

Conversations Over a Brew

Season 2, Episode 2 - Grace & Kerry

Transcript

Recorded Thursday 23rd September 2021 over
Squadcast

AA - Amina Atiq

G - Grace

K - Kerry

28:20

[INTRO MUSIC]

Amina Atiq -

[THE SOUND OF A KETTLE BOILING FADES IN, THE CLICK OF THE SWITCH INDICATING IT IS BOILED, WATER BEING POURED AND THE CLINK OF A TEASPOON STIRRING TEA IN A CUP]

G - So I guess we met at the beginning of the faculty, I met Kerry over Zoom. So The Faculty North Programme, which I applied for, and Kerry was there every two weeks. So I guess I joined as, like, as an artist who wanted to join in a group about socially engaged art and learn more about it, and Kerry was the teacher or the facilitator. How would you describe your role, Kerry, or how would you describe, like, what The Faculty was? Because I find it really hard to describe.

K - Well, yeah. So kind of a facilitator, because what we want within The Faculty is it's kind of peer learning, really, without anybody leading, although this Faculty was somewhat different because this is the second Faculty that Heart of Glass along with InSitu have run. The first one was people in a room, whereas this one was all on Zoom, which made it quite, quite a different Faculty. And we had to structure it differently as well. And we had more people, so we had 30 people. So the first time I met you Grace, I probably didn't really meet you because you were a tiny little face amongst a lot of other boxes of faces on the screen. And to be fair, it took me ages to figure out who was who. So even though we're seeing the same people every two weeks, it was really difficult to kind of connect with anybody, other than the faces, because there was none of that, kind of like, you know, sort of more personal interaction. So, yeah, I guess what I was doing was one of the facilitators introducing the speakers, and kind of holding the space along with Chrissy Tiller, and then hopefully creating a space where people could ask questions. So, I mean, just thinking back, because we, we had kind of a false start with it as well, because it was supposed to start in January of this year, January 2021. And of course, we all went back into lockdown. So I think, you know, we had to sort of shift it and change it because much of the staff team within Heart of Glass went on furlough again, which meant that we didn't have the resources or the capacity to run it. And we did three sessions, which were a lot more informal. Those first three sessions over the first three months were a lot more informal and a kind of space for people to get to know one another a little bit. And there was a couple of tasks that were in that, I don't know, did you do any of the tasks? Did you make a hat or a cocktail?

G - I didn't make a hat. I loved the hat that you made. I remember that very well.

K - [LAUGHS] Yeah, there's a few, a few things, you know that...

G - The amazing twig crown

K - [LAUGHS] It was a twig crown [LAUGHS] and to be fair, that was the first thing I'd kind of made during lockdown. I mean, lockdown really locked me down creatively. So for me, those tasks that we did at the beginning were really helpful for me, which wasn't actually necessarily the point. The idea was, you know, for them to be helpful for the participants

within The Faculty. And they weren't they weren't compulsory either. I mean, people could either do it or not because everyone was, you know, we were all in lockdown again. But, yeah, I made something out of a material they use when they're restoring peat landscapes. And it's kind of like a really stiff weave. And I just went out and shoved a load of twigs in it. But yeah. So, I mean, how did you, you know, because it was all online, because it was a very different, well, I guess we all kind of got used to being online. But how did you find that sort of format of having an online Faculty?

G - I suppose I didn't know any different, as none of us have known any different for however long that I think I guess chatting to some of the other faculty members, we were really trying our darndest to speak outside of those sessions as well and get to know each other socially, because I think socially engaged art, it makes sense that we'd also want to be friends and work together, but maybe did find that really difficult. I think something that's been tricky over, yeah, however long is really wanting to be social and also being really, really burned out by it. So I think having those sessions as like, a core thing to think through and just be present and maybe turn my camera off and like it felt very much like I was taking a lot of information in. I was looking at my notebook this morning of all the speakers and everything that they said and being like, I'm not sure has taking this in at the time, but it was really good. Well, it's like really good, strong information to have now. So I think returning to it and returning to those conversations with some of the faculty members. But I chatted to some of the last Faculty because I didn't realise it only happened once before and happened so differently. But I had a chat with Michelle, Wren and Garth Gratrix from the last Faculty who were comparing that experience. And it was really wild to hear about, yeah, how the online had affected us. And also, yeah, I assume, that I suppose we did meet in real life after The Faculty had ended, but it changed the dynamic of the group so much. And I think that is, there was hope there that we would get to know each other more, work together, start meeting up outside of sessions, which I suppose that last meeting at InSitu really made for. But how did, did you feel like? Because I think socially engaged stuff is really difficult to do online. And I think a lot of socially engaged artists have had a crisis of confidence of "I've worked in my practise for so long and now have to adapt a lot of those methods." Do you feel like, especially as you knew the first Faculty as well and how different that was, do you feel? I don't know. I imagine it was just really challenging for you.

K - Yeah, I mean, totally challenging. I mean, it was, it was, it was really, really challenging, and not my favouritest, I know there's no such word as that, but wasn't my favourite of experiences because it felt quite, it felt, it felt didactic, you know, it felt like we were teachers. And I think in, the in The Faculty where we were all together, it was a lot more fluid. There was a, you know, we could shift directions a bit. We could be responsive to each other's ideas. And although there was, like, definitely elements of teaching in the first Faculty, by the last one and it ran over four weekends, it was all handed over to the cohort to organise that final one. So yeah, this one felt like, you know, who, it was that, that question of "Who, who will the speakers be?" "What will the themes be." And then the speakers present in you, you know that their practise or doing a presentation. And what I also feel is that, well, I don't necessarily believe that all social practitioners are academic or academic minded. And I do feel that The Faculty was quite academic. There seemed to be a lot of reading matter, and a lot of stuff to take in. It was quite dense, I think, in that respect. In information coming at you, and far less time to play and to experiment. And those are the things that we did in the first one that we didn't know how to do in the second

one. Um, and I think, you know, it's great to hear that you kind of connected with people during that faculty period, um, you know, that you got in touch with people. Because the other thing about doing something on Zoom is when you switch that computer off, when that Zoom ends, you're back alone in your space that you're confined to because of the lockdown and you don't really know what else is going on. So we had no idea that you were connecting with other people. And so that's really, really lovely to hear that some of that was actually happening. And, and you're right as well about that final session when, when a number of us came together, wasn't all of us. It was a small number of us, and just had that time to sort of chill out. We were just basically hanging out. I mean, Chrissie and I had put a programme together. I know Chrissie couldn't join us in the end, but we kind of put this programme together, and we didn't go with it because what became apparent was that what we all really needed or we felt like we were craving was just a space to hang out together and just to sort of, you know, just chat about stuff. So that, you know, that, that was, that was and also I couldn't speak could I, I had no voice. I lost my voice completely on that live session when we were all together. But yeah, I mean, I mean from, from that because I know it was such a dense programme, because I think we had four speakers every session and then a Q&A. I mean are there any speakers that kind of stood out to you, are there, any presentations that you kind of felt, "Oh, you know, that resonates. That's something I can really, you know, pick up on and move forward with?"

G - Oh, you're putting me on the spot there Kerry. [BOTH LAUGH] I think there was, there was stuff to, a cheat way out, there was stuff to be taken from all of them. I think for me, I when I started The Faculty, I was like, I'd just moved away from London. I didn't know quite where to, quite where to be. I didn't know how to place myself and feeling like that was so important for my practise. So I think seeing different, where people are come from, like I love like Googling all of these places and like learning about, there's definitely one speaker from Preston where I'm like just moved to now knowing nothing about it and getting really excited about that, seeing kind of how like Lancashire and kind of the Liverpool city region can interact and the Northeast and having these kind of different places was like, there is stuff going on. And I knew there was stuff going on, but now I know how to Google it properly. And then I think, and also some of the stuff that I just, I'm a, I love stuff that I really disagree with. So also hearing speakers that said stuff, I was like, "No, I don't agree with that at all." And getting really, like, excited about that because I think also socially engaged art, you know, we can be, we can be a bit cuddly. We can be a bit friendly. We can be, you know, all like together as a community, which is great. But also, like, I think I said very early on in one of the sessions, I love a good argument. So I think one of the first, me and a couple of other people met up very socially distanced in a park, to have a chat. And we, we did spend like three hours just like moaning about the state of the arts and everything and getting that out there, which I think is the stuff that, yeah, gets missed out of that as much as anything like having a really good moan [LAUGHS]. Which is also really important to thinking of new ideas, I suppose. But yeah, I think also, yeah, the chance to ask those speakers questions. And I think the way, it's interesting that you say about, like, it being kind of feeling sometimes didactic or like it was like there was, I mean Zoom makes that happen, right? You've got a speaker and you've got a listener. You can't kind of talk over one another. So thinking about those hierarchies within art as well, felt really like, like it ran through in an undercurrent of who are we listening to, who we, who's speaking, who's asking questions, especially with a cohort of thirty people, because that is so many to like hold in a space together. But I think from what I've heard about the first Faculty as well, them being kind of rooted in these, like because it was each of the CPP

projects, right? So the Creative People and Places, kind of, as funded by Arts Council and selected in that way. So then thinking of this like scattering that happened in online felt quite different as opposed to us, like maybe visiting, sitting down, getting to know the trees and the landscape of somewhere. But it felt much more like brain than hands and feet.

K - Yeah, it did. It was it was very

G - I was interested as well from starting. Oh.

K - No, no carry on.

G - Sorry, delay. [LAUGHS] I guess I was going to say because I knew a bit about Chris's practise before starting and reading some of her stuff through work that I'd done before and learning about In Situ and kind of setting stuff up. And I guess the question that I've just been dying to ask you about kind of, um, self organising and art and some of this stuff around how do we organise stuff that happens together and whether to you that feels possible to happen in the online space in the same way. It feels really, really difficult. But I guess with your, like, history of kind of self organising and pulling artists together, how possible you feel that is? Or how we navigate that?

K - Do you know, really difficult, really, really difficult. I mean, I think that self initiating stuff and pulling together, for me has always been kind of like, a happened by chance thing. You meet somebody, you have a conversation, and they may be an artist or they might not be an artist. And ideas get sparking. And then you go away and you ruminate and then you come back and then, you know, meet that person again and take those ideas a bit further. I think online that's really difficult because we, we don't have those happen by chance meetings in the same way, you know, I mean. Yeah, I think it's really, really difficult to do that. And it's really difficult to, I don't know, there's something about when you meet somebody in, in person, there's like a chemistry that, that happens and you can kind of connect and feel like "I can work with this person. There's something here that's, that's that's you know, I feel we're going to get on really well." And and I don't think you get that online. And actually, there was a, I met Callum, who was supporting with all the technical stuff on the Faculty, Callum works at In Situ. And I met him for the first time in person when I met you Grace for the first time in person, which was when we had that little gathering In Situ. And the thing I noticed about Callum that really struck me was his eyes and his eyes were sparkling. And, you know, I'm looking at you guys now and I don't see sparkle in your eyes because you're on a screen. And that was such a big thing to go "Oh, my God, you've got sparkly eyes." And then you realise how much you take from somebody's eyes, you know, that that that connection. And we're never, I don't think, going to get that on Zoom. We can get intellectual conversations, we can get banter, we can get the exchanging of pictures, but we can't get those kind of really human connections. It's like looking at pictures of trees in a book is so different from being stood next to a tree. The difference is immense. And so I think it's that same thing. And I think it's really, really difficult to organise and initiate. But I also think, going back to your question in the hierarchies and and all of that In Situ which runs, or we strive to run as a non hierarchical organisation, we were aware, I think we were aware that it does become quite hierarchical on the Zoom platform or, you know, a platform like this. But, you know, I do think there's a lot to be said for people coming together and trying to kind of butt those hierarchical systems that are in place and actually initiating stuff ourselves and bypassing the

structures and the systems that are in place and figure it, and what was so great when you talked about the guy from Preston, Chris, that was really inspiring how he just kind of worked on that one estate and just sort of said, you know, you know "Sod the art world. You know, I don't give a toss about that. I'm going to be here on the estate where I live and I'm going to work here." And he's done some amazing stuff. And it was so refreshing to hear that because what he was talking about was coming from his heart more so than his head. I mean, a lot of it was coming from his head as well, but he was kind of following his passions and his beliefs. And another talk that struck me was one by Paul Hartley when all of the speakers were asked to, to sort of offer up something that had inspired. And, and everybody except for Paul offered a text. This text inspired me. And this text has influenced me. And Paul, this is me being very bad with names. Paul said "Ah, you know, I'm not much of a reader, but, but my inspiration was Bob." And then he spoke about this bloke who'd inspired him. And it was like, wow, that's great. That's, that's social practise. That's when you kind of you know, it's not coming from a book. It can't come from a book. It can only come from being out with people and, you know, arting with people or just being and again, that kind of hanging out with folk and understanding where you're at and the place that you're in and the people that you're with and all of those dynamics. So, I mean, it would be amazing if we could kind of, you know, with what what was kind of sort of laid down with this Faculty, there's a way that we can kind of pick up and take that forward out into the, you know, the lived world, the, you know, the experiential world and and meet again and, you know, just just have that chance to sort of imagine together and plot together and come up with stuff with one another that I mean, that would be amazing.

G - And to do stuff together as well, I think I feel like we are plotting and that exciting, like thinking through and then being like I think on the, yeah, on that day when some of us managed to meet up, someone's like "Shall we go, should we just go for a walk?" And then everyone being like, "Yeah, we can like support that and push that forward." And I think or I talk a lot and ramble a lot about what if we just all looked at each other? What if we stopped kind of looking up to the thing to the where the money is or it feels like the money might be in actually kind of turned and looked at each other. And I think that's a really tricky thing to do within artist development, especially just because of the name of it or thinking about, yeah, progressing our practise. Learning. Growing. And how we do that in a way that isn't looking up towards a teaching, but actually learning a lot from each other and dissent being a huge part of that and going actually we are going to do it like this. Or actually, and I think some people saying to me that "I didn't come to one of the sessions because..." I think maybe there was one around thinking around artist self care. And one of the artists told me that they didn't they didn't attend because they needed time off. And I was like, that's great. That's the point. That's also really good for you. And how do we put those things in practise while we're also trying to be together on Zoom, is tricky. But I feel like maybe we're growing to we're growing to learn, like, to take that time out or to argue with each other in the chat or to go ahead and send that email and not be so nervous about it. Which definitely feels like a positive towards organising together. More so because I'm not sure that the internet is going anywhere.

K - No, it is. I, you know, somebody said to me, I'm about to run a radio station with Helmut Lemke who is a sound artist and we're doing it without funding. We just decided, sod it, we're going to do this, we want to do it. It's something that's going to be running through COP and we want to interview different people. So when I've been speaking to people saying, "Would you be happy to sort of say something on this radio?" And they go, "Yes" I

then have to add this caveat, saying, "Well, you know, we're doing this by funding, so we can't offer you anything. Is that OK?" And one of the artists said to me, "Well, what, what, what would the funding make different?" She said, "You're just doing it. And that's great." You know, I mean, I know we all need money. We need money to live. But like you just said, sometimes instead of chasing the money, we can just do things. Yeah. But then we don't have any money. But, you know [LAUGHS] we don't have to stop doing things just because something isn't funded,.

G - [LAUGHS].

K - Because if we haven't got that we haven't got that funding. Then presumably we wouldn't have any money anyway during those however many weeks or we would still be doing our bar job or whatever it might be. So we don't have to stop being, you know, proactive and creating just because we haven't got funding to do it.

G - But then, on the other hand, I think that was a beautiful thing about The Faculty, that hasn't been the case with a lot of other artist development stuff I've been involved with. I've kind of been taking part in a little bits over the past couple of years to see how they work, how artists work together, how arts organisations kind of develop artists and artists develop themselves. But The Faculty did offer to pay all of the artists to be involved. So, that led to a discussion with some of the other Faculty members about how you can almost make, not make a career, but you can kind of do these different artist development things in the current climate that we're in. Especially with like the emergency funding and things given to arts organisations and to artists of actually it did kind of pay people to be there and be in the sessions at a time when there wasn't loads of kind of commissions and people's jobs had fallen through and stuff. And how important that is to freelance artists, because we're not part of maybe a workforce that is train, is, you know, we don't get training, we don't get those kind of certificates of accreditation that maybe other jobs get. So to see arts organisations investing in our progression as freelance artists and not really expecting anything in return, I think was also really important just to be like, oh, no, like it is, it's, it should be part of our job as artists to like also take time to develop, learn, connect together, reflect and not try and make an art work at the end of it, but actually just chat about it and let that feed into things quite naturally. So it did feel like it gave a bit space and time to think through that and not too much pressure, yeah, to work together or to make a project. Or we must meet three times a week and come up with something and for the outcome of the Faculty. But I guess you talked about the future and, yeah. Is that, because I've not, I mean, like we have been chatting, we have been doing stuff. Is that something you would have liked to hear more from us? Kerry I feel bad that we didn't send you a postcard.

K - Yes, I would have loved a postcard that came through my door. That would have been amazing. Yeah, no, it is. It's like. There isn't that same kind of connection. We don't know what you're doing. You know, it's kind of like for us, it finished in a sense, and it would be lovely to know those connections just to sort of have a feel for those. And maybe that's something we can kind of take back to Heart Glass and say, "Hey, can we do, can we do something? Can we actually sort of find out who's doing what and who's connected?" I mean, that, that would be that would be great. That would be really, really I'm sure Chrissie too would, would love to know. But for myself that would be amazing to know that. And I also kind of wanted to say, you know, you saying about the fact that there was a stipend

for everyone to be there. I think that's what's so great about, you know, this particular Faculty with, with Heart of Glass and with In Situ. I think that's so important for both of those organisations to see the artists get paid and the artists, you know, who are involved in things, you know, do receive that kind of financial support to do that, because we were asking you for your time in effect. And I think that is so important. And I think that that's, that is a role for, for arts organisations and that it's great to be involved with two organisations that do do that. So, yeah, I mean, it'd be marvellous if more arts organisations did that as opposed to just offering the opportunity to participate, but to say, actually, we value your time on this as well and we'd like to give you some money to, you know, because we know that you're giving up your time to be in in this room. So that, that's good to hear that that was appreciated.

G - Yey, we love paying artists. [LAUGHS]

K - [LAUGHS]

G - I think really, really important, really exciting, valuing the time, and, and I think also giving artists that autonomy or the, just the, just some space to think about this, yeah, this money comes to us and that's important because our time is important. And then like having a great conversation with some of the artists on The Faculty about; what if we'd have pooled that money all together, like what if we'd have like, thought about it in that way or how, I think access to resources then lets us think more creatively about what we could do with resources if we when we have them again. Or when we can invest in ourselves more. Because I think we don't often have the opportunity to think about what we would do if we were given a grand each and we could all share it or we could all bet on something and see if we could triple our money. And, and how and would Arts Council let us do that? [LAUGHS] So I think, yeah, some excitement that was just opened up by the programme. So thank you for doing it.

K - [LAUGHS] That's brilliant I love that. I love the fact that you can put all of that money on a horse and just see where it took you. That's great. That really is chance. [LAUGHS] And yeah, I mean, the postcard. I mean, I'm just thrilled to hear as well that there's been those connections and conversations since. That, that's just so great to hear. And I'm now hoping that, you know, some more money can come your way, you can pool it and you can put a bet on [LAUGHS] and then it doesn't come through. It's still art isn't it, hey?

G - It's all art. [LAUGHS]

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