**Lauren La Rose:***Community-based work or you know like social practice? It's a practice. It's a process. I think that process is really key. And often through that process is where the transformation happens.*

**Michael Bowdidge:** *Ideally, we'd like to see WHALE, entirely staffed by local people in 10 years time, that would be wonderful. We would love that.*

**Lynda Buchan:** *This creative session for engagement it kind of offers a common ground - the place - that's what brings us together, regardless of culture and heritage, identity.*

**Emma Jayne Park:** *This isn't about us as individuals surviving it is about art and like access to culture in a long term way. And I think for me, what that means is long term investment in artists on the ground*

**[INTRO]**

**MC**: This is the Future Culture podcast. In 2021, the Culture Collective programme was created and established a network of 26 participatory arts projects, shaped by local communities alongside artists and creative organisations, funded by Creative Scotland. Since then, they have embarked upon an event series entitled Starting Points, that explored pertinent themes to community-based art projects within the network. This podcast will explore what comes next! What does the future hold for creatives and their importance for communities across Scotland as we go forward?

In this, the penultimate episode of this series, we will consider different themes which mirror those of our initial Starting Points events. In this episode, Locate, we focus on Scotland’s places.

This week we explore:

* With so many facets to projects, how do creative practitioners not lose sight of their main objectives whilst creating legacy within communities?
* How do we maintain, honour and celebrate traditional culture whilst challenging approaches such as participation and access?
* Culture within places may differ across Scotland therefore what community considerations are central to locations?

**Part 1: With so many facets to projects, how do creative practitioners not lose sight of their main objectives whilst creating legacy within communities**

**MC:** Something that underpins all of our episodes and indeed Culture Collective is location. The projects that exist within the network are driven by communities stretching from Shetland in the far north of Scotland right down to the borders.

Location can be made up of physical and natural features including landforms, bodies of water, climate, soils, natural vegetation and animal life. Location is only one piece of the framework of geography, yet it’s an important theme because it helps us know and express where things are. There are also the human characteristics of a place to consider. Locations become places through human actions and thoughts and the human characteristics include the culture of the people living in that place and all the ways they interact with it. This extends to people inhabiting the place, their way of life, as well as how they use and modify the environment around them which can be represented in language patterns, architecture and more.

Our country and world are in constant motion, constantly changing. Like blood flowing through our bodies, movement brings life to a place and so does culture. Culture is a fundamental part of a vibrant society, expressed in many ways that have been documented throughout this podcast. In addition to its intrinsic value, culture provides important social and economic benefits to places. Improved learning and health, opportunities to come together, increased tolerance and an enhancement of quality of life increases overall wellbeing for individuals in communities.

We have travelled around lots of places during this series and we wanted to visit a few more in this episode.

Our first stop off is the Scottish Borders where we meet The Teviot, the Flag and the Rich, Rich Soil. Steered by cultural organisation Alchemy Film & Arts which is invested in experimental film, this programme of artist residencies, film commissions, discussion events and community engagement exploring the borders, boundaries and lines of Hawick and the aforementioned Scottish Borders.

Taking place between July 2021 and December 2022, the programme engages artists in working with communities to consider the pasts, presents and futures of Hawick. They will research and investigate the town and wider region’s cultural identities in relation to land, water, industry, territory, place and environment. Emphasising collaboration, collectivity and sustainable growth, The Teviot, the Flag and the Rich, Rich Soil also includes artist bursaries, community filmmaking workshops, and a traineeships programme.

The first team member we meet is Lauren La Rose, a multidisciplinary artist and educator. Lauren earned a Bachelor of Fine Art from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where they trained as a filmmaker and fibre artist. Lauren is also Alchemy’s Project Coordinator and took part in our Starting Points event focused on Scotland’s places.

Here’s what they had to say about process, infrastructure and barriers when it comes to culture within a community…

[CLIP] **Lauren La Rose:** *Part of working with communities is meeting people where they're at and assessing their needs. You're constantly building like a relationship and relationships take work and negotiation, but they also take compassion. So if we're talking about, you know, community-based work or like social practice, it's a practice, it’s a process. I think that process is really key. And often through that process is where the transformation happens. So I think as much as we're talking about these large infrastructure changes, or systemic changes, there's, you know, it's a grassroots approach, a horizontal model that builds up and all of that creates momentum. So I don't think that there's a hierarchy and the impact in terms of creating larger social or systemic change. The way our engagement strategy is being developed, and, you know, partnering potential with frontline services and our social service, sorry, social services is because there's a real desire, you know, talking about change that, you know, COVID-19 has exposed kind of deficit in the art sector that has predated the pandemic. And that, you know, if we say we want accessibility, if we say what we want, we want inclusivity we have to have a just a, you know, as much as want a just arts sector, we have to have a just society. So if we're working with communities, we're seeing barriers to access not just to frontline services, but to arts, which are also integral, because arts often kind of dislocate, allow us to confront injustice and oppression. So I just think that that's part of the conversation, as well that things are being co-designed expectations are being set in a collaborative way change has to happen. It's not just a, you know, like a desire, it's a necessity.*

**MC:** Lauren echoes here some of our observations from our opening, in that the arts are integral to society and help to address and communicate issues such injustice and oppression, which can be common barriers within places. This can be through truth speaking and storytelling, but it can also be used to assess the needs of people and the building of relationships in innovative ways. This is another subject which threads through Lauren’s clip and their point about the grassroots building up to create momentum, is key to communities in localities, as it promotes more accessibility with the potential to create a movement.

Infrastructure is also something that Lauren touches on and from the many conversations with people on this podcast and with others participating in the Culture Collective network, the feeling has been that having time to work on creating these basic foundational systems have been both a blessing and a bit of a game changer. Effectively infrastructure can support sustainability, promote working relationships, create new opportunities and open up an internal project to a wider location. But it can also be viewed as something constrictive by some. For many creative practitioners, there is the need and want to simply move freely with their practice. This may involve all the imaginative, fun and colourful ways in which the arts and culture is promoted and participated in without the red tape, boundaries and sometimes clinical aspects that infrastructure can bring. People sometimes don’t think about infrastructure until things go wrong or something isn’t working, but it’s fundamental in protecting from unpredictabilities.

With the addition of infrastructure considerations to the many other facets that projects have to consider, there may be risk of creative practitioners losing sight of their main objective. And with that, there is also the challenge of thinking about the legacy being created in the community that these practitioners work in.

We were keen to explore this subject more and caught up with The Teviot, the Flag and the Rich, Rich Soil Artist in Residence Julia Parks. Julia’s practice encompasses film, animation, photography and archives, often using series of photographs and projected 16mm film. Through this medium she explores the different relationships between landscape, people, plants and industry, often focusing on the west coast of Cumbria. Here’s what she had to say…

[CLIP] **Julia Parks:** *​​People are always really at the centre of what I have made in the past. I mean, I'm really interested in actually hearing from people who actually live in the area that I might be making a piece of work about, I very much don't necessarily go in with a very set agenda. When I go to make a film, often, the films often end up being shaped by the people who I've spoken to who I might have interviewed, or in places that they might have taken me, for example. And so I think that's one thing. And that's kind of very much like the way that I make films. But also, I would say that this other side of my practice is very much being quite like hands on around making things collectively or experimenting with different techniques. For example, I work primarily with 16 millimetre film. And sometimes I will obviously be using the camera very much like as me with the camera filming certain things. But I often do work with film in a more kind of collective way, that where we might be using an archive piece of footage and cutting it up or wherever we might be like using a camera to document something and then developing it with in plants locally. And that being a kind of process. So obviously, I'm keen that the project isn't just necessarily my vision of what I've kind of interpreted from the place that there's going to be that opportunity for people to get involved with like a hands-on making process. And one of the things that potentially interested in is experimenting with that 16 millimetre film and experimenting with developing it maybe in different types of plants and what the images that we produce together are I'm not sure but yeah, I think that's kind of important because I do like it's it's quite different for me because obviously I work very much where I live and kind of very much respond that whereas I'm going to be going to a very different place which isn't really a place that I know or, and six months isn't a massively long time either it feels like quite a short time to get to know somewhere and to do something and response. But I'd even just my week visit just before Christmas, like I met lots of different people and kind of went from not knowing anything to sort of feeling like oh wow, there's so much potential.*

**MC:** Julia’s specificity surrounding film doesn’t limit the themes that come from what she says. Her comments on not setting an agenda and letting the people who live in a place shape the project has been a common approach within the network. Comments on having an experimental approach are interesting as time constraints can often limit this ability to experiment however, this is arguably where some of the biggest positives can come. Experimentalism can lead to interesting pieces of work and new discovery but it can also contribute to shaping safe spaces and trust, because one size doesn’t fit all.

The consideration from Julia to not let her vision of interpretation dictate, feeds into these ideas and gives way for communities to explore, manifest and even transition in some cases.

And for Julia and many others entering new locations, communities and hubs, it can be a tricky endeavour. From one angle, there is a desire to expand our horizons, feed our own knowledge, develop our practice and even reduce ignorance when it comes to understanding our landscape. There is also the risk we can also be mistaken into stereotyping and thinking that a place needs input, that it deserves help of some kind from the outside, without acknowledging the culture already present.

The other angle is that sometimes, communities have certain ways of working and living, they may want to run things in a certain fashion whilst also staying true to things like tradition and history. And it can become intimidating, particularly for smaller communities, minoritised groups or even certain desirable places to be approached continuously when it comes to cultural activity. So this begs our first provocation of this episode: ***How do we safeguard communities from constant engagement?***

**Part 2: Maintaining honour and celebrate traditional culture whilst challenging approaches such as participation and access**

**MC:** We remain in the south of Scotland for the next part of our podcast, this time in Dumfries and Galloway, and visit a cluster of dynamic places as part of the ‘What We Do Now’ project. With The Stove Network at the helm, What We Do Now is a pioneering experiment in Creative Placemaking for the South of Scotland, supported by a regional partners group (DG Arts Festival, Wigtown Book Festival and Upland) and a strategic partners (South Of Scotland Enterprise, Dumfries & Galloway Council, Third Sector D&G and Skills Development Scotland).

Supporting Place Hubs in five communities across the region; ‘The Millennium Centre’ in Stranraer, ‘Outpost Arts’ in Langholm, ‘LIFT’ in Northwest Dumfries, ‘A’ The Airts’ in Sanquhar and ‘Castle Douglas Development Forum’ in Castle Douglas, the project hosts both established and emerging artists to work with these communities and local group/organisations to inspire new imaginative possibilities and explore bold ideas that celebrate the voices often unheard in their region.

Lucy MacLeod is ​a commercial Illustrator, Artist and Educator and co-founded OutPost Arts in early 2018 with a vision to create opportunities for rural artists & makers and increase access to cultural activities and learning for local/regional communities. Based in Langholm which exists within the vicinity of the What We Do Now project, Lucy took part in our Starting Points Locate event and raised a provocation that we felt would be a great opener for this section…

[CLIP] **Lucy MacLeod*:*** *So yeah, my provocation, I suppose, is focused on decision making. Local culture, hate to do it, in Langham where we're based. Due in part to geographical isolation. So for example, common ridings where old fashioned models of community leadership and decision making persist, I can give a few examples maybe down the line. This relationship between culture and tradition trickles down to create an…in my experience anyway, personally speaking, creates an inflexible approach which excludes people. And I've said mainly women and young people, but there could be other groups that I'm not considering there, from contributing and from taking part in decision making. So the questions that I think because of that, that we, as an arts organisation, and me as a director of an arts organisation asked myself is how do we maintain and celebrate and honour traditional culture? Traditional cultures like common ridings. Whilst challenging approaches regarding the participation and access, at a kinda social community level.*

**MC**: Lucy’s personal take on geographical isolation combined with exclusion is a thought-provoking comment. This draws in a further point to consider about how historical cultural activity can sometimes in fact exclude substantial members of the population. So we thought it would be interesting to ask two members of the What We Do Now project team the provocation Lucy poses, that being: *How do we maintain, honour and celebrate traditional culture whilst challenging approaches such as participation and access?*

Firstly, we meet Andy Brooke. An emerging artist based in Dumfries, Andy worked for a substantial time as a teacher of photography but took early retirement to concentrate on his own practice as an artist. Here’s what he had to say…

[CLIP] **Andy Brook:** *I think the project that we're involved with at the moments through The Stove is the What We Do Now project which is part of the building back really after COVID. So I feel that we're working in Northwest Dumfries, there’s a team of us. And we're very much trying to involve the community there in all of the work that we do. So that means we try to sort of make contact and involve them in decision making and ideas about what they would actually like to have, but also recognising that they have their own culture to start with, and not to try and sort of step on that in any way. But to kind of build on that, if you like, extend the opportunities that they might have or not have. It’s seen as a sort of a deprived area of town. But I think one of the key things that I've learned doing this project, you know, since last year, last summer, is that there are resources within that community that perhaps they don't fully understand or recognise or use. And our job is to kind of make use of those, I think, and in a sense transform perhaps the way that they see their own setting and their own culture. The idea is to give them perhaps a bit more self respect and self reliance in their own area. So I think what we're trying to build all of that in, we're trying not to sort of just bring in our own culture and impose that onto them. That is part of the project and why it's taken, really taken quite a long time to sort of prepare the ground if you like for what we were doing. In fact, yesterday, we were putting up the tent that we've had, we've commissioned a tent to be made, and sort of traditional canvas tent, which we're going to use as as a place to have pop up events around the tower blocks that in the street that we're going to be working in. Okay, and we're going to try and gear the events directly for the residents they're getting to this point . It's taken quite a long time. We've had consultation with the residents. We've tried, we've knocked on doors, we tried to sort of make friends a bit. We've tried to sort of show them what we perhaps could offer, but get their input and what they would like to see as well. In the sense of their culture, we do have a lot of respect for what they do and what they're, where they're coming from as people. And we're not trying to sort of impose, we're trying to build I guess, on what's already there.*

**MC:** Andy mentions the importance of communities being involved in decision making but also the importance of recognising that they have their own culture to begin with. And this is something that is central to being responsible and sustainable when working in an area. Respect is the huge theme and the guiding principle behind Andy’s approach along with his colleagues. Whilst people may live in a community, when introducing something new there is perhaps an importance on honouring your role as a visitor and allowing local actions to guide behaviours. The role this location plays in the lives of the people who live there is far more significant than perhaps a new introduction as it may be something outside of the context of the locals’ desire.

But there is an interesting point that Andy raises regarding resources and we felt this is something that should be explored more as part of our first provocation of this section. And that is: ***Is there a misunderstanding or underuse of resources in locations and communities that we should be building on rather than introducing something new?***

**MC:** We are next introduced to Katharine Wheeler. Katharine is one of the core team at The Stove Network in Dumfries. She is also a visual artist with a socially-engaged community practice and also a massive advocate for the role of creative practice as part of community led change and development. Here is her take on our initial question…

[CLIP] **Katharine Wheeler*:*** *How does a project like this engage the culture that is already present in a community. And I think that comes back to the importance of you know what, what we've tried to build into what we do now is this real anchoring in place through the community, the place hubs that we're working with, who have strong relationships and knowledge of that place and an identity to that place. You have to really know what already exists, the challenges, the work that's being done, the culture that's being celebrated or the culture that's potentially not being celebrated. And that requires long term building of trust and relationships. So for us with what we do now that collaboration with the place hubs provides that. Also initiating the project, the work that we'd already done through the Embers Report in us building that our relationship The Stove building its relationship with the place hubs. So sharing this vision for a more joined up, networked way of working and thinking about it as community-embedded practice with artists. In terms of access and inclusion, but focusing in the first part of my answer on the place hubs as a sort of anchor organisation, I talked about experimentation. And the experiment and learning together is how to work with artists. There's learning for the artists in how to work with community hubs, anchor organisations, there's learning for the organisations in how to work with artists. And there's learning for both in how to work together to work with communities, in really true process-led collaboration. I think that forms the foundation of the second part of my answer about access and inclusion. What that provides is a commitment to transparency, a commitment to process, a commitment to more horizontal decision making, and working through challenges. And what that looks like in practice, is it's about making spaces and understanding the support that people need to come into those spaces to be able to engage in the project. So we see there are opportunities for people working with the place hubs, with the project. And then there's the experience of the artists in providing something a little bit playful, that inspires some of these, you know, I suppose, groups in the community that we feel we're trying to reach. It starts from that anchoring of what's already happening. What we've requested, our artists and our play subs and with the support of The Stove. So bringing our experience in this process-led how do you provide small activities that initially create spaces for the community and groups to come into excite them interest and through those conversations, you then allow that to lead what comes next or what might be needed and you're constantly allowing for that flexibility and come together to share the challenges of that, which is this constant balance between having a vision because people want to be inspired. but that vision being flexible and responsive to the process of those creative actions, those interrogations, those conversations with the community.*

**MC:** Katharine presents a very clear and structured approach on behalf of The Stove when it comes to their approaches with the What We Do Now project. There is almost a mapping of considerations which involve community, area, creative practice, legacy and those delivering. She also echoes Andy’s comments about culture and how identifying as *she* puts: “you have to know what exists”. It’s a given by now in these conversations that trust and relationship-building is fundamental but we all know this can be the hardest and most complex thing to achieve.

The further mapping which identifies *“how to work with artists*” is something of note. There’s often an approach in projects whereby the focus is placed on getting to know locations, communities and the individual pockets of people that live in them but sometimes there is a missing step in the process whereby it would be useful to have something for people to learn from and this could arguably contribute to legacy and pay forward to projects that these communities could initiate themselves, without the aid of a traditional creative practitioner.

Katharine also mentioned horizontal decision making which if you remember from part one, Lauren also brought up. This non-hierarchical approach is something that could be more attractive to communities as it removes an imposing potential directive and also feels like something far more collaborative.

Similar to Andy, Katharine raises a provocation in her own right. Her comments on cultural vision are compelling. This perhaps feeds into the horizontal approach in decision making but it also promotes a question to take forward and that is: ***based on the subject of cultural vision, and for it to be flexible and responsible in an area, how do we go about creating balance?***

**Part 3: Culture within places may differ across Scotland therefore what community considerations are central to locations**

**MC:** When we look at culture across Scotland, it can take on many different forms depending on where we visit. But, even if we look at one creative or cultural practice in a city and take it to perhaps a coastal or rural area, it can still look dramatically different. One thing that may remain similar however, is human value.

Things like generational change, immigration, education and more can influence a place but there are also physical aspects such as environment, gentrification and so on. And that in itself can influence cultural approach and delivery.

Learning about land and resources (as Andy pointed out in Part 2) and how this has shaped regional culture, for example, can help us understand its uniqueness. And without that uniqueness there would be a slow down in imaginative approaches to creative projects and our desire to continue them.

This all leads to a question surrounding community considerations and how these are central to locations.

Another panellist who took part in our Starting Points Locate event was Michael Bowdidge. Michael is community development lead at WHALE Arts, which is a community-led arts charity and social enterprise and has firmly established itself as the cultural anchor organisation for Wester Hailes in North Edinburgh.

WHALE’s Culture Collective project ‘Create Community Wealth’, is a collaboration between this community hub and a number of others in the local area including North Edinburgh Arts, Passion4Fusion and Score Scotland. Michael made a number of comments at the original Locate event that relate to the subject of community considerations being central to locations. Here’s what he had to say…

[CLIP] **Michael Bowdidge:** *Both through the Community Development strand, I'm involved in that and through creative placemaking that came before that, we've really want ideally, we'd like to see well, entirely staffed by local people in 10 years time, that would be wonderful, we would love that. We're not there yet, unfortunately. But in terms of kind of trying to make as level a playing field as possible, between local artists, and even, I want to say trained and untrained artists, but that doesn't really quite articulate what I'm going for. But self taught, or perhaps people have been to art school, we've actually for last three years, we have a Wester Hails open exhibition, which is completely open to everyone, staff exhibit in local community artists, young people, artists have worked as freelancers, everyone's welcome to put stuff in. And what we've found is that it's been amazing in terms of creating new connections, both between the works that get displayed, and also hanging, that is a revelation, because there's nothing there that doesn't belong, it all fits together one way or another. And it really does sort of start to take away some of those preconceptions we might have about professional arts practice, we get some amazing things happening through that. So I think, to answer your question, Jenny, yes, we very much think that that's something that we we want to do and to continue to do is to empower those local artists, but also not to turn them into copies of ourselves as being sort of insecure freelance, flitting from one job to another types. We offered someone, a local painter, a three grand commissioned to decorate some, some free, little free libraries for us. And he turned it down. And we said, Why don't you want to do it? He said, because it's going to mess up my benefits completely. And I actually have sort of, I don't feel anxious, I have financial security, I know where my next cheque is coming from. If you give me that money, I have to declare it or I worry about it. And then where am I after that? And it's like, you know what, you're absolutely right. Really sorry. We tried to turn you into what we are. So there's all sorts of lessons around that absolutely.*

**MC:** WHALE Arts’ ambition to have their charity and enterprise run entirely by local people shows fantastic foresight in looking at investing into the area of Wester Hailes, but also the conversations and considerations they have around who is an artist, from self-taught to professional. And this perhaps ties in with Katharine’s comments in Part 2 regarding *“how to work with artists”.*

It was however Michael’s reflection about the commission offer to a local painter that is noteworthy. Within communities as freelance creatives, we can often be looking for work on a regular basis as is explored in our previous episode Spotlight, but we have not yet had comment on what needs to sometimes be in place for us to survive within an area. The benefits system is a flawed, complex and huge beast and perhaps not for this episode BUT it is something to take heed of. It would not be as simple as if work dried up then we move to a different location or perhaps travel in order to satisfy this. There are varying reasons that people wish to remain in the area they are. Childcare, mental health, other commitments, even self-doubt. It’s therefore another consideration in terms of economics and our safety nets that this is added to our debates.

**MC:** Our last trip of this episode and indeed this series are to Keith, Buckie and Speyside located on the North-East coast of Scotland.

Arts in Moray Collective comprises four local organisations: Dance North Scotland, Moray Arts Development Engagement, Moray Way Association and Wildbird. Drawing upon associations of the word ‘collective’, the project employs a new and radical approach to engaging a network of creative practitioners and communities within Moray – hosting at least eight artist residencies from June 2021 to September 2022.

One of the Artists in Residence is Lynda Buchan, a Moray-based artist and recent graduate from Moray School of Art. Her creative practice is kept close to the heart, embracing areas of her native culture and surroundings of a northeast fishing community and life experiences to inspire her work - blending disciplines of art, archaeology and anthropology to convey the found and made artefact.

We were keen to ask Lynda our earlier question in this section relating to what community considerations she is taking on that are central to her location…

[CLIP] **Lynda Buchan:** *So the limitations at the beginning, I researched quite a lot about the locations and the heritage and histories of places trying to pick up some connections. But I then reached out online, which could, it's kind of limited once you've got one connection, that’s when it happened, and then actively being present in an activity with the community, then that just feeds into whatever happens next. It does take a bit of time. But it's worth it because you build really meaningful relationships that are sustainable. And they help, not just me, they help the whole collaboration of the collective to pass on all that information. And then that's formed. It's interesting because I've been working in communities along the coast. And there's a kinship, the coastal folk, the hair that kind of mare related to the sea than the land that they live on. And there's a similar sense of belonging there. All along the coast, what I've taken into consideration is being culturally sensitive, my engagements, engagements are open to all ages and abilities. And I kind of gave us quite a lot of thought I didn't want to be working with one particular group, I wanted it to be very, I wanted to get all these hidden voices, because we are all unique. And that's what makes it interesting, and less creative sessions or engagement that cannot offer us a common ground - the place. That's what brings us together, regardless of culture, heritage, identity. We’ve all got really interesting in life history. So that's what I've been taking into consideration. And really, always go back to the heart of the project and that’s really just to bring people together from all walks of life, just to share their stories that experiences really just hit that meaningful exchange.*

**MC:** Lynda’s comments about the kinship within coastal communities will be something that many relate to. Communal ties exist on many different levels that can make community members into family members. This isn’t necessarily about genetics but history, growth, evolution, even hardship including significant socio-economic problems. The tie that binds can feel more intimate in these areas due to the way of life and the history that’s preceded it.

You can feel how invested Lynda is within her practice, whilst it’s a means of working, it’s also a way of life and the dedication to a community as a whole, no matter age or experience. And that arguably should be at the heart of what creative practitioners do.

Lynda also comments on storytelling, which is quite fitting as our first episode of this series ACT, was where we first began to explore this in depth. And when it comes to location, this is still a main catalyst in a creative project.

But, it’s Lynda’s comments on cultural sensitivity that lead us to our final provocation. Sensitivity, empathy, trust, compassion and open-mindedness are all things we need to consider before working and practising in these settings. Cultural sensitivity can be argued as the knowledge, awareness and acceptance of other cultures and cultural identities. These are skills we need to communicate effectively but it also enables those travelling and working within communities to navigate with which they are interacting.

So let us consider the following: ***How can we look at adapting our cultural sensitivity depending on what area of Scotland we are working in?***

**Part 5: Host Round-Up: Morvern & Emma**

**MC:** At the end of each episode I like to have a debrief with a guest to discuss the themes raised each week with someone who is connected directly to the episode theme. This week our guest is Emma Jayne Park - Emma is a dancer, theatre maker, collaborator, facilitator, movement director, trainee intimacy coordinator, choreographer, advocate, micro-activist and occasional drag king.

Currently a PushProject.Eu Artist and Associate Artist with the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival, Emma recently undertook an Associateship with Scottish Dance Theatre/ Dundee Rep supported by the Surf The Wave Seed Generator. Their facilitation practice includes working with Federation of Scottish Theatre, EPAD, Imaginate and IETM.

Emma has also advocated for freelancers rights as a speaker in Holyrood at the [Cross Party Group for Culture](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFgGVZXOJWg). Their work will be done when practices that encourage mental well-being are embedded across the arts sector.

Here, I catch up in conversation with Emma about the provocations in this episode and take a look at the future.

[CLIP] **Morvern & Emma**

**MC***: There you are, you've magically appeared. Fantastic. We are talking and picking up on the very last of our Starting Points events, which was LOCATE, Scotland Places. Really great to have you back to kind of talk a little bit about some of the stuff that maybe came up then or maybe didn't come up then or has been coming up as a result of the interviews that Halina has been conducting for this episode of the podcast. We're gonna jump straight into our first question, which in the context of LOCATE and Scotland Places is how do we safeguard communities from constant engagement?*

**EJP***: And this is a great question. And I think it's a great question that I might pick apart a wee bit because I actually don't think constant engagement is the issue. I think constantly being sold things, told you're meant to engage in a certain way, being made to feel like you should be grateful, because there's a thing like: “Aren't you lucky we've arrived in your space and imposed some culture” inverted commas on you, and you should be really happy about that. And so it like it fits a lot with me and I think particularly so I live in Dumfries and Galloway Lots of questions about whether we should even discuss that as a place. It's a massive region. Like to me, Dumfries and Galloway isn't a thing, if I'm really honest in terms of living here as a person, but I think there's something loads about joined up thinking. So last year when things opened up two or three events happened on one weekend in Dumfries and Galloway, and I'm just…*

***MC:*** *Kind of overwhelming [laughs]*

**EJP***: Overwhelming and ridiculous. And it's not that I assume people would want to go to all of them, but there's just part of me going, how do we build things so that people can opt in in the way that they want to? And how can we like avoid this thing where we imagine we own people, or that people are sitting around waiting for something to happen, like people around here live full, brilliant, valid lives. And if we want people to engage in culture, there's loads of inverted commas going on there. Actually, what we need to do is offer opportunities to engage weekly, monthly, annually, totally sporadically, in a way where there's kind of just things bubbling away all of the time, so people can slowly I think in my head, I call him like participation by osmosis, people who already live rich and full lives just without the stuff we have classed as culture, how can they just go about their everyday lives and slowly make that space to discover and then opt into these things? So I think for me the safeguarding is anyone doing this stuff coming together and being like, when is it happening? So there's gonna be always something going on, that people could opt into? And secondly, like, can we all put our own egos aside, and recognize that we're not special, we're not doing anyone a favour. We're just offering something and letting people decide if they want to engage, because actually having a constant offer is brilliant. And then give things the time, so that people wake up with that thing and go, here are fancy, like some art today, there must be some art somewhere. And I do think it's about our ego. And I think that's really tricky, because it's tied to survival. Because I think a lot of us are like, we just need to get some numbers in because we've got another project grant coming in. And so part of me thinks that the constant engagement is driven, right up at the top with the way everything is subsidised, where it's about numbers, it's about justifying our own existence. It's about people having this like huge, almost rejection, dysphoria, where we just want to feel validated in the stuff we're doing. Because the systems Above us are like, feel valid or feel rejected, there's no in between. I wonder how we de-centre ourselves and actually centre the work and just being like, if these things exist over time, the people that want to will engage in them. And let's stop forcing people and telling people they don't have a culture already. Because they do it's just not what a bunch of other people who most have gone to art school in some way or connected with that kind of vibe, think is culture.*

**MC***: Yeah. And it's king of a question of value that I feel that there's this kind of thing sometimes where institutions of all different kinds can sometimes think of this idea of the gift of culture is some kind of benevolent act when actually it's not necessarily called for in the first place.*

**EJP***:Yeah. So old school is just patronage, isn't it? We'll do something lovely for the paupers. No, the paupers in the gardens having a great time like…*

**MC***: The paupers are at the Gala day, they've got their own stuff going on. So maybe that leads us nicely onto our next question, which is around kind of the resource and locations that's already there. So yeah, is there a misunderstanding, or potential under use of resources and locations and communities that perhaps we should be building on rather than introducing something completely new into communities and locations?*

**EJP***: I think about this loads, and I think it's all a bit like, like moon landings, I think there's loads of just like, rock up, plant a flag, because everyone needs a bit territory, or whatever that is. And there's very little like, real assessment of the landscape. And I do wonder how we really, really assess a landscape and see what is there before looking at like resource. If I think of it ecologically like what resource exists? How do you work with that resource so that you don't disrupt it being available in future? And I think, who gets to assess the landscape is really tricky. Like, I think if you’re in Gretna where I live, and I must admit, everything I'm seeing today really is probably coming from a rural perspective in some senses, but maybe translates elsewhere. And if it doesn't, I think that's cool. But I think that the current funding structures we have are literally a barrier because I think assessing resource as it were, or understanding what exists is about time, and the people who have time to do that, while sustaining a life are generally the people who have some kind of wealth behind them, some kind of other support or already have access to some funds to do this. Yeah, for the areas like Gretna who missed out on any of the like bigger infrastructure money that happened in the New Labour years, apparently. I would say Dumfries & Galloway as a region missed out on loads of infrastructure money, there is no infrastructure for anyone else other than people who are already tapped into this network of the arts as it exists or cultures that exists to sit back and assess the landscape. So actually, there are people coming down to do it and start things a bit like moon landing, where they have no knowledge of what's going on. And the lens that they're looking through, already has an agenda. And I think I mean, the great and the good are lovely people. But there's a dominating culture that goes on. And then we get into the stage of like, we have to compete because there isn't enough other resource anyway. And actually, what we ended up with territories. And so I think, for me, the big misunderstanding, really is that like diversity of thought, I think is your greatest resource in any place. But what that means we need to do is be okay with there being multiples of everything. And I just don't think we're equipped to do that. If I'm honest, I don't think arts and culture is good at like multiplicity, particularly in rural areas, because it's like, well, we'll be the gateway to Gretna. But we've been doing this in Gretna, we're the ones where the Gretna art people. And it's like, yeah, there could be 20, like reserve stamps. And in Norway, it's about the same size as Gretna. And it has five theatres. And they all just work together to make it happen and promote theatre. And they like it works their flourishing and they have a lovely time. And instead, what I'm seeing a lot is that there's no space to collaborate with any of the resources there, whether they be locations, or like locational stuff or community stuff. Because people are too busy trying to like cling to this thing that they've invented and decided they’re entitled to.*

**MC***: So this like is kind of territorial ism. And like, I mean, I've experienced it, you're talking from a rural perspective, but like, I've experienced this in like, inner city Leith, like in Edinburgh, like, where you just feel like, you know, is there not enough room for for everyone to be doing something, especially if we're not necessarily always speaking to the same people. So for a cultural vision to be flexible and responsible in an area, how would you say we go about creating balance with it?*

**EJP***: I think responsible is a lovely word. And it brings me back to what I was just saying about infrastructure and joined up thinking. I think we are very good in the cultural industries, creative sector, at navel gazing. And introspection is good. And we should all be like reflecting on what we're doing. But I also want to be like, again, there's a pothole in the road, someone get a bucket, someone gets some concrete, we'll go out at midnight, so we don't get caught. And we'll just fill it in. Because actually, in many places in the places I'm interested in working in the people living there are scared, because infrastructurally there is not what is required to have a base level of safety, therefore then being like, but art, art, everyone, no wonder people are like, whoa, too much. And I feel like you're trying to sell me a thing. And I'm not, this doesn't feel equitable. So I think there's that and I also think the other one for me is like Michael said in the conversation, brilliant Michael from WHALE said, we need to recentre the work. And I'd like to expand that and be like, we need to recentre art and not ourselves. This isn't about us as individuals surviving it is about art and like access to culture in a long term way. And I think for me, what that means is long term investment in artists on the ground. And that possibly means like less justifying ourselves to ourselves. I think I love that, like I love this podcast, because it makes me think and it makes me think more about my practice. And I love the other conversations. And I do think they’re important. I also would like hand on heart. In fact, yeah. If anyone in Gretna, who is somehow connected to someone I went to school with, that's a broad pool, is listening to this, I will give them £100 cash, I will have I will come to your house, I will be able to find you. And I will just give you 100 quid because I guarantee nobody is, because this is us, in some ways, like trying to pull these things apart. And I believe that with yourself, but like it's a genuine question, I think in other areas it’s justifying ourselves to ourselves. And I think that comes from me in loads of layers of middle management, and I'm not having a pop at producers. And I know that it's a bit more complicated, but actually what I really want to do is just find a way where we can just be like here, a few artists come together, go and work on the ground. And maybe we won't hear what you're doing for a year. Because actually, you need time to listen and time to trust the process. And to really like find those areas of tension and not talk about them. But just share that information. So that something meaningful can happen and I can't blame middle management because in some ways what I'm asking people to do is write themselves out of a job. And that's scary when bills are going up. Actually, I feel like we've created these layers of bureaucracy. That mean the art isn't that important, the people, the community is nowhere to be seen. And isn't that important. And then we have like, we'll have the community steering group. And a lot of the time, I'm just like, cool. So you found people who are already interested, already engaged, who also you feel are palatable and will support the vision you've already had. That's what goes on there. I'm not seeing loads of like, you're the person that comes in, hates the fact we're doing things. Come on in, have a cup of tea and will like will seriously listen.*

**MC***: What you're saying is, can we just pay artists? And can we pay artists for a long time? And can we not ask for outcomes and objectives? I mean, and in some ways, like Culture Collective, that is an aspiration of the whole can a programme that 50% Of all the funds are distributed to all of the participating organisations, and consortiums had to go on freelance artists. I might steamroller onto our last question. Today, one of our last questions, which is interesting in the context of what we've just been seeing, but how can we look at adapting our cultural sensitivity, depending on what area of Scotland we are working in?*

**EJP***: He honestly, I think it comes back to all of the things I was just saying, I think we need to find ways to create time, I think we need to find ways to listen, just time to listen to what exists, and the fear that is least through all communities, but even more so now, post pandemic, I think fear is a currency that is feeding the world, we need time to listen to that we need space to see what we don't know, we don't know. And I think that's really tricky. And again, the cynic in me, but I think there are things where the people who are resourced in some way to do this work already, possibly aren't the best at knowing what they don't know. Because they will have grown up somehow around this culture of art and art making, whether that means they went to art school and not saying anyone's had an easy life. There are interesting examples. So Huntly, for example. I've been thinking loads about going hang on a minute, what if there's a way of just spending some time shadowing Huntly shadowing see like Slung Low down in Leeds and then being like Gretna. I want to get past this notion of like institutional quality, or this kind of like dumbing down of what we do, when it's judged on these parameters that they'd already have time to work in a place with the culture of that place evolves and becomes distinct.*

**MC:** *I think I think that's really interesting cos I think there's also there is mentioned hierarchies earlier, and it does feel like there's hierarchies within participatory art projects, and there kind of is some of those big hitters. And for and also, as you say, maybe the origins of which are maybe not, as we would suggest, would be the best approach to community engagement if something were starting now. But I think I think that's all good learning. I think it's interesting to see what might come out of now, and how we might do things differently as well.*

**EJP***: And and how do we then situate that in a place where hierarchies ultimately prevail again, and using Gretna was quite like a honed and reference point. Dumfries & Galloway is a conservative region, actively socially conservative. So the whole situation when I'm talking about cultural sensitivity, how does this also like link in with the local community council? How does this link in with our local authority funding and the complexities around that? How does it link in with planning? And land ownership, which is a huge issue across Scotland, but particularly across the border of Scotland? How does it link in with all of that stuff that is often unseen, but that hierarchy is running the show, and how do again, cultural sensitivity maybe when I'm not the best person to do it, because I'm not being diplomatic? And is it a level of diplomacy, that is required to unpick some of that?*

**MC***: I think, definitely. And also, that's not to undermine people that come in and do stuff or just actively just do stuff as well. But it's just, I suppose, kind of supporting them to do that in the best way.*

**EJP***: And those networks, you talked about, how do we support the people doing this work to be in networks, where we're not coming together? To have a pretty conversation where we're scared to say the big stuff? How do we do it where we can get in a room, throw our hands up in the air and be like, Oh, my God, I'm so confused. I'm totally lost. What am I doing where's that network of just, holy shit, this is way bigger than I thought. Because I think that to me, could be super powerful, because then we're going to get to the great stuff.*

**MC***: People are being open about that, rather than being like, oh, everything's fine. We're an established organisation. We're coming to the close of our conversation, which has been really fun. But I was wondering if you wanted to leave us or if you'd had thoughts around a last provocation you were kind of hinting towards maybe something at the end there.*

**EJP***: Yeah. I think for me, the biggest provocation I have is like, are we just genuinely willing and equipped enough to be brutally honest with ourselves about the work we are doing, why we are doing the work and our role in that local place?*

**MC:** It’s the end of another episode, but we do want to leave you with one big provocation courtesy of Emma to take forward. And that is: ***Are we genuinely willing and equipped enough to be brutally honest with ourselves about the work we are doing, why we are doing the work and our role in that local place?***

In our next episode, an edited live conversation we’re calling Standing on the Shoulders of Giants, we regroup with all our previous guest hosts and interviewees and discuss each of the provocations they have brought forward. In the meantime, why not head over to our Miro board, an online space that’s been created to invite you to join the conversation. Add your thoughts, insights, experiences and questions here, and we'll include your perspectives in our future conversations. You can find the link in the show notes to accompany this podcast or on the Culture Collective website. You can view videos of the original Starting Points events there too.

**Credits:**

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