**Sean Roy Parker** 00:00

Yeah, hi everyone, I My pronouns are he and they and I'm currently obsessed with dehydrating food. So I do lots of preservation, fermenting, and pickling and things like that. But I bought myself a dehydrator, so I'm making like ground powders, and salts and sugars and things like that. So it's kind of what I'm obsessed with at the moment. Yeah, I live in an old school in Ilkeston. And it used to be a Steiner School. And now it runs as a artists residency. So I live with anywhere between 6 and 10 other artists, and we just live together, we, you know, cook and clean together, but we all have our own practices. And sometimes we do work collectively. But it's very interesting. And I really like being somewhere that's really close to the canal, I really like spending a lot of time by the canal. So a lot of my work over the past, I would say maybe 3,4,5 years has been moving towards an environmental practice that not only is sort of getting used to being in nature and thinking more about what I'm making, but also thinking more intensely about all the things that are connected to my practice. I think Wingshan can kind of back me up when I say that my practice and my lifestyle are very close together on purpose, you know, I don't kind of see myself as someone who makes art in one way, and then goes and does things in another way - I try and bring them together through the things that I believe in, you know, the language that I use and the materials that I use. So yeah, so these are some of the questions that I was thinking about. And sorry, to start off with the hectic stuff, but I think it's really important just to, you know, appreciate the moment that we're in. And particularly thinking about how we view what's happening, either through the media or with our own eyes. And knowing that it is a reality that is happening both in other parts of the world, and also closer to home. And as well as relying on institutions and governments to move in the right direction, which can seem a bit frustrating sometimes, I feel like also, there's a potential for us to make changes within ourselves, within the things that we do have control over, and start moving in the right direction, and urgently change some of the things that we're doing in our own lifestyles. So I'm trying to think about not only my own practice as a living system, so you know, everything changes daily, like my mood changes daily, the, you know, where I am, the food that I'm eating, and so I don't, I try not to see my life as a kind of fixed, something with a fixed outcome. But I'm also trying to look at other life forms. So particularly, if I am fermenting, then I think about bacteria, you know, I'm working with bacteria to transform this food into something that's delicious. And also preserved, or whether it's my worms in my wormery, like I'm working with the worms in order to turn food scraps into compost. So these are the some of the things that I ask myself. And also more recently, maybe the past year, two years, I've been thinking, do I as an artist, do I actually need to make art to be an artist? That's quite a big question that I keep asking myself, I don't necessarily have an answer. But I think even just asking myself is a good start to an ongoing conversation about is it important?

**Question** 04:19

I was just wondering how it was for you over the pandemic, whether that changed anything in your life, particularly?

**Sean Roy Parker** 04:30

Yeah, it's a good question. When I lived, I lived in London until March 2021. So I was in London, for one year of the pandemic. And I found it really, really difficult. I lived in a very, very small flat and I didn't have any access to a garden. The park was very, very long walk away. So I found it really difficult as I'm sure many, many other people did. What I did was I started volunteering at my local community garden. And that meant that I could go there and be in a green space for one or two times a week. And it wasn't necessarily like my, it wasn't anything to do with my project, I was just like, weeding or watering or harvesting. And I have done a lot of community gardening, and it's something that I'm really passionate about. So I used the opportunity just to like learn a bit more and to start considering my mental health, way more than I ever had done before. So I think it goes hand in hand, with kind of what I said about meeting my basic needs, you know, like, have I got like, sometimes getting out of bed and feeding yourself is, okay, that's enough. We don't have to be super productive every day. We don't have to make something new and amazing and huge every day. I think there's a dominating narrative that we have to be incredibly productive and incredibly visible. You know, like, whether it's on the internet, we have to show everyone what we're doing all the time. And we have to be always aiming high, higher and higher. And for me, this really matches, it really like sits in with the kind of capitalist ideas of being a professional, and always doing more. And it doesn't really take into account our own human needs. And also the kind of the slowness, and the intention that we need to maybe move with, especially in a time where everything is so uncertain. And then I was very lucky to come to DARP where I live now. And I have lots of space and have a lot of time. And actually, one of the long term projects is that I wanted to decouple or unlock that relationship that I had with kind of perpetual capitalist time, where I was just working all year round, like as hard as possible. And I was like, well, I'm going to break my body, I'm gonna break my mind. And I really need to start considering if there's another way to do this. And I think I'm very, the way that I've been working with, like other animals and bacteria and worms and plants, has really made me understand that time is non linear, it's not one line until the end of time, time is very much like a kind of ellipsis. And it's, or like a lasagne, where like, there's so many different things happening all at the same time, especially in nature, you go into any green space, you've got all all different plants and trees working on different timelines, all interconnecting with each other. And you know, they have a kind of circle, you know, it's a circle, so, and just like the seasons, you know, we're in winter. So I, my internal dialogue was this winter, I want to hibernate. I've never, I've been working for 15 years straight, I very rarely give myself a break. I want to take a few weeks off, not have any projects and just, you know, catch up on some sleep. And I was like, maybe I'm a bit like a hedgehog. You know, or a bird or something. I was just trying to think about these more than human life forms that I make work about and with.

**Question** 08:58

What is it like living in a community with other artists?

**Sean Roy Parker** 09:02

It's fabulous. It's very, it's tricky and difficult. And of course, everyone has different needs and desires. It's all about communication. And it's all about not, changing from outcome based thinking to process based thinking. So that's just taking everyday by, you know, taking it day by day. The main thing, the main objective is to all get on, to all have a positive experience, to share, you know, food or share labour or share ideas. You know, we don't, we're not like aiming towards like being the best art collective in the world. It's like we just want to get on and have a nice time.

**Question** 09:52

I was just wondering if you had, if there was like any groups like or individuals or artists that sort of inspired you to sort of create the art that you do now, or did it sort of come through you exploring for a while?

**Sean Roy Parker** 10:10

Yeah, that's a really good question. I can't say that I have a particular artist that I aspire to be, I think it's a real mixture of like, I really like collage, and I really like sculpture, like where people like reuse materials, or change the change the meaning of materials. But also I do, I think I do really look to these mediums outside of art. So whether it's like, I've been reading a lot of poetry the past year, and that's really like really helped my own practice, understanding really varied ways of writing about something quite similar, whether it's, you know, three artists writing about love, and they're all going to do it in totally different ways. And just understanding that the world and our thoughts aren't as simple as we kind of make them to think, make them out to be. And you can have these like multiple meanings that are all crossing over. You know, everything's kind of a big mesh, a big, like, interconnected web. And I think gardening is a big influence on me as well. You know, learning kind of practical ways of working with the land, understanding that I'm not growing the vegetables, the vegetables are growing themselves, I'm just providing, you know, their basic needs, the water, the warmth, whatever it is. So just trying to think like outside of art, because art can be a bit of a dead end, because ultimately, we're not quite sure what the point of it is sometimes. And I also, like I was saying, like, I've, I'm not so worried about making things anymore. I'm not worried about like, just producing work just for the sake of it. So I'm thinking about how can I use my creative thinking to apply to other, you know, can I apply my creative thinking to gardening? Can I apply my creative thinking to cooking? Can I apply it to writing?

**Wingshan Smith** 12:25

And I think this is something that we've been looking at a lot within the collective and the programme here, where it's like, how are we defining art? And I think it was like one of your questions at the beginning, wasn't it Sean? Do I need to make art to be an artist? Which I think is a really great question. Because it's, producing things and producing that end object is contributing to that, you know, there's too much stuff out there, there's so much stuff out there. So it's definitely really interesting to think that way. But how, how can we embed our creative thinking and our critical thinking that we do as artists, but in the real world, across you know, different areas of our life, which I think is really, really, really exciting and optimistic. I mean, we can get really down. And I think there's a lot to be said about this anxiety that we feel with ecology, especially as young people, it would be quite interesting to hear more about the discussions you've had about that, because you have done a few workshops have you Sean about eco anxiety or explored that in your practice somehow?

**Sean Roy Parker** 13:44

Yeah, eco anxiety was this term that I came to a couple of years ago. And I think it's become quite like, I've seen it written a lot now, and I'm not claiming to have made it up at all, but I just have been using it for a few years. And it was coming to this point where I understood that a lot of my personal depression, anxiety, you know, worry was coming from my negative feelings about the environment, and actually like the stress that the kind of overwhelming amounts of plastic or, you know, these kind of very, you know, Amazon and the way that people, the way that workers are treated in Amazon and the way that we use fossil fuels to move things around the world. And I think like I just became more acutely aware that this anxiety, this kind of, like bodily, this thing in me that like made me feel like really, really sad and really, like stressed, was actually not because I'm a bad person, not because I can't control my emotions, but because of all these external factors that have different small effects on my everyday life. And so for me, like artmaking has always been, even before I knew about my environmental illness, it's always been a way of like, processing emotions, processing thoughts, and also processing materials. You know? Yeah, this kind of like coping mechanism, if you like, which I think is a, I feel like I've moved away from it being a coping mechanism, actually, towards understanding some of the things I do outside may be my strengths, may be like very positive things that I can do in my daily life that make a difference to the way that I see the world. And, you know, if anyone else is affected by those positively, then that's a huge bonus, of course. Yeah, for me, like I, you know, art, being an artist is kind of very vague. Like on purpose, I'm not really like, ascribing myself to any profession. I think like, you know, I can kind of make up what I want my art to be about. And it can change every day, because my emotions change every day. You know, my interests change week to week, and my living situation changes year to year. So there's no way that my practice can be static, or fixed, if everything else in my life is changing so rapidly. So I think really, like trying to build a practice, that is, that allows space for that. And, you know, is still trying to move forwards in a positive way. Yeah, I'd like to open it up now. And I've got some stimulus questions, particularly about the theme of the workshop. So it's called, like, radical tech for survival. So I mean, obviously, from seeing my work, you can tell, I don't use a lot of technology. But there is still a radical low tech, that maybe we could agree that I employ. Low tech in the sense of like, maybe traditional crafts, like eco dye, or fermenting or gardening, you know, things that don't necessarily need modern technology, but are in of themselves a type of technology. So there's kind of like low and slow movement, you know, reclaiming materials, reclaiming labour, changing the framework, changing the mindset, changing the way that we see things, these for me, are maybe more more important skills to hone, to practice than, you know, becoming the best stone carver in the world. Not that that's, that I have a problem with that. But that's just the way that I want to make my own work is much more flexible.

**Wingshan Smith** 18:17

The workshop series, so we've got a quite a few coming up. And it very much is kind of interrogating the idea of what tech, what kind of technology will help us survive. And what kind of technology are we going to lean on. And a lot of it is the kind of technology that is from the past. And it is part of, very much part of Sean's practice, in a couple of weeks, we're going to be looking at augmented reality sculptures that uses data, pollution data, to visualise the pollution around us. So it's very interesting, these different ideas of technology and survival.

**Sean Roy Parker** 18:58

Definitely. And I mean, personally, I am not sure that tech can save us. This is kind of the, I guess, one of the arguments around like science and technology is that the more money you throw at tech, like the, you know will eventually someone will invent a machine that will like, save, what's the new one, like, take carbon dioxide out of the air? I don't even really know. But for me in my own head, in my own logic that I've come to, and it might be, it might be short sighted, I don't know. But I feel like like de-growth and like, you know, using the things that we already have and actually shutting down factories and you know, reducing the amount of carbon needed to make stuff and, you know, re-localising our food like eating food that is grown locally or regeneratively or organically. These, for me are ways that don't require sort of science technology. But science is a really good way of giving us very kind of like, structured, like structured ways of seeing ourselves, you know, whether it's data, or whether it's like yeah, like tests or surveys, the kind of good ways also us understanding what's going on. So, yeah, for me, like decarbonisation is a term that I use quite frequently. And it represents all of those things that I just talked about, like trying to remove carbon from, trying to remove fossil fuels from my own practice, you know, trying to use currencies that aren't money, you know, that don't feed into a centralised system. Also, you know, considering if I'm buying materials is that, you know, are the people that made these getting treated fairly? And are they getting paid well? And do they, you know, are they living with their basic needs being met? And these do, it really influenced, like, what I buy and from where, so I would say, in general, I have like a low consumption lifestyle. But, you know, for me, it's like, it's important to actively work against all forms of ecological and sociological violence, that are kind of wrapped up in capitalism, sort of extractive, as in like taking materials out of the ground, transforming them, and then putting them in the world. So, you know, we do have, there is a global responsibility to make changes, but I think also, that's very overwhelming. You know, the idea of like, trying to change something that's global is like, totally overwhelming. And that's probably where a lot of my anxiety came from before, trying to change something that's so enormous, but I can change myself. And to start with, before I tell anyone else how they should change themselves, I've got to change myself. Otherwise, it's what we might call virtue signalling. Yeah, I think also that, you know, these movements towards more ecologically responsible practices can be extremely exciting and invigorating as well. Finding new language in nature, making connections with other than humans. Why does everything have to be about humans? Like when, why did we decide that the whole world revolves around us, when there are so many other incredible life forms that, you know, communicate non verbally, who support each other's life, and, you know, who have very creative practices of their own, whether it's birds singing, or beavers making dams, or worms making compost, you know, these are all incredible practices. And, you know, I just think like we as individuals, as humans, can maybe be a bit more creative with how we deal with the climate crisis. Like I've said, like I see much of my art practice is about making about, it's about the environment, but it, trying to connect what I believe in as an individual, with my art practice, has been the main sort of string of my work. If we use the term about like, oh, I make work about the environment, or I make work about sport. It kind of implies there's a distance. So I make it about it. I'm separate to it. I'm here. The environments here, I'm making work about it. So for me, I had to really change that. And I've decided that I make work in, with, next to, from, beside, buried in, and overpowered by the environment. So, I'm trying to see myself as an integral part of the ecology. You know, my life is as valuable as the life of a worm. My life is as valuable as the life of a dandelion. Once I can start rationalising this in my own mind, then it becomes clearer to me that the work that I'm making has to be, has to like fulfil those ethics, has to fulfil that realisation you know that I'm not the centre of the world, that actually I'm one very, very small part of something that's, you know, infinitely chaotic, and you know, overlapping. And what I was saying earlier about these kind of like, ellipses and these lasagnes of materials and time, and we like to simplify things too much. So I actually really like to complicate things on purpose.

**Wingshan Smith** 25:40

We've got a comment from Tom saying, thanks so much, Sean, really interesting way of life you've made for yourself, got some really essential notes and questions from this, thinking about to what extent does the value of materials and the known and unknown of the material meaning and property dictate an artwork. Unfortunately have to go soon, thanks for the discussion was great to meet you all, isn't nature, the most amazing artists of all?

**Sean Roy Parker** 26:03

That is so true. So I want to open it up now. And I want you to all think about your own practice, whether that's art, or writing, or curating, or music, or whatever your practice is, whatever thing that is that you have that you love doing every day - cooking, reading. And I think it would be really cool if we could have an open discussion about how we might make changes within our own practices.

**Question** 26:33

Hi, for me, I find what you said really interesting, because it's something I've struggled with a lot. Because I do love art. But I don't call myself an artist, or make any "art" because I don't like the idea of just making for the sake of making because I just feel like a lot ends up going to waste and not in like a judgmental way, it does come across very self centred to an extent, where it is, I do understand the need for self expression, but it comes off sometimes where you just didn't need to do that. Like you didn't need to create maybe the amount you did, or the exhibition you did. So for me personally, the way I've kind of dealt with it is telling myself that I wouldn't make anything without purpose. So however that did look, I wouldn't make anything if it wasn't going to be used for something maybe important or to help someone else. And I think you, what you said has kind of opened my mind that I could also still create stuff or express myself in ways where, it even if it didn't have a specific purpose, it could be more about enjoying the process. So when you did the stale bread and cherries, I believe it was, I thought that was really interesting, because I do agree that if you eat it, it doesn't make it any less of art. It's still part of your process and your thinking. So yeah, kind of, I think that's my favourite bit, it's kind of opened my mind to saying that I could do more stuff in an expressive way and still be creative. But without the guilt of feeling like I'm just doing it for me alone, because that's one thing I felt a massive guilt of just making because I want to make it. But then it's obviously affecting a lot of people. Even if it's not obviously in a massive scale, it's just the paper I throw away when I practice or stuff like that. But I also started to choose to maybe do more digital, and I know that in itself has its own repercussions. So now I'm kinda like I've got like ways to look, things to look forward to and ways to try to be more expressive. But then at the same time, I'm now torn in like, should, is digital really better than me wasting paper? Or am I like, just like walking back on myself if that makes sense?

**Sean Roy Parker** 29:05

Yeah, all very valid and really important points. And I think even just starting to have this, like internal conversation with yourself is a really great takeaway from the session. I don't you know, I'm not here to give you all solutions to the huge problems. I'm just, you know, we're all just trying to like have a nice time and survive, right? So I think what you said about making stuff just kind of, for the sake of it. I like semi agree and semi don't agree. Like, I think we should, like something that a lot of people need to do is express themselves or do things, but I think if we can try and consider, you know where the materials came from, how they got to us, if you, okay, so I'm going to liken it to an apple. Okay. So if you've got an apple put on a shelf or in a fridge in the supermarket. We only know what that apple looks like at that point. And that's what we want. Okay, so but that's a very, very, very thin sliver of the whole life of the apple, doesn't tell us where it came from, you know what country it came from, who grew it, how many air miles it's gone, how many refrigerated vans it's been in, how many miles it's travelled. And also, it doesn't say anything about where it's going afterwards, you know? Is it going to compost? Is it going to pigs? Is it going in a bin? So, for me, I'm really trying to expand on this moment of whether it's like the finished piece, or whether it's an apple, and I'm trying to open that gap up, so we can see more of the lifecycle.

**Question** 30:54

Yeah, of course. That makes sense. Thank you. That was it. That makes sense.

**Sean Roy Parker** 31:03

Does anyone else have any anything? I'm going to throw some words in the mix. So desire, friends, slowness, anti racism, class solidarity, edible. Also, this idea of like, ruining, or like, destroying, or eating or composting.

**Question** 31:37

I think like, one thing I did get out of like listening to you talk about how you sort of create the works that you do. It's so like, obviously, now, it's so important actually thinking about how those art pieces are created. And the meaning behind the approach you take, can sometimes have, like, more meaning than the overall like the finished work itself. And where does an artwork become like, the finished sort of product? I think. So that was like a really interesting point that I thought about when you were talking because I think as well, it's like, traditionally, you always think, what does this art piece mean, when you first look at it, like as a finished thing, but actually, the process of making it almost tells you so much more about what you're thinking about while you're, does that make sense? I don't know, I was just kind of thinking about that when you were.

**Sean Roy Parker** 32:41

Yeah, I mean, what what I interpret from your point, also is that, when we think about art, or galleries, or the way that we interact with art, we only see, like I just said, we just see a very, very small part of its lifecycle. And also, like, you know, it's so, our experience of kind of receiving art is often very limited to institutions, whether it's a gallery or a website, or whatever. And so, you know, for me, like, I'm not, I don't really kind of make work that goes in galleries, but that doesn't make me any less of an artist than someone who only shows work in galleries. And I think like, you know, I just want to self define really, like I'm not bothered about who, bothered about trying to get validation for what I make, from, you know, any other person or any other organisation. You know, for me, it's just about processing my feelings and trying to find new visual languages in you know, in unexpected places.

**Question** 33:57

I was just thinking about how idealised and kind of like romanticised reconnecting with nature is, and like, it's, I know this is such an obvious point, but like, it doesn't have to be this all or nothing thing where either you're like, in this beautiful world where you're entirely isolated from everyone else, and you can finally like, reconnect with nature, whatever that means. I feel like it's so easy to forget that there's just like, easy ways you can do that in your life. And like, actually think about the way that nature connects with our real world. Like it's not this big dream, because I have this big fantasy about you know, like everyone does, you know, like living in a little cottage and cooking things that I grow and stuff like that. But I don't know, I think it's so easy to think of it like a storybook rather than like real life. But I don't know if that's like anybody else thinks of it like that. Whether that's just me.

**Wingshan Smith** 34:56

I think the story life can be the story but can be real life.

**Question** 35:00

That's what I mean though. It's like so easy to romanticise it to the point where it doesn't even feel real. But like there's people living, even in just small ways that like, let them reconnect with their dreams of nature and things, if that makes sense.

**Wingshan Smith** 35:15

Yeah, live out your cottage core dream live out your cottage core fantasy.

**Sean Roy Parker** 35:21

That's a really great point because for me that illustrates the division between humans and nature. That is a very purposeful outcome of the Industrial Revolution, whereby peasants were stripped from the land and said, you know, their land was taken away from them. And they were sent into the city to start working in factories. And since then we've had this, there's a really good book, but I can't remember the name of it, and it talks about protectionism and conservation. And actually, both of those things are perhaps as negative as each other. Because we've got protectionism where it's like, this pristine thing, like this kind of mirage, like you're saying, that we project our own ideas of beauty onto. And we're not allowed to touch it, and we want to preserve it. Or we don't want to go on it at all, or there's this kind of conservation idea whereby it's very heavy handed, human design, about, these parks and things that are like, they don't really look anything like nature, but they're kind of as close as we get to it in the city. And personally, I feel like, that's why I'm really interested in permaculture, as a way of like designing green spaces, because it's using, it's observing, and learning from nature, like embedding ourselves in it again, and trying to find the answers that are already, you know, the one of the things that they say in permaculture is the solution is the problem. Or the problem is the solution. And it's just like, we need to learn to look and listen more, because the answers are already there. It's just because we've separated ourselves from the land. And we just, we think of it as something like, completely, yeah, romantic or completely separate from ourselves.

**Question** 37:37

What does permaculture mean?

**Sean Roy Parker** 37:40

It's like, it's a human's design system for creating gardens basically. But it's based very much, it's a very western term. A lot of it is lifted from or inspired by indigenous practices. Just in Europe, and Eurocentric countries, we just, it's just called permaculture. But this is the thing, the practices, the indigenous practices that it comes from, they didn't have a separate word for nature. You know, they don't have, they don't, there is no distinction. So it's a very western idea that we're different from it, we're not part of it. And it's, you know, definitely one of the ways that this kind of this dichotomy, this human versus nature thing has been used very politically, both to remove people from their lands, but also as a way of extracting from the land without us feeling like it's part of us.

**Question** 38:54

Can I just ask, like, I'm sorry, if this is like too much of a personal question for you, Sean. But like, was your childhood full of dying things and growing things and cooking things? Or did you kind of just like develop this in later life?

**Sean Roy Parker** 39:09

No, I didn't have any of this. I wasn't interested in any of it. I've just spent a few years moving in this direction. And I wish that I had found it earlier. But that's fine.

**Wingshan Smith** 39:27

I would also say that Sean has an awesome e-newsletter where he sends kind of sometimes resources, sometimes reflections. Wasn't it in like Vogue or something recently Sean?

**Sean Roy Parker** 39:44

I think it was on Elephant mag last year.

**Wingshan Smith** 39:46

Some cool people have been talking about it, so I'll post it in the chat.

**Sean Roy Parker** 39:51

It's like my journal. So I journal a lot. But it's it's a mixture of like, some of it's like, today I did this, you know, I went here, I saw this person, some of it's a bit more in depth, like describing a taste or flavour or a sunset in very like visual language. And then there's also this, like, about mental health and about processing difficult emotions and kind of working through things as I'm writing. So it's kind of a stream of consciousness. Yeah, I haven't done it for a little while. But it's all out there.

**Wingshan Smith** 40:38

Well, thank you so, so much, Sean. I know, it's been super interesting for all of us. And just really, I think, for me, the most important thing that I've taken away from it is actually like to not make it hard on yourself, again, like the solution like the easy way. I feel like some people are so scared of doing the eco thing. But actually, the eco thing is very often easier. And it can be cheaper, like going to charity shops, or just making do with what's there and the idea of process rather than this final polished product, and making art that you can eat. That's very exciting to me. So yeah, thank you, everybody. And thank you so much, Sean.

**Sean Roy Parker** 41:27

Thanks for having me. It's really great to hear all what you're up to and thanks for your questions as well.