



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST - MARCH 2020

Transcript of interviews:

Theo Mantalvanos – Queenscliff Gallery and Workshop

Louise Reilly & Robert Lording – Audrey Fine Art

Terri Lew – 19Karen Contemporary Artspace

Professor Jane Griffiths – Monash University, Faculty of Arts

THEO MANTALVANOS – Queenscliff Gallery and Workshop

Tim Stackpool:

First, let's catch up with Theo Mantalvanos at the Queenscliff Gallery and Workshop in Victoria. The gallery is situated in a former church constructed from sandstone in the late 1800s, it's beautiful actually. And Theo joins us on the podcast right now. Thanks so much for your time.

Theo Mantalvanos:

Pleasure.

Tim Stackpool:

Now, in terms of what you guys have to do, I mean, we don't know what the future holds given that the situation is changing daily. How do you strategise during this time?

Theo Mantalvanos:

How do we strategise? To make a strategy, you need to know where you're going and right now as you correctly said, we don't know where we're going. We don't know where we, personally, as a business, as a family are going, where all our contemporaries are going. With that said, we do know that we need a strategy for the duration of this ever changing time and period. The focus is definitely on survival and the task is how do we transform our operations? We pause regularly. We've been discussing these constantly and we even ask ourselves easily is this possible? Now having said that, we are fortunate to have excellent cyber connectivity tools for non-physical communication. The artist's works will still reach our audience or an audience, but as we know, looking at something on the screen, particularly beautiful works, whether they work on paper, etchings, paintings, we all see these images on our glossy tablets and phones and they really don't do it justice.

Theo Mantalvanos:

We are missing that. We are missing that, but we're doing everything we can and I believe being unable to view the work is one obstacle, but a greater obstacle is of course that a lot of the public and our clients have got no clarity on their financial situation at the time. And I think that's really, really difficult.

Tim Stackpool:

Now, did I understand correctly that you have a show opening and you're still hanging that show?

Theo Mantalvanos:

Absolutely. That's key for us. We've been talking to our clients and our neighbours and friends and we just pulled down the current show. I'm sitting in a gallery with blank walls. However, we will hang our new exhibition showing Rick Amor, Philip Davey and David Moore and it is going to look magnificent. It's going to look wonderful. We need to be in the space and feel that we're still doing what we do for our artists, for ourselves and of course for the wider community and we will be projecting videos and photographs and using every online method to make sure the exhibition is seen.

Tim Stackpool:

And how are the artists handling this, that you've been in contact with?

Theo Mantalvanos:

The artists? Look, they're quite distraught and they're worried. However, the ones that we are showing and the ones that we do show are quite appreciative of what we're doing. None of the artists have pulled the work or said don't hang the exhibition even though they know that we're not going to get physical visitation to the space. They are more than pleased that we are going the whole way and business as usual within our walls. And they're still potentially excited for sales and we do have clients that we've spoken to about the upcoming exhibitions and they too are very excited to view the work even if it is via video feeds and virtually rather than physically.

Tim Stackpool:

I mean, you do have an online presence anyway, but in terms of how you're ramping that up, does that include things like, you were talking about putting more video online, perhaps doing more live streaming?

Theo Mantalvanos:

Absolutely. We very recently, only a few days ago, morphed our website to make it more dynamic and given that this is now our main stage, we'll be publishing some artist studios. We've gone out about three weeks ago, four weeks ago, funnily enough, before all this Covid-19 seriousness started and we filmed some of our artists in their studios. And I think it's important for the public to get a bit of an insight as to how different artists work. But yes, as you said, Tim, lots of videos. I'll be walking around talking about the artwork and we'll also be doing a bit of work ourselves. Soula, my partner and business co-director is an artist and she produces beautiful paintings, etchings and I audition for her so we'll be busy upstairs getting inky and producing work during this lockdown time.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah, so just let me understand Theo, you also have a workshop there, is that correct? A studio?

Theo Mantalvanos:

That's right. We do have a workshop and the workshop was two tiered. It was an extra studio for print makers and also a print workshop and painting workshop. Now, with the restrictions, the workshop is on pause. However, we still can produce work, as in Soula and myself, for us. And we can also, I'm still envisioning for clients, so the way it works is a client or an artist might send me his or her copper plate, whether it be from Tassie, interstate or Melbourne and I would be auditioning. We are still actively working to the best we can and as much as we can.

Tim Stackpool:

But in terms of setting yourself up as a business, I mean, you would have seen this as another opportunity, as an income stream, which was separate to the gallery and exhibiting and that's been taken away from you as well. I mean, you try and, I guess, mitigate your risk by opening up a studio and a workshop as well as an exhibition space. It becomes even more, I guess, disheartening for you that even that income stream has been pulled from you.

Theo Mantalvanos:

It has, I mean, the workshop is about a third of our footprint in floor space and that is now pretty much as you said, an empty space. There's only so much we can do up there. I know it might be sounding quite

positive and moving forward with best intentions, but there is the reality of fear for our business. We started this business five years ago now. We moved from Melbourne to lovely Bellarine, down here in Queenscliff. And I guess being an art gallery and a workshop, it took about three and a half to four years to really get on our feet and gain the trust and the momentum. Now that has been put down a few gears and there is that worry about when we'd come out on the other end, whether it be three months or six months, I'm not sure anyone of us know. Where will we be? Will we have gone backwards two or three years or will the momentum pick up again? But definitely trying times.

Tim Stackpool:

Or will you exist at all?

Theo Mantalvanos:

Yeah, we are, again, I'm not being overly optimistic, but I'm trying to be a realist, I think we will exist. I hope we will exist. The support by the visitors and the clients has been quite overwhelming. As I mentioned earlier, they came to see work, they came to buy. I was speaking to someone this morning saying, I've got a spot on my wall. I want something from the next exhibition. Now, that is very positive. We hope that on the other end we're still moving and selling work and supporting our artists. One other thing that we implemented when the first steps of this Covid-19 period started is, we posted publicly that our artists will be paid immediately. And if I can just reflect on that, what usually happens, we hang an exhibition, we sell the work during that month because of administration, et cetera, we do monthly payroll for all our artists. About three or four weeks later they will get paid.

Theo Mantalvanos:

What we're saying now is if a customer or client comes in and buys a picture for X amount of dollars, within 24 hours, our artists will get their payment. We're trying to do everything possible to keep the morale up and keep a lot of producing and also have our clients support us and the artists and we felt that was one way that we could help.

Tim Stackpool:

That's what you really need from the artists as well, is to keep producing, don't languish, use this opportunity as an inspiration in a way, if I could call it that, to continue turning out work.

Theo Mantalvanos:

Yes, we've said to all of our artists, keep working. Creativity has always been a guiding light for Soula and for myself in a way. And I'm sure that we will see some very spectacular work, not necessarily reflecting the period that we're living in. I think our artists are simply producing work that they love to do, but they've all got the time now to produce more work and we're encouraging that more and more. And as I said, we've got our exhibitions locked in until at least December this year and we're still looking forward to hanging every month and presenting, whether it be online or otherwise.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah, you need artists to keep producing art and you need art lovers and buyer to, instead of actually going out to galleries, to actually hit online websites such as yours and keep buying and appreciating art?

Theo Mantalvanos:

They do need to keep buying, and we had one neighbor say that he would rather panic buy art than panic buy pasta and toilet paper. He's got enough pasta in the cupboards, but his exact words were, and I won't mention names, was, "If I'm going to be stuck at home with this wretched virus looming outside at least I can look at some nice pictures on my walls." As we mentioned, I think the art is not appreciated as to what they offer the public. We know that they help people with mental health issues and in times of stress and there'll be a lot of that happening now. There'll be all sorts of other horrible situations at home because there's a lot of stress and a lot of anger and a lot of fear.

Tim Stackpool:

Well, Theo, look, I wish you all the very best and thanks so much for taking the time out to have a chat with us. I know you're rearranging everything so quickly where you are, as are all galleries and all artists and everyone involved in the industry. And in fact not just this industry, but right across society. It's all happening and I really appreciate your time on the podcast.

Theo Mantalvanos:

Fantastic. Thank you Tim, so much. Really appreciate the time.

Tim Stackpool:

That's Theo Mantalvanos from the Queenscliff Gallery and Workshop in Victoria, and if you want to see what they're undertaking online visit www.qgw.com.au. That's www.qgw.com.au.

LOUISE REILLY & ROBERT LORDING – Audrey Fine Art

Tim Stackpool:

Okay. Now let's head to Audrey Fine Art Gallery in Sydney. The gallery, operated by Louise Reilly along with resident art consultant, Robert Lording. They're working to maintain contact with artists and buyers online as much as they can. I got the chance to speak with both of them over the phone and I began by first asking Louise how they're approaching online exposure and how things are going in general.

Louise Reilly:

It's difficult. I think what we have to do is we really have to rely on our social media. So what I've been doing and what I'm getting my staff to do is to do Instagram updates on a daily basis. So we're fresh in people's mind. People are seeing us all the time interacting with the artists and posting on Facebook, LinkedIn, LinkedIn has been really good for me, Tim, I've been making sure that I'm on there every day and connecting to everybody that I can possibly reach out to. So that's helping as well. The website of course. That's a huge help and keeping my database updated, keeping the artists updated and then keeping our customer base and client base updated. So that's something you look at and hopefully just, when you're looking at art, you tend to get lost in it. So hopefully it's a distraction for some people.

Tim Stackpool:

And in terms of the type of response you're getting from all that social media work that you're doing, people are very anxious at the moment. I don't know that you'd probably expect too much positive response at this point, but are you finding that there is at least some type of reaction?

Louise Reilly:

What I'm noticing is that my social interaction, so my pings are, are going up. So people are looking, people are observing, they're spending more time on my website, they're spending time interacting on Facebook. But what they aren't doing is spending money.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah. Now, no time is a good time for something like this to happen. However, you launched your gallery towards the end of last year. Are you finding it particularly anxious for you at this point in the business?

Louise Reilly:

I am. I've had a few sleepless nights and I've been contemplating whether, do I keep the doors open or do I shut down for a period of time? But I think with the government support and what they're doing in reference to commercial leasing and commercial buildings will be a help. I believe like anything, we will get through this and so will the gallery. I can focus on other things and just, I'm not going to close my doors until I absolutely have to and that will be a decision that I will be forced to do. But right now it's just full steam ahead the best that we possibly can. But yeah, it's difficult and it's difficult for everybody. The foot traffic has gone from a very, very busy, because we're street front in Harris Street in Pyrmont. It is a lot of activity normally and it's like a ghost town. You could shoot a cannon through here.

Tim Stackpool:

Robert, if I might ask you, you have significant experience over many years in the arts. What are the difficulties that you see artists may have at the moment? Have you heard them express any particular worries or concerns to you?

Robert Lording:

Hi, I have indeed. They seem to be contacting the gallery more often and they're concerned about sales. But our policy is as soon as we do have a sale, we notify the artist right away. They can't exhibit, group shows are being closed down, public viewings have been cancelled. There's no open evenings anymore, so things have become quite difficult for artists.

Tim Stackpool:

What advice would you give generally to artists at these times? Artists are fairly reclusive quite often. They're often very inward looking.

Robert Lording:

Well that's exactly right. I'm suggesting that you carry on. But if you're going to go into self isolation then do so in a gallery, in your own studio and work there. I think that's possibly the best advice we could be an artist at the moment and I don't really believe that it's the artist's business to try and sell their work. That's really the domain of the galleries or their dealers. So I would just suggest buckle down and go into self isolation and just work really hard. Just keep going.

Tim Stackpool:

Louise, in terms of that online marketing that you've been doing and going ahead, this is likely to have to escalate in terms of how you're touching your customers and your clients. Do you have any idea as to how you will ramp that up? How you'll amplify that opportunity that online gives you?

Louise Reilly:

What I'm very fortunate with is, I have an international database, so with the Australian dollar at the moment, I'm taking advantage of that. I am sending emails globally. I'm sending updates on the Australian artists to everybody I know from Paris to Canada to say, "Guys, this is a perfect opportunity with the Australian dollar as it's seen at the moment." And these are people who are affluent, they're in a position that they can. So that's one angle that I'm pushing really hard and it's complimenting the Australian artists as well because I've got beautiful pieces in here. All I can do is just keep interacting with social media really to be honest.

Tim Stackpool:

And what do you think we'll see coming out of this, Robert? Do you think we'll see some rather unique art come out of this period?

Robert Lording:

I would hope so and think so. This has affected the Biennale in Sydney as well. It's all closed down. I'm hoping there's going to be a resurgence of interest in art generally amongst the general public and that they will decide to support the artists and support the arts. As Louise was saying we're going to support artists as best we can. And we're hoping that when Spring finally comes that there'll be a resurgence of interest in the arts and the people will want to be supportive of arts.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah. I don't think there's any decline in the support or the interest in the arts. I think it's just a shame that we can't access it the way we'd want to.

Robert Lording:

Well that's right.

Tim Stackpool:

Louise, just coming back to you. When it comes to keeping your operation running, if there was something out of the box, something outside of what we've discussed that perhaps the art world could do. Art lovers, art buyers, artists, is it just all about hanging in there and holding out for as long as you can because as you say, we will come through this? This is not a crisis caused by poor banking practices or over lending or some sort of any financial difficulty. This is all due to the fact that we have a virus in the world which will eventually have a vaccine developed against it. We just have to get to that point so we can get back to life as we know it. But is there anything else right now that you would love? Any advice you'd like to give people in the art community from your perspective?

Louise Reilly:

Look what I would suggest to people if they're at home, if they're home bound and start doing things that you haven't done for a long time. Actually have that big cleanup that you haven't done or you've been talking about doing. Is there a wall in your house that you've been thinking about wanting to purchase something? So what we can do with that, if they're restricted to their home, we can do, if they were, for example, just send me a picture of their wall. We can find art and we can superimpose it onto the wall and send it to them. So they literally do not have to leave their lounge room.

Tim Stackpool:

Great idea.

Louise Reilly:

Show me your house, show me what you would like to make different or change and let me do the work and I'm not leaving the gallery and you're not leaving your home and I can help beautify it.

Louise Reilly:

So, if you're sitting at home and you're not doing anything, let's start playing around and let's be creative and do some interior design and get some art on the wall. We can deliver. There's options that you can rent pieces. I don't even know if people understand that they can actually lay buy, and then there's this thing called Art Money where people can get interest free. There's many, many things that we can do. So if you do like art, and if you're in a position where you're stuck at home, let me help you.

Tim Stackpool:

Louise, it's tough times, no doubt about it. Really appreciate your time chatting on the podcast and I'm looking forward to the time when we can finally get to catch up again in your gallery.

Louise Reilly:

Okay. Yeah, I would love that. Pop in anytime.

Tim Stackpool:

That's Louise Reilly there from Audrey Fine Art in Sydney, along with Robert Lording and you can visit the gallery online www.audreyfineart.com.au.

TERRI LEW – 19Karen Contemporary Artspace

Tim Stackpool:

Queensland is usually busy with holiday makers, especially on the Gold Coast where, at Mermaid Beach, you'll find the 19 Karen Contemporary Artspace operated by Terri Lew, an art collector herself. And she joins us now on the podcast. Terri, thanks for your time.

Terri Lew:

You're very welcome. Tim.

Tim Stackpool:

Now this situation, as I've said to a number of gallery owners in this podcast is changing almost hourly. How are you coping and how are you able to strategise going forward, not knowing anything about what's going to happen in the future?

Terri Lew:

Well, I'm probably in a similar boat to everybody else. However, a bit in a better position financially to be able to ride the wave and wait for things to improve. However, yes it is hard. It is hard on everybody, especially on your emotions, to manage the emotions and what's happening around the world. That's the thing that I find the toughest, not so much the financial burden.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah, I know you own your own property. I know that. And the gallery is yours.

Terri Lew:

That's right.

Tim Stackpool:

But in terms of where you are on the Gold Coast, Mermaid Beach there, I mean all of that has got so quiet. I mean it's so vibrant, full of tourists. That indicates a downturn for the whole economy. Of course, it does everywhere, but particularly on the Gold Coast.

Terri Lew:

Absolutely.

Tim Stackpool:

But it means there's just less excitement and less activity around where you are.

Terri Lew:

Yeah. But you see, we're all in it together, so what's the difference? I mean, there's not much of a difference from one business to another. So we'll just keep pushing. Yeah. There's nothing much we can do about it except for riding the wave and not against it but with it.

Tim Stackpool:

Art brings a lot of comfort to people as well. But in terms of your artists and you carry tremendous contemporary art and you have certainly exhibition agreements with high end hotels on the Gold Coast as well to show the work. How are the artists actually handling this that you've been able to contact and talk to?

Terri Lew:

It varies. Some of them are freaking out and some of them have taken the opportunity to create some wonderful creative work. I am blown away by some of the art that some of the artists are producing these days. It's really allowing them to slow down. And when you slow down, you think about what you do, when you're not under pressure as such. And they just disappear into their own little world and they create some amazing things. Which is not going to go to waste because the minute we get on the other side of this, they can have shows, they can sell their work, they can show their work. So it's never going to go to waste whatever they do now.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah. And it's a different type of inspiration and I've used that word before in this podcast. It's a different type of inspiration that artists feel. I mean, many of them are very introverted and introspective people anyway.

Terri Lew:

Anyway, that's right.

Tim Stackpool:

And self-isolate as the course of their existence. That happens too. But of course, without the external stimulus, the creativity doesn't come. So it is completely different feeling, I think, that those artists have. What advice do you have in general for artists at this time?

Terri Lew:

Don't rush and do anything stupid against your galleries. Be loyal to them, persevere with them and support them. Because the minute you start selling your art privately, depriving your gallery of the potential income, when things get better, you may not find that representation any longer. So you need to support each other, for sure. It's really, really important.

Tim Stackpool:

Yes, don't panic and don't burn your bridges.

Terri Lew:

Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Tim Stackpool:

Your online presence is quite vibrant. Your website is highly engaging. Are you making any changes to that strategy given the current situation?

Terri Lew:

Not a great deal. I have sent a newsletter to all our people on our database to let them know that as a result of the changes, this is what's going to happen. Not much, but we just have to wait like everybody else to see what happens. If they find a cure or the restrictions are lifted.

Terri Lew:

But I've just explained to them that I understand that buying art is probably the last thing on their mind at the moment. But for some people, it does lift their spirit when they look at art. I know it works for me and I'm surrounded by art, not only in the gallery but at home.

Terri Lew:

So if people are still financially I able to invest in art, they'll do make a huge difference to some of the artists that are really struggling by buying their art. And not wait until it hits rock bottom to get it to next to nothing because that's really cruel in my opinion.

Tim Stackpool:

Are you seeing that artists are reducing their expectations in terms of turnover?

Terri Lew:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, because they are desperate.

Tim Stackpool:

I think sometimes there's probably a feeling as well in terms of art buyers that, "I've always wanted this piece. I'm feeling pretty down at the moment and I really do need to get a piece in order to lift my spirits." I mean there's probably going to be some of that. It's really impulse buying, I guess, ultimately by some people. And hopefully while it may not be prudent in terms of a financial decision, at least there is a sale taking place and we'd have to be grateful for that.

Terri Lew:

Oh, absolutely. Right now, nobody is buying for the sake of buying. So it's a case of do I really like it? Do I want it? Is it affordable? And that's probably the difference in spending these days that people are not going to just go willy-nilly and buy for the sake of buying. Unless it's something that they really, really like and they've had their eye on it and it's within reason and they've got the money. There's still a lot of people that have got extra cash out there. But they don't want to just spend it on just anything.

Tim Stackpool:

Because we don't know what's coming up, that's the thing. It's a great unknown mystery, unfortunately.

Terri Lew:

Yeah, it's pretty scary times. Pretty scary.

Tim Stackpool:

Now, Terri, as I said earlier, I mean, you're well-placed in order to move ahead because of the fact that you don't have rental overheads and that sort of stuff. But in terms of having any sort of income, I mean, do you have any other opportunity apart from selling art?

Terri Lew:

Yes, I do. I worked damn hard over the years to secure my future and I invested in properties. I've saved money and that's what I kept telling my kids, "Don't spend your money. Just save the bloody thing for a rainy days." And they haven't done so. They haven't saved anything. And just the other day I had to rescue my son from his mortgage.

Tim Stackpool:

Oh no.

Terri Lew:

Yeah, because I'm worried I don't want him to lose the roof over his head. And yeah, I am fortunate that I've still got some money and also properties, rental properties that I can derive income from.

Tim Stackpool:

Yes.

Terri Lew:

That's why I was able to survive all this time as well. I own my property, they don't have any debts whatsoever.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah. But at the same time, I mean, you're under pressure perhaps from your tenants who may have trouble meeting those rents.

Terri Lew:

Yes, yes. That could happen. And I'm keeping a very close eye on it. And if it does, well I know that the government is coming to the rescue and will be helping. And I will be able to help too. If it takes a year free rent, so be it. I'm prepared for that. So I'm not going to leave anybody in the street and I'm going to be helping them as well because we're all in it together.

Tim Stackpool:

That's lovely to hear. Terri, look, thanks so much. I know it's a very stressful time for everyone that I'm talking to on the podcast and I really appreciate your input and your candour today.

Terri Lew:

All right. Thanks Tim.

Tim Stackpool:

Cheers, okay. Bye-bye.

Terri Lew:

All the best and see you on the other side.

Tim Stackpool:

Terri Lew there from 19 Karen Contemporary Artspace at Mermaid Beach on Queensland's Gold Coast.
And you can see that gallery online at 19 Karen, that's the number 19, 19karen.com.au.

Professor Jane Griffiths – Monash University Faculty of Art

Tim Stackpool:

Finally, let's hear from Professor Jane Griffiths from the faculty of arts at Monash University. This situation is reaching across all sectors, which of course now presents challenges with teaching but the arts as a whole will, of course, struggle.

Tim Stackpool:

Professor, thanks for joining us on the podcast.

Jane Griffiths:

Please call me Jane.

Tim Stackpool:

Okay, thank you Jane.

Jane Griffiths:

Very happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

Tim Stackpool:

Now, there's no industry or individual which remains unaffected at this time, but how do you think are the arts particularly affected?

Jane Griffiths:

Well, it's pretty catastrophic. I think the major thing about the arts industry is that everybody who works in the professions is subject to massively transient work forces. There's no continuity, there's very, very little stability of employment and to have that which already exists, compounded by the fact that suddenly contracts are being cancelled, left, right, and centre. People are no longer able to perform in shows that they had counted on for their income. It's pretty catastrophic. The only rider, the only thing that we could say is potentially of benefit to people in the arts community is that we're used to unstable conditions and erratic employment, but unfortunately that's not much of a consolation in the current times.

Tim Stackpool:

No, that's right because pretty much performance particularly who you are associated with and even artists in general would fall back on things like hospitality or casual work in stores.

Jane Griffiths:

Absolutely. It's a double whammy.

Tim Stackpool:

Let me just talk about education for a moment. How is your learning and teaching at the university effected by this?

Jane Griffiths:

It's been a bit of a roller coaster, I have to say. So at Monash we are not a conservatorial model, but one of the things that has always been our point of difference is that we have consistently employed artists from the industry to come in and teach practical workshops with our students. Now, within a week, we had to put all of this very collaborative workshop delivery, online. And, to be honest, for about two days we did weigh up whether we should just cancel all of our units because to me collaboration is absolutely crucial to the craft. But the flip side is of course we have developed very creative transferable skills and so actually we've developed entire new courses where through Zoom webinars we're able to bring in these professional practitioners to workshop with our students in real time. We can have 20 people all focusing in on a Zoom seminar and doing Alexander technique, physical and breathing exercises again in real time in their bedrooms.

Jane Griffiths:

But we're trying to create a sense of, I suppose, collaboration and accessibility. So, it's actually been fascinating for us as educators. I don't think we've cracked it yet. We've got a long way to go, but certainly this whole situation has made me much more responsive to the digital humanities in a way that I wasn't before. And I have to say we've had a few artists coming in who have usually been teaching in the devised area with our students, who are doing the most extraordinary work. The stuff that they're creating online is incredibly creative, artistic and is actually introducing the entire new paradigm for where performance could go.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah, absolutely. But I think across the whole of industry we're finding ways to continue communicating that perhaps we would have thought were purely auxiliary in the past and now our priority.

Jane Griffiths:

Yeah, it's been obviously forced on us, but it really is necessity being the mother of some really interesting invention going on.

Tim Stackpool:

Yes, absolutely. Now, artists and performers, they are a certain breed. Sometimes I refer to them as introverted extroverts, but they actually express themselves through performance or their art.

Jane Griffiths:

That's spot on. It's a spot-on description. Yeah.

Tim Stackpool:

Yeah. Are they likely to suffer somewhat differently psychologically? I mean, I know you're not a psychologist, but what's your opinion?

Jane Griffiths:

No, but I'm an actor. It's going to be huge. Certainly from my perspective, I was, when this all happened, I was filming a TV show in New Zealand and I was supposed to go over to finish shooting the day before the lockdown happened. Now I'm fine, I mean, I've got a family, I've got a full-time job at Monash as well, but I already feel a part of my soul shrivelling that there's a possibility that not only will the filming

be delayed for six months, but it might never be completed because the entire production might've lost all its funding by then.

Jane Griffiths:

Now, that's just a tiny thing. But for my friends who had gigs at Malthouse or MTC or Belvoir lined up, and also really crucially for my friends who had development time planned over the next few months, it's devastating because, particularly for small companies, you can spend years applying for grants unsuccessfully. Then finally you get that big break. You get your grant from Aus Co or from the City of Melbourne or wherever it might be and everything's put on hold.

Jane Griffiths:

So, I know personally it's pretty devastating. I have three projects that I was working on, which now I don't know if they'll ever come off, but for my friends for whom acting is their primary income source and also the primary source of emotional connection, it's devastating.

Tim Stackpool:

We spoke a bit earlier in the podcast about Sydney Biennale and all the work that was put into that and it's huge. It's a huge festival of art really, and to be the curator on that as well is such a great honour and to have all this work pretty much, well moving to a digital domain at least, but part of the experience of course is moving through the spaces and enjoying that art. That's all completely gone unfortunately.

Jane Griffiths:

Absolutely.

Tim Stackpool:

How do you think the crisis is best approached by the arts? I mean we've really going to have to lean back on government to support us as individuals to get through this, I think to a huge extent.

Jane Griffiths:

Well that's right. I think the hard thing about the messages that we're getting from the government is that they are so mixed and even on economic terms, the value of the arts is never recognised by the government. As Scott Morrison talks about going to the football match, but there's no discussion about whether you're going to go to Red Stitch or MOMAA or MTC. I mean the arts is constantly ignored despite the fact that it provides billions in terms of economic growth to the-

Tim Stackpool:

Oh, it sells more tickets than sporting events across Australia.

Jane Griffiths:

Absolutely. Absolutely. I think that the major issue is going to be that it's ignored, that it's economic and it's also social contribution to the country is ignored in terms of bailouts.

Tim Stackpool:

In terrible danger.

Jane Griffiths:

Yeah. I mean if practitioners managed to get through the labyrinthian quagmire that is Centrelink and get some funds just to keep them alive on a week to week basis, then that's all well and good. But the bigger thing is how the government is going to inject just sustainable resources so that these companies, so that these festivals can actually survive in the future. And that's my huge concern. Not on a day to day basis, but the future of the industry generally. We'll bounce back. I mean the arts always bounces back to some degree, but it's already tough. So given that the circumstances are just going to get harder and harder, help needs to be provided in a way that's commensurate to what the arts actually contributes to society.

Tim Stackpool:

And given that arts and performance is driven by high emotion, it's all about connecting with the audience through performance or through exhibition coming through this, how do you think that demonstration will change? Will the arts change will we see deeper work? Will we see darker work?

Jane Griffiths:

Do you know, it's funny, I was giving a lecture online last week about Greek tragedy and how that existed in the context of Athens during a time of war and plague. And I was thinking that for the Athenians, Sophocles wrote Oedipus the King in the time of plague. A play that starts off with plague and what that actually means in terms of bringing together the political body to try to understand their situation through theater and through the arts.

Jane Griffiths:

Obviously we don't have a context in which that's possible because there is no way that we can draw an entire community into an artistic event to make us reflect on our own situation. But I do think that the response of artists and creatives generally is going to be search. It's going to be looking for a way of reflecting on and integrating these experiences of COVID-19 into our society in the future, and that is going to lead to some very fascinating work, probably dark work, but also stuff that is going to be reaching out in a way that perhaps it hasn't been before.

Jane Griffiths:

I mean, it's interesting that just thinking on the broad level of creative media, the 2011 film Contagion is now trending again. Everybody's watching Contagion. And that in itself says something really interesting about our need to fit into a representative mode, a mimetic mode to try to understand the reality in which we're living.

Jane Griffiths:

So I think the arts is going to have a great role in our trying to come to terms with and understand what we're going through because the issue is when that's actually going to be taking place, because it might be many, many months before we're able to see a live performance which can address these issues.

Tim Stackpool:

Absolutely. Or visit an art gallery or see an exhibition and much of it we can see online as I say, but that human connection makes such a difference. And I think that's pretty much what we're all going to miss over the coming months.

Jane Griffiths:

That's right. Yes. Yes.

Tim Stackpool:

All right, Jane, thank you so much for your insights and chatting with us on the podcast. We really appreciate your time.

Jane Griffiths:

It's been lovely to talk with you. Thank you so much.

Tim Stackpool:

Professor Jane Griffiths there from the faculty of arts at Monash university.