know? Like, and then you finish! And then nobody cares, you know? [Laughter]

Kelly Lloyd 17:04

Truly.

Bella Milroy 17:04

But I think for me, part of the not realizing that none of it matters was just totally freeing and made everything far more interesting and exciting. Because it was like, I had a life in a different kind of way, and because the way my illness came about meant that I had to completely rebuild my sense of identity and a life for myself. Which meant that the degree show bit was just one aspect of that. And so, when it was finished, I could then go back and do all the other stuff that I was thinking and doing about, which was often really small, slow stuff at home. And, and so I think, you know, that that kind of knowledge of that, like, oh, oh, yeah, this is all just really meaningless, and that's amazing. I remember knowing that and remember having to just like, not say that to people. I just didn't want it to be that, like, you know, all-knowing, you know, person who has the wisdom and the understanding of it, because you only know unless you've been through that kind of thing. But yeah, it is, that was definitely a really felt thing of like, yeah, this doesn't matter, but it wasn't without feeling or without importance. It was just really freeing and liberating when you kind of find that space within art making and creativity.

Sometimes I think, I think I am getting better at spotting it before it gets to the bad place. But I think it's really hard to do that and it's hard to like, preempt those moments where you've already lost, you're already way in your overdraft of all of that. [Laughter] And, yeah, I think that's, that's, that's really hard. Like I said, I think I've done a lot in the last six months in particular to kind of try and preempt those moments. And like, I'd say, some of the most successful moments of the last six months, when I've had to do the same kind of reconfiguring and rescheduling of plans and things like that, they've been the first times I've ever done that where I haven't made those decisions when I'm not already on my knees, you know? And they felt amazing, and I don't think I've ever really, like, appreciated that I could do that. And I could feel like a sense more of a sense of agency and autonomy over those kinds of decisions that are essentially out of my control because of the nature of my health. But I never really thought I would actually get to this place where I can see that we're on the wrong track here, and this is gonna go bad. [Laughter] And, and actually make those decisions with that kind of more better foresight. And I think that's only really happened because a) experience for one, and then also just like having that different kind of support that I just didn't have in the same way. That more like formalized, I need help figuring stuff out and have putting that in place to do that. And yeah, that's felt really, really great to be in that different place to do that.

Yeah, and there's, I think there's lots of layers to that, isn't there. In terms of like, yeah, wanting to be perceived a certain way when you're asking for things that are... make you quite vulnerable. And yeah, I think I too am striving to get to that place as well where you can just say no.

Kelly Lloyd 20:26

I don't know, I feel like this is like systemic change, like how can we affect systemic change to, like, make it okay for people to say no? Like...?

Bella Milroy 20:34

I mean, it's totally unsustainable. I think, if you looked at it, from a framework of real community, real care, and real kind of deep consideration for each other's needs and capacity, it's a totally different story. Because doing stuff with friends, like, that's a different, that's a different request. Like one of the things I've been thinking about, because I'm also doing my podcast, but I've only managed to so far do one, one recording this program because I have been attempting to, you know, put the dates in, and each time I think we've rescheduled like three, four times now with various different people. And, it can get really disheartening, because, you know, it just feeds the internalized ableism of, like, this being a problem. You're a problem. You're disrupting things constantly. And fortunately, I'm talking to other disabled artists who are most often in the same boat as me as needing to do that all the time. And it's been really interesting, the responses we've had from people, when we've had to rearrange. Is just like this, instead of it being a problem, it's more like a reassurance for them to see that, 'Oh, you're doing this to this is really helpful to know.' And that is that is really deeply reassuring for me. But one of the things I've been thinking is just like, oh, I wonder if like, in the next budget request bit, we could like, even put funds aside for that rearranging? Like, I wonder if we could have like, here's the fee for the thing we're going to do, and then we've also got a pot set aside for respecting and acknowledging that, you know, we value people's time, and we and sometimes people, we take up people's time in the rearranging of things. And like, I wonder if we could pay people to rearrange as well, do you know? I'd love to be able to do that.

I talked to some disabled artist friends of mine who incorporate things like recovery time into their practice. The fee is also a reflection of the way in which they're going to be completely knackered afterwards and need to recover. And so, I guess it's like, thinking in that sense of like, okay, so there's the thing that requires the output of how we produce,

and then there's the buffer. And how do we make sure that that buffer is well-tended and taken care of and looked after? And then allows us to do the other things we want to do?! And yeah, I think that is a really interesting way in which it feeds itself in terms of, like, I feel good, because I know you're covered and taken care of, you feel good because of that, and then we can all feel a lot better and more comfortable around it, you know?

Kelly Lloyd 23:13

Yeah, like the one of the first lines of your bio on your 'About' page, is you make, 'work about making work (and being disabled) and not being able to make work (and being disabled).' And like I make work about work, and about this kind of performance of artistic labour. My studio practice, it's just like, making people tea and talking to them. Or like, staring at an empty wall. Um, whereas other people's artistic practices more closely align with (maybe in part because they made it so) this understanding of like, 'Oh, I got here at like, eight in the morning, and I've been here for, like, all three of my meals...' And, you know, and then you see them, like, carrying plaster molds from, like, one room to the other. And it's like this whole thing that I think when you see it, you're like, 'Ah, yes, they're working!' But then with me, like, drinking tea in my studio, it's like, 'What the fuck is Kelly doing?' You know? [Laughter] Like how harmful it is to have these understandings of like, what work looks like?

Bella Milroy 24:19

Yeah, so difficult. It definitely reminds me of just like, you know, there are so many different kinds of ways in which we experience that outfit of the artist, and what that means to a kind of public display of that. Because for me, the first time I ever called myself an artist was in response to a really classic early years of illness conversation that I would have with people I didn't really know. They would ask me, like, 'What do you do?' And I would crumple into an anxious blob. And this was still like, maybe like a couple of years in, so I was still floating around in this, like, leave of absence space where I wasn't at Uni, but I didn't really know what was going to do and... Very much on a kind of a space where we were, you know, expecting things to be very different very quickly. And, yeah, realizing that I should have just said, 'I'm an artist' was like, so incredibly powerful and transformative to what those conversations ended up like, because, I mean, most of the time you say that to people, and they're like, 'Ooh, how interesting!' Like, and that's not to kind of make myself

into this interesting, cool person or whatever. But it just takes back the ownership of who I am in those kinds of spaces. I get to decide what you think of me.

And again, I think that's something that that took time, because now I'm able to understand my disability and my illness and how that fits into my life, because it's not a case of it being like, oh, I wasn't disabled, I was an artist. You know, I didn't have the vocabulary to be able to talk about my illness in the way that I do now. I have so much more authority over my identity in that respect and saying that I was an artist was a really powerful way of doing that.

And I think it also influenced this idea of like, my time being valuable in a way that I really had to work from the ground up to reconfigure. Because I'd got sick in the Autumn term of my final year of Uni, you know, where everybody is doing the, 'I've been in the studio for 12 hours a day, and I'm working really hard on this.' Going to not doing that at all, you know, there was this constant kind of feeling of like, you know, when I'm at home, watching *Homes Under the Hammer* (which I stand by today is still one of my favorite shows)... so, when I was doing that, it was just this overwhelming sense of you know, you should be somewhere else, this is not where you should be.

And to this day is one of the things I still find myself saying internally when I'm really really unwell, and I'm in bed. I can still say to myself like you're exactly where you need to be. And that, and then also kind of bolstered by that kind of creative identity, was like a really, really powerful kind of tool to just give my time the respect that it deserves, and my body the respect that it deserves. That like, this is what I'm doing. I'm not doing it nothing. I'm doing stuff, because I'm here and I exist, and I think and feel about things, and I have relations to the world, and people I love. And yeah, I think that being able to put that value on my time in that way was yeah, just completely transformative in that respect. And so, yeah, the artist thing is so complicated, because it's got such a capacity for that power and authority and autonomy like that, but then also there's this skewed public kind of performance to it as well, that can be really tricky. Yeah.

Kelly Lloyd 27:57

Yeah. So that's interesting how, you know, because I know, there's like, so much.... Like, who defines themselves in art as an artist and who they tell they're an artist to who, like, has so much baggage around it. And so, you know, it was really nice to hear you say, like, it is actually something that you can, like, claim that allows you to claim ownership over your time and, like, claim authority over the way that you organize your life. And, yeah, what

you value and how your time is spent and how it is valued in certain ways. And I wonder if that's like what is so romantic about an artist for people? Because that's what people want. What people want more of. That's what I want more of.

Bella Milroy 28:44

Yeah. Yeah, I think I mean, for me, if you want to talk romance, I could talk romance of that all day long. I think you could say the romance of talking about that kind of thing disregards the practical, and, you know, structural problems with all of it. But you know, creativity is absolutely romantic. Like, I think for me, one of the things I'm always really excited and interested in is like romancing the kind of things I'm thinking about and feeling around that. Particularly because, so much of my work is interrogating aspects of my life lived with illness, and what that means. And so much of that life is kind of drenched in discomforts and difficulty and challenge like that. And, for me, my creative approach to it is always trying to, like, find moments like that, and kind of trying to fall for myself in those ways.

You know, ways that the world says gross and horrible and uninteresting and unimportant. Like, those are the kinds of things that I want to look at and feel, and hold, and be able to, like fall for, you know? And yeah, I think it is really undervalued. Like, I think, um, you know, I guess maybe one of the things that's springing to mind in terms of how that is undervalued is like, coolness, you know? Like, I don't think it's very cool if you were to turn up and just be like, 'I just love making and thinking about the stuff you know?!' [Laughter] I think coolness in creative spaces is much more about the performance, about how you are styled. And again, like, you know, where do you want to start with the structures of that? Who gets to look cool, etc. What bodies get to look cool, that kind of thing. But if I think about Art School, like, yeah, I think that's a huge hole in that space. I mean, like, I guess it's that inner child kind of thing that's missing in a lot of those bits of Academia that like, you know? You do just want to do it because you like it, don't you? [Laughter] And I think we kind of miss that bit. Like we're doing it because we really love it, don't we? Don't we? Don't we love this thing? Like I love it. Like, I think it's like the best thing like talking to you, like, what a treat just to get to do this. And like you say, like, your practice is this kind of making tea for one another and chatting.

Yeah, I mean, I think again, the focus in those kinds of structures (I mean, maybe I'm getting too focused on Art School in that respect, but I guess that those structures are replicated in so many ways, aren't they?) But like the one you're so heavily focused on the

output, you know, we miss all the kind of ephemeral transitional kind of moments like this, where we're all just gazing off into space and, and having brilliant ideas about things that would otherwise just get missed and forgotten about because we've got to get on with it and do the thing and make the thing, to show people, you know? And something I think we've spoken about over the last 12 months, as you've not been able to access those studio spaces, it's those bits that are the most pressing in terms of wanting to be there and be with other people and have those seemingly insignificant moments with one another. That really supports that creative output.

Kelly Lloyd 32:15

Yeah, you know, as a Black woman, like in majority white spaces, like I've had to find ways to like my body, and like my hair, and like my skin color in the midst of like, a bunch of people not liking it. [Laughter] And I think, you know, I've had to fall for myself in these ways. And some of it has to do with, yeah, like having body hair, and some of it has to do with like, having nose piercings (a bunch of them) and like, these ways that I can, like, adorn myself in very particular ways that sometimes you know, push up against, like, the things that I should be doing to try to, like, you know, [Laughter] like, squeeze myself into this person that I can never be. And that I thankfully have grown into understanding that I do not want to be. Like how boring would life be, right, if everybody just, you know, fit into one mold. Um, but and falling for yourself and the connection with like aesthetics, but then also like, pleasure, you know? I was reading through some of your *Mob-Shop* materials, and just this idea that you like, are they called mobility scooters? How are they, what are they called?

Bella Milroy 33:30

Yeah, mobility scooter is, like, the kind of little one that's mainly using two... it's got like the front wheel drive that you use kind of almost like a moped, but like, got four wheels, most of them.

Kelly Lloyd 33:44

Yeah, just the idea that you would like, you would fall for it, in the way that you fall for like, probably, like well-designed, beautiful, bright products that reflect your personality, you know? And these are all words that I know you've used in different outlets. I wanted to talk

to you more about *Mob-Shop*, but then I also, yeah, I am just interested in how you're tying some of these things together.

Bella Milroy 34:11

Yeah, no, they absolutely are from the same kind of place. And I think, yeah, tie into so much of what we're saying. Like, again, there's such a, such a conflict with the idea of coolness as well, in terms of like, these spaces, like mobility shops, and mobility aids at large are just like, so, you know, void of coolness. Essentially, I mean, one basic definition of coolness would be kind of embedded in youth culture, you know, that kind of thing. Like, those spaces don't have them. So, there's kind of part of me that, like, once, so it's desperate for those spaces to be cool, to be aspirational, to be... you know, like, places we want to be in, and devices that we all want to kind of, like, touch and hold them, and be a part of. But within that there are so many difficult parts of how we achieve that.

Like sometimes I think, I want those spaces to be completely and wholly just disabled culture and just for us. And just a space, where they're our things and they belong to us, and we get to use them and we get to feel fucking great using them and look great, and that's for us, you know? But I think the nature of disability in its vastness and in the way in which anybody can become disabled at any moment, and then not disabled. You know, it's such a fluid experience was in lots of ways.

I don't know, if that's ever, ever the approach we should have with it. I think there's part of me that feels like, well, in order for us to get more comfortable with those places and have more of a kind of broader aspiration of them is for us all to be a part of it and all to understand it. And yeah, I don't think that those things are mutually exclusive. I don't think they have to be only for us, or for only for everybody, you know? I think a non-disabled person could experience them in a really interesting, you know, way that is such a great education, and then they can act as a part of disabled culture as well.

But I think yeah, the falling for yourself bit is so powerful in that way of like, how you say, you know. Just kind of realizing just how draining and exhausting that squeezing yourself into places that actively work against you, [Laughter] and, you know, how liberating that can be? And, I mean, and in that liberation, it is not without its fatigue, and its discomforts, is it? But those kinds of rituals, and those kinds of acts are just such a great way of kind of, like you say, pushing back against those things, can feel really, really close sometimes, you know? Yeah, and I don't know about you, but for me, they've always felt

quite instinctive in terms of like taking agency and autonomy over these things. Like, because you're met with things that are just so, so, like, gross, and like, horrible.

Say, for example, like, if you were to get a mobility scooter... it's interesting, like, and this is things I've spoken before about is like, when I first got my mobility scooter, I got it on the basis of, I had to just decide not to be embarrassed about it anymore. And I really remember specifically being like, I'm sick of not being able to get out. I'm sick of not going places, I'm just going to not be embarrassed about it. And that was a really big shift, and it felt great. But it was like, I think it again, it took me quite a long time to realize just how weird that is to have to have to kind of psych yourself into that place where you're like, I'm going to I'm gonna make this work for me as a way of getting to do the things I want to do.

But the process of that is also very complicated. The fact that you when you kind of go to those kinds of spaces, like mobility shops, and talk to the people who are working there, who are, you know... my experience of that was never with disabled people (they may well have been disabled themselves, but they weren't forthcoming with that.) I remember one of them saying things like, 'Yeah, you know, like, it is sad that younger people are using more and more of these things, but, like, it's good! It's sad, but you know, they're great things. And you know, good luck to you.' That kind of thing. And, like, I just remember, like, looking at him because I was sat on the thing and being like... yeah, like, what is that? What are you saying there? Like, what I'm doing here, there's a sadness to it?

What I've talked with lots of my disabled friends [about] is like, where are the occupational therapists in those settings? You know, where are the people that have, like absolute knowledge and understanding of like, bespoke items.

And, you know, it was great. But again, it's one of those classic experiences of, like, there's no bar, because your standards are just nonexistent. And then you get something like this, and you're like, oh, my God, my life has changed!

Like, one of the things I always say about this getting that scooter was, like, how, you know, I got it on a motivation of wanting to get out and wanting to go for walks and things like that, that, you know, I wasn't able to do. And, but it just, I never expected it to give me time in a way that it did. And I think those are the kinds of things that I'm really interested in, in terms of exploring our aids and devices in that, like, they're designed for very specific things, but actually what they give you, it is just almost kind of infinite in how supportive and transformative they can be. I think applying that kind of creative gaze to it in that way of like, yes, how do I fall for it? How do I make it mine? I think, how do I make it mine is something I'm always really, really always eternally interested in doing. And like, there's this thing,

there's this lump of stuff, and how do I, how do I turn it into this? How do I turn it into what I want it to be? How do I make it mine?

Kelly Lloyd 40:16

Is there anything that you thought we will talk about that we haven't talked about? Do you have any questions for me? Or is there anything you'd like to say?

Bella Milroy 40:23

Um, yeah, I didn't really have an idea of what we would chat about. I think it was just kind of like sharing our practices, which I think basically we've done, haven't we? So that feels really nice... I think one of the things that's been interesting for me, especially since doing *Access to Work*, because *Access to Work* is like just a generic government subsidized thing. And it's more so designed to help people that are in employment. Like they have an employer, so they're not self-employed. So not only am I self-employed, but I'm an artist. So, like, just that process is just like, so different. [Laughter] And they were very, like, I think they were quite thrown by a lot of the kind of things I was trying to say I needed help with. But it was really interesting, kind of, because they needed to know what... I basically needed to do a business plan, I needed to tell them where I was going to be in three years' time or something like that. And I just never done that before, I'd never formally evaluated my daily output. And I wonder, like, if you've ever had to do that, and what you feel about that? Like, is it something you think about? Like I think recently I was having with someone about when you retire. Like when you retire? I mean, LOL. [Laughter] But like the idea of like not doing it anymore.

Like for me, personally, in my experience of disability, like when we were leaving Uni, the idea there was all these questions around, 'Are you going to get a studio?' And like, 'Are you going to carry on your practice?' And all these kind of big questions like that. And for me, it was like, but like, yeah, I've obviously like a) it's what I'm already doing, and b) like, I don't there's no other option for me. Like the other options of other paid employment are just like nonexistent. And so, but even then, it's not like I was there being like, 'Paid employment? I've got to be an artist! I've got to do this thing.' Like... and again, there's lots of support that came into that in terms of how feasible that was for me. But yeah, I wonder if that's a question you've ever really like sat with and thought about in that kind of way?

Kelly Lloyd 42:33

Yeah. Um, no. [Laughter] I mean, I think, you know... I think, like, it comes up in conversation with friends, I think sometimes when you're just, like, hitting a wall, you know? And they've had the same conversation with you over and over and over again. And so, they're just like, 'What is the plan here? Where do you want to be, you know, in, in the future?' And I'm always like, 'This, but better.' Like, not better as in like... just the quality, you know? So, like, the quality just kind of consistently goes up a little bit, you know? Like, my bed just is always a little softer. You know, like, my house is like, just always a little nicer. You know, my relationships with people are just like a little deeper. You know, but it's basically the same exact... I just want to keep doing this. By this, I mean, like having friends going out for drinks, like, you know, meeting new people having interesting chats, like, getting to do my work, like making some money from a constellation of like, artist fees, and grants, and fellowships, and lecturing opportunities; like, you know, getting to travel to places I've never been to before, like, spending time with friends and family and you know, just kind of that. Only continued and, like, consistently better, you know?

And, you know, I think a lot about how the things I do not want, more than I think about things I do want, which, like, in terms of mood board vision (like attract the things in my life by thinking more about what I do want, rather than what I don't want). But I think a lot about how, like, I want to continue to be at a level in the variety of things that I do, to be in the conversations I want to be in. Which I need to keep up a certain kind of exhibition practice, [I need to] keep up with certain kind of socially engaged practice, I need to keep up a certain kind of writing, [I need] to keep up these things so that all of a sudden, I'm not put at like the kids table with any of this shit, you know?

Bella Milroy 44:41

Yes!

Kelly Lloyd 44:42

And so, I just need to like, kind of keep all those balls in the air at the same level, like, not at the same level, but at the level that I want them to be for the people I want to talk to, and for them to want to talk to me. Like that, I need to do... and will continue doing forevermore, you know? Which sounds exhausting talking about it. [Laughter] But is it think something that I definitely do want (based on something that I do not want). And so yeah, so I think that's... when I think about like my future in terms of planning, like, that's it.

I really love talking to you. It's... And I really like these conversations because I feel like, I've talked to you before, you know, like, but somehow in the chit chat (which is lovely) and then the logistics (which is also lovely), like, I don't get these kinds of richer things.

Bella Milroy 45:31

Oh no, I had honestly an absolute blast, so so so so, so nice. Yeah, thank you so much for asking me. Honestly, Kelly this is lovely.

Kelly Lloyd 45:39

Thank you for doing it.

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Outro (Kelly Lloyd) 45:46

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

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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! That's it for Season 1 of *This Thing We Call Art*.