

Bodies of Water Symposium: Regenerative Art Practice – Closing Remarks Transcript

0:12 Emma Underhill

Hello, sorry to interrupt you again, but we just want to take your attention for a few more minutes, and then we can get back to chatting with a drink in our hands, hopefully. Wow, well, it's been such an amazing afternoon. It's been incredibly inspiring and energising. And thank you all so much for participating so generously throughout the day. Working responsibly and with care for the environment can sometimes feel quite overwhelming, so it's really important that we do take time to come together and share learning and ideas and reflections. And it's also comforting to sort of tap into this collective hive mind I think. We're going to try and just summarise some of the kind of key takeaways from today, but it's been so rich, and there's also been a lot of conversations happening outside of the room that I've been in, so we may miss some. But I think Mala's going to help me here. Something that comes up has come up throughout the day really consistently, is this question of time, like the need for longer timelines that we want to be we should be following nature's time, not trying to impose our time onto nature and dominate it, developing long-term, long-time projects, considering future ancestors. And I really loved that quote that Alice introduced to us earlier by the one and only Bob Dylan: "purpose of the art is to stop time". And that was really going to stay with me. I think another really key thing that came up was this idea of applying the practice of care when we're working with the planet. And also, I think it was Iman who mentioned, like, taking the practices of care out into the digital space as well, and particularly when we're kind of having this sort of quite sort of palpable anxiety about AI, and also when we're thinking about tech, like, how do we go beyond the low carbon strategies when working with technology? Just a recap on that lovely definition that Justine introduced around regeneration being about repair and how can we work in a reciprocal way with the environment. Mala and I were also talking very much about, you know, this sort of importance on focusing on community, and taking a people-based approach and working locally. And that kind of links into one of our considerations around sort of make it local wherever possible, draw on local knowledge and really value local knowledge. And I think Iman said something, "pay radical attention to your local ecology", which I thought was amazing, and sort of thinking about how, which is something we've really tried to do with bodies of water, actually. How can we work globally, with global ideas, but also make the work hyper local. Changing world views, shifting our processes, but also our narratives. That

was something that Beatrice mentioned this morning, and then I really also like, how Duk Hee was talking about the power of public art to affect change, and that can happen more easily outside of the gallery wall walls, and that we should listen to the non-human world. The forum was amazing. There was so much expertise - so amazing - many amazing hosts. I was lucky enough to be in it so I can comment on it, and I'm sure the other breakout sessions were just as amazing, but I wasn't in those but some of the sort of key questions that came through that they'll be kind of feeding into the Slido that you'll be able to see, but ideas about slowing down again came up. Is time and space a privilege? Questions of legacy. How do we deal with waste, particularly mushroom waste came up. Is there anything you'd like to add Mala?

4:03 Mala Yamey

So really the responsibility, whose responsibility is it to consider materials? So how much gets placed on an artist, and how much of that should also be given to the commissioner, the funder, and those kind of shared kind of owners? And then the other thing that really came up from Rhys' table was how important it is to work cross-disciplinary and how there's important to create spaces and resources for that relationship and that conversation, because it's we're all working towards the same purpose. So if we can work together, it's better.

4:32 Emma Underhill

Yeah, brilliant. Thank you. I'm sure there's so much more as well. And I just wanted to let you know at this point that UP Projects are planning to develop a sort of toolkit-style resource devised specifically for the public art sector. I'm sure lots of you are aware of the really brilliant Theatre Green Book, and actually we drew upon that when we were developing *Bodies of Water*, but we were really keen to develop a specific type of public art green book, but obviously it will have a different name. And we're having some early conversations with potential partners about how that might develop. So as soon as we have any information to share, we will do - but I'm hoping that a lot of the thinking and conversations have come out today will be addressed through that resource. I also want to take one last opportunity to invite you to come along to see Duk Hee's installations at Haigh Hall. It's launching on in Wigan on Saturday. So if you're local, please do come and see us. It would be lovely to see you there. And I also want to just take a quick moment to thank the wonderful Jack Newbury, who's up there. He's been running around like a crazy man, and he really has sort of put this whole event together and produced it and

then done an incredible job, as well as the rest of the UP Projects team, who are also marvellous. Thank you to all of the brilliant speakers and workshop facilitators who joined us today. And I also wanted to do a quick shout out to Ada and Julia, who have helped us today from Liverpool Biennial team, and also Gareth who's been filming, Anthony, who's been helping with tech, Fozia, who produced that lovely food. And also, thank you again to The Black-E there's also millions of organisations and individuals who have helped with bodies of water, and they're all listed, well, not millions, but you know what I mean, listed in the end of our programme. So thank you so much for coming. Thank you for being such a generous audience. I'm sure you're all desperate to have a drink, as I am, but I'm just going to quickly hand over to Justine for a final few words.

6:49 Justine Bousard

Wow, we've come to the end of the day. So thank you so much everyone for your time today. Thanks to all the speakers. I admire and love you all so much. So I so appreciate you just going on this journey with us, trying out different formats, and all of you here for playing along. It's been amazing to witness. So as everybody knows here, evaluation is very important. You all work in the art sector. So when I tell you to please complete our evaluation form. I am sure every single one of you in this room will do it, because that's the solidarity for the sector, right? So please scan it here, or you'll also have it in an email. But yes, we would be really super grateful if you could do it. And kind of without a transition, really, because that's the sort of amazingsness of the worlds we live in. I have to give you a QR code for an evaluation form, but I also want to end the proceedings on something a bit more profound, and we have to hold these two realities together at all times. And it's not really, really easy. So the bar will open very soon, as soon as I'm finished, and it will be open until six thirty and the building will be open until seven, so there's plenty of time, but before, I'd like to offer you one last moment to gather your thoughts, because we've been talking with talking together, but also talking about subjects that are deeply, they're visceral, they're emotional, they're not easy to deal with. So I think just to make sure you all feel really well looked after, I want to offer you one last moment of just taking stock really. So first take any movements you'd like to take. You can shake your hands. You can shake your feet. I don't know if anybody wants to shake their feet. Then try and find a comfortable position, whether that be seated or standing, and for whoever is comfortable with it, close your eyes or just soften your gaze. Now I want you to bring to mind a place that you love, a place somewhere outside. It could be the countryside, a remote wilderness, or the heart of the city. What does it look like? What colours and shapes and textures can you

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see. What does it smell like? Does it feel warm, or does it feel cold? Take a look around. Who else is there? Are there any other humans, maybe birds or insects flying around, some spiders crawling away, a dandelion fluttering in the air, other mammals around you. Now, try and think, how long has this place been the way it is? Do you know what. It took for it to be the way it is. Did anyone ever had to fight for this place who made it more beautiful, more special, whether they were human or more than human? Now I want you to imagine this place, well and truly thriving. Again, what would it look like and smell like, and what would it sound like? But also, what would it take for it to do so, what needs to happen there and further afield for you to be able to witness such an abundance of life. Now, hold on to that beautiful vision, because this is your memory of the future you want. So let everything you do work towards that vision. And equally importantly, take courage in the fact that all around you, right next to you right now, so many other capable, smart, brave people are holding onto complementary visions. Before you leave that place, I'll share the wise words of Joanna Macy. She says, "the most remarkable feature of this historical moment on Earth is not that we are on the way to destroying the world. We've actually been on the way for quite a while. It's that we are beginning to wake up as from a millennial long sleep to a whole new relationship to our world, to ourselves and each other". And so I would like to dedicate this event to the memory of Joanna Macy, who left us recently. So as you take leave from that special place, once again, look around you and really take it all in, and when you're ready, open your eyes if they were closed or re-sharpen, refocus your gaze if you had softened it, and just promise yourself to just keep up the good work. That's all we can do. So thank you everyone, and I declare the bar open. Thank you.

12:16

[Applause]