

Chris De Rosa – SALA Podcast – interview transcript

00:00

[intro music]

Steph 00:17

Hello and welcome to the SALA Podcast. Today I'm in the lovely seaside town of [Port Elliot](#) in South Australia, which is kind of the heel of the boot if you think of the Fleurieu Peninsula as a boot, and Kangaroo Island as a football. It's a lovely balmy day, you might be able to hear the corellas screeching in the background, promise they're okay, that's just the noise that they make. While I'm enjoying the flora and fauna, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of these lands and waters, the Ramindjeri and Ngarrindjeri people; and any other nations with a connection to this area, and acknowledge the Elders past, present, and future.

Steph 00:58

I'm in -it's not little by any stretch- I'm in a studio, which is covered wall-to-wall, even from the ceiling with artworks. I am here with the lovely Chris de Rosa. Hello.

Chris 01:11

Hi.

Steph 01:12

Thank you for welcoming me in here. I feel like I'm being privy to way too much. So much happening in here. It's quite...

Chris 01:21

it's busy.

Steph 01:21

It is busy, but in a nice way. And it's actually doing wonders for the acoustics for this recording. So thank you twice.

Chris 01:28

It was managed that way.

Steph 01:29

Oh yeah - so thoughtful. Before we take a deep dive, can you just give a couple of sentences or a bit of a brief of how would you describe your practice to someone that hasn't encountered it?

Chris 01:43

A 'deep dive' is a good intro into it because I kind of deep dive most days into the ocean. And that kind of feeds this practice

Steph 01:53

That was appropriate to start then wasn't it?

Chris 01:55

It was, but I think you've used it before. I think I've heard it once or twice before.

Steph 01:58

Oh, guilty as charged.

Chris 01:58

But this time, it's super appropriate. I make a kind of, it's kind of a multidisciplinary practice. That's kind of you know, a go-to-word

Steph 02:10

so you're not tied down

Chris 02:11

Yeah, not to tie anything down. But I am kind of at the core of it is a printmaking practice. And even though I don't feel that I'm a traditional -I don't know if that's quite the word- but a traditional printmaker. I really rely on the process of printmaking to inform my practice. So that's what I initially studied. And it's kind of at the core of everything that I do; print making - the expanded field.

Steph 02:45

Yeah. Love it.

Chris 02:50

But most recently, kind of major installations sculpture, video, and music. There you go. I think I've hit them all. Music not quite. But you know, in collaboration, but I can just about chuck it all in right.

Steph 03:03

Many hats. Yeah,

Chris 03:04

No, not really. Just one large sunhat.

Steph 03:08

Love it, very appropriate out here. Well, that's touching on what my next question was going to be, which was, how did you find your way to being an artist? So was there formal training in there or?

Chris 03:19

There's formal training there, but serendipitously because at school, I wanted to be an art teacher. I liked art and biology, and I was absolutely, I am allowed to swear? Fucking hopeless at school. Easily distracted, I think was a common description.

Steph 03:35

Oh, yes.

Chris 03:36

But I thought I'd be an art teacher. And I didn't. You know, I just mucked around way too much and was hopeless. And my dad's an Italian migrant, very low education. And my mom was a nurse aide, and

they were like, like, being an artist was not a discussion in our family.

Steph 03:55

Not on the table?

Chris 03:56

It wasn't it wasn't. It wasn't. No, it was you get a job and you save up and you buy a house. So I became a nurse. And I nursed for... I can't remember the exact amount of years but quite a long time, and I was quite ambitious and driven. And part of my nursing work. I went to Flinders Uni, I don't think it was... it wasn't called Flinders Uni.

Steph 04:21

what would become Flinders Uni?

Chris 04:22

It was an annex. I think, forget what...Sturt College! That was it. So I did a post kind of grad studies in nursing. And part of that I did an elective in printmaking, of which my line manager was horrified that I was getting time off work to go and study printmaking. But I suddenly I had been slowly realizing that nursing wasn't for me, that I was kind of the round square peg going in the wrong hole. So, printmaking consumed me, and I would be there printing really late at night breathing in way too many turps fumes, but the lecturer was Nigel Murray Harvey, and he really encouraged me to pursue printmaking, which is kind of weird, because I was kind of like an aspiring, rising up the nursing hierarchy kind of thing. So I decided, yeah, this is right. And I left nursing and I applied to go to Stanley Street School of Arts. And it was at the cusp where there was all this talk where higher education was about to become...you had to pay, so it was about, it was about to change. So I thought, oh my I've got to get in before, before I have to pay.

Steph 05:33

That's motivating.

Chris 05:33

That was motivating. And also I took some like, I really did use that printmaking department at, at Flinders to the max and I got some works framed by Anima Gallery. And I remember the guy Robert now I can't remember his last name, he kind of he kind of said the same thing. Oh, well, you know, you should pursue this. So it was kind of those early encouraging words that pushed me. Mind you, I kind of feel that I'd been always really interested in making things. I used to like draw and make cards and do kind of weird home crafty things. But I was always filling my room a bit like the studio with hyper colored images, you know, [Toulouse-Lautrec](#) incredible lithographs. And I was obsessed with the photos. So nothing in a way has kind of changed because I'm still really interested and fascinated with that use of colour and, and the way colour can be explored and contrasted. So yeah. So then I went to art school.

Steph 06:37

Love it. What a journey.

Chris 06:39

Was that the question? Was that the full question?

Steph 06:41

Yeah. yeah. I'm just soaking it in.

Chris 06:42

Okay. I could elaborate more, though, on what happened?

Steph 06:47

If you want to!

Chris 06:48

Well, yeah. Because I because part of my year 12 art project was to... I went and interviewed a jeweller at the [JamFactory](#), and that was really exciting for me as well. So I kind of had this little niggly thing at the back of my brain about being a jeweller, so I thought when I went to North Adelaide, that was my main focus, jewellery-making, and I did printmaking on the side. Well, jewellery-making obviously didn't work out, because I just lost a lot of hair by pulling it out with frustration. And I kind of, in a way, I went to a different form of metalwork because it was zinc etching plates. And so I kind of became and harking back to that screen printing session, late night sessions at Flinders. So I kind of majored in printmaking, but the art school was quite skill-based, you know, and it was a lot about acquiring those printmaking skills and not acquiring the jewellery skills.

Steph 07:40

I love it.

Chris 07:41

Oh but I was also going to say now I'm thinking more that I was obviously a mature aged student. So by the time I went to art school, I already had bought the house that my parents decided I needed to buy as being a good Italian girl. I satisfied them and then it was kind of now it's time to you know, fulfill my...yeah.

Steph 08:00

They couldn't hold it over you then.

Chris 08:01

No, that's it.

Steph 08:02

Do it all. You can have it all!

Chris 08:04

Yeah, well. Yeah, I don't know if you can.

Steph 08:07

Almost. no jewellery.

Steph 08:11

I don't know how to phrase this question. But was there a point of going from 2d to 3d that's any significant? Or is that not really? Is it just...can you just tell me more about the materials? Because I

don't know if we've scratched? Yeah, there's just seems like there's a lot.

Chris 08:26

Well, obviously, printmaking involves paper and paper is the thing I love. Because paper, you know, is just so varied it can you know, from high end incredibly handmade traditional Italian papers with huge weight and, and a malleability to, you know, so I use incredible papers, handcrafted papers like that, right down to newspaper and tissue paper. So I just love that the qualities of paper that it's so strong, flexible, opaque, transparent. You know, it can be made into sculptural forms. I spent a lot of time perforating paper. So paper is like is, is the most important material to me, but in more recent times, and perhaps since meeting my husband, who's a potter, I don't know if I should claim that he's had that much influence. I... No, he has.

Steph 09:25

How much credit do you give him?

Chris 09:26

You know, that's how much credit I give, yeah. But because he's using three dimensional objects, making three dimensional objects all the time, I did kind of want to cash in on that level of expertise and have, have played with some earthenware and developed three dimensional things. Starting with, with Paperclay and earthenware. And since then I kind of dally quite often too. I wanted to get away from that idea of just print, print on paper. And wanted to add three dimensional, two dimensional forms to the paper to kind of make the paper, you know, have that sculptural element. And then as I started to almost hint at before the 3d stuff, maybe that happened...the paper mache kind of stuff maybe happened because of COVID. Because because you know, you, I had a lot of time in the studio and I listened to a couple of the other podcasts and many people have spoken about, you know, the advantages of COVID. Because you, you spent heaps more time in the studio. So I wanted to use all the shit that's in this room, which is a really huge room.

Steph 10:38

There is some in here, yeah.

Chris 10:39

There's a lot of stuff. And I wanted to just use what I had.

Steph 10:42

Yeah.

Chris 10:43

So the material- that kind of changed my approach to materials. And I really wanted to use the, you know, millions of rotten prints that have gone wrong. And I just wanted to use easily accessible stuff. So I started to make small [paper mache](#) objects. I had used PU foam quite a lot in the past, but I kind of was beating myself because it's, you know, a pretty horrible plastic thing. So I wanted to go from the PU foam to using paper mache. So, and another, that's another reason for loving paper, paper because the paper mache is so strong and so malleable. And you know, you can do almost whatever you like with it. So that's how I kind of started making small paper mache forms, which have evolved into kind of giant paper mache forms.

Steph 11:36

Yeah, it's hard to even comprehend. You know, you think of paper mache, I think a lot of people think of a certain scale. But yeah, we're beyond that.

Chris 11:43

Oh, no. The big ones aren't even in here. The big ones are in the... I cleaned out the shed, to make a carport. And now I've had to fill it with giant paper mache forms that maybe should just be burned. I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

Steph 11:55

You can't say that on this podcast.

Chris 11:57

No, you can say that. What do you do with all the stuff you make?

Steph 11:59

Look it's a...

Chris 12:00

It's a question.

Steph 12:00

it's part of the whole practice isn't it, what do you do for storage?

Chris 12:03

It is. What do you do with all that stuff? Yeah.

12:05

[musical interlude]

Steph 12:18

And maybe, I don't know that nice sustainability, might tie into this next question that I have about the themes in your work. And whether you find that everything that you make comes back to some core recurring themes, or if you find that you have a permission to sort of go in different directions with different projects.

Steph 12:41

It's both I mean, I really I think you have one idea. And it just has little offshoots and branches and you know, pathways that travel slightly differently. But since moving to the south coast, maybe over 20 years ago, my practice really shifted because I had come from a house that I bought that with had like a botanic garden in it, and that was, that was what kind of informed my practice. And then when I came to this place, it was a denuded gravel landscape. So I..., the shoreline became my food. So, I was really interested in the things that I would find washed up on the beach. And they were kind of brown discarded things that most people wanted cleared off the beach. You know, they were kind of ugly and interfered in the picnic hamper kind of notions.

Steph 13:39

You mean like natural things? Or...

Chris 13:40

I mean, natural things.

Steph 13:41

Yeah ok.

Chris 13:42

It's funny when I think back I don't think I remember so many unnatural things. But they're obviously there's a shit-tonne now. So yeah, so the move did change what I was looking at. So I became interested in the sea forms, and I wanted to know more about them. I thought they were [flora](#) and I thought, oh, that that aligns with my practice. Like my city practice investigating kind of flora. And I thought, Oh, this is all you know, this is all sea flora. But as I delved deeper, I realized that I was actually looking at animals, simple, simple animals. Simple, simple. I don't like to call them simple organisms, because it sounds derogatory,

Steph 14:21

[laughs]

Chris 14:21

but simple, and economical, and smart organisms. So I kind of went on a deep dive into the kinds of things that I was uncovering on the beat on the shoreline.

Steph 14:32

Yeah, that's such an interesting shift. And yet the constants were still there as well.

Chris 14:38

And I had looked at kind of, I'd use a lot of botanical illustration in my previous work. And I was really interested in the kind of the ways that those illustrations were drawn were often incorrect, and I really liked that aspect of it. I don't like the kind of purist, you know, almost completely reproduced drawings of forms. I like the wonky bits, the wrong bits. I just find that much more interesting. And also, you know, it's much more about the human mark. And it doesn't have to always be perfect. And you can't copy nature because it just can't be done.

Steph 15:11

No. This is making a lot of sense. And I feel like we do just have to dive straight into the [Seaweeding](#) project and exhibition because, yeah, that sort of [beachcombing](#) and specimens... I'll just let you explain.

Chris 15:26

Well, it was, it was a, it was a long...what's the word?

Steph 15:33

Process? Project?

Chris 15:35

I wasn't thinking...

Steph 15:35

Saga?

Chris 15:36

No, yeah it was a saga. it was all of those. Germina- It was a long period. It was a long project. Anyway, simply put. It started a long time ago when I first met Tony Kanellos, who I had met at a print symposium at the National Gallery. And we kind of started this friendship and talked about wanting to do something together within the [Museum of Economic Botany](#), of which he was then the director, person in charge. I don't know what his official title was at that point. So I had a long nurturing period. That's what I was trying to say before. So as a long lead in time, and we eventually got a date. And part of that project was to look at algae collections within the herbarium. Specifically about a woman collector who's from Port Elliot called [Jessie Hussey](#). And I had already undertaken some research about, around her and her collections. And she had, she lived here from the 1860s til about 1890s, died quite young. And she became deaf when she was teenager years I think? I could be wrong there. And there were there were ads in the local papers -not that there were that many local papers in Port Elliot, there was probably one agricultural journal- looking for women collectors, because Ferdinand von Mueller had spent some time in Adelaide. He was a German kind of botanist scientist. And he went to Melbourne, and set up the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, and he was looking for women collectors. So, Jessie Hussey's father put her on to this, but I think she'd already been collecting terrestrial and aquatic plants here for some short period of time before this ad was out. So she became a collector. So, I was interested in her because her, I was on some weird, like community group with her great, great nephew. Yeah, so I thought there was this, and he was a really kind of straight guy who really didn't like me at all, because I was a bit too strange for that committee. But we developed this really interesting relationship around Jessie Hussey and he's since died. But she still has living relatives here. So I was really intrigued that there was this woman combing the foreshore and that's kind of what I was doing in a slightly different way. So I had already looked at her collections at the Melbourne herbarium and I had gone to London. And spent some time at the Natural History Museum looking at her terrestrial and algae plant collections.

Steph 18:15

That's very cool.

Chris 18:15

So that's why I really wanted to get into the herbarium here to look at though, to look at her specimens. So that was the big, that was kind of the beginning part of that project. And of course, I got interrupted by the thing. And there were issues at the herbarium with COVID and also with the kind of the mechanisms around the collection. So I didn't actually get to look at any of her specimens, which I was very sad about, but I had plenty of plenty of examples of her collections that I'd viewed before, so I continued on with it. But also part of that Seaweeding Project was I wanted, I had already been looking at spongia at the South Australian Museum. So, those things that I talked about a while ago, a minute ago, about you know, I thought they were all sea aquatic plants that were actually invertebrates. So I became really interested in invertebrates particularly [spongia](#) or porifera. So I had organised to go and do some visits at the museum to look at their collection there. So I was wanting to amalgamate those two institutions' collections and try and blend it

Steph 19:27

Yeah - there's a terrible sponge pun in there somewhere.

Chris 19:32

Yeah there's, there's many sponge punches, sponge sponges, sponge pun. Ah!

So I was trying to marry those two collections together. Because in the ocean, they exist... They have many symbiotic relationships where algae and spongia grow on each other and have a really nice time. And also I wanted to, you know, try and, because science looks at single species, and I was interested in trying to break that down and combine this kind of, this merging of the species. As it turns out, as I said, didn't quite get to the herbarium. But I did get to do quite a bit of research at the invertebrates with Andrea Crowther, who's head of that department, who was fantastic in facilitating that. And got to see incredible spongia.

Steph 20:20

And so the outcome was in the Museum of Economic Botany, where that's where some of those specimens live or is that...?

Chris 20:28

The museum, no, the Museum of Economic Botany, it has a lot of fantastic specimens in it and is a great, you know, has this really incredible collection. But the, none of those...

Steph 20:41

They weren't the ones...

Chris 20:42

The permanent collection stayed as such. But even despite that I didn't get into the herbarium before the show opened, there had been changes within that department. So Tony left, he was replaced by someone else. And now Lindl Lawton is the current...

Steph 21:00

Leader person.

Chris 21:01

Leader person. Director. Whatever. I think she's got a bigger title, because she's, her job is, like most jobs had to incorporate multiple roles. So towards the end of the process, we were able to get access into the herbarium and so many specimens of that Jessie Hussey had collected were included in the exhibition, which I was extremely excited about. Because that was the whole point of it, you know, it's like art collections, or so many collections have so much work stored in this special secret vault, for obviously, all the right reasons. But it's great when the public gets to see those specimens. So I think they had to change the specimens every three to four weeks, just because of the...

Steph 21:47

Is that kind of exposure to the elements?

Chris 21:49

That's it. That's it. So it was, it was incredible to see them. And those relatives, you know, of hers, that live in Port Elliot, and other places throughout South Australia, you know, were able to see those parts

of the collection. So to me, that was super exciting that they were on show for everyone.

Steph 22:05

And then so the work was alongside it?

Chris 22:07

The work was alongside it. And so the whole process was so long and drawn out. And so, so tricky, because the leadership changes made everything kind of interesting as well, because it is a national trust building. So I had envisaged this kind of major intervention into the whole building space.

Steph 22:24

Ah. Okay.

Chris 22:25

But it didn't quite pan out that way. So I was kind of floundering, I would say, as to how the work was going to actually be shown. Because the space is quite, you know, the exhibition space is quite prescribed and quite restrictive in a way. It doesn't have, you know, there's no... it can't hold a great deal of weight. So I had envisaged a different exhibition to the one that everyone saw. And in a way, serendipitously, it turned out better than I possibly could have imagined. So in a way, it's a big lesson for me, because you, you know, like you think you need to plan things. And you know, most institutions want drawings and plans and everything resolved. But it kind of evolved right up to the last minute. And I think it turned out, perhaps better than I expected.

Steph 23:14

Yeah.

Chris 23:14

So, the forms kind of invaded the gallery space. And it was also, because I work part time in a bookstore. And I read a lot of dystopian, I read a lot of anything, because I can get a lot of books to read. But I'm kind of interested in dystopian literature, I don't think it's called that anymore. Particularly Ballard, who wrote in the 60s, I think it was I could be wrong, I have to check that. About this... there's like a major solar incident, and London is underwater. And he describes many things in that, in that [great novel](#). And, and I was particularly taken with these descriptions of algae hanging from the porticoes, and algae hanging from the door and taking over these monumental buildings in London. So that's kind of what I had in mind for the Museum of Economic Botany.

Steph 24:11

Taking over...yeah.

Chris 24:12

Yeah. But I think it worked well. And I created these giant, I don't know three metre, paper mache forms. I had been snorkeling at a little reef near where I live, in only in the last couple of years had found this specimen called a [sea tulip](#). And so they're kind of based on that.

Steph 24:36

Yeah.

Chris 24:36

And they're like as, again, this simple, wonderful organism that's a filter feeder. And so I wanted to have these giant aquatic forms, kind of overtaking and challenging that space. And I wanted to cover, I wanted, because there's lots of [busts](#) of men scientists,

Steph 24:56

Little faces? Yep.

Chris 24:58

Big faces. Up on top of big showcases, and I wanted to again to kind of push that and try and acknowledge the 'Jessie Hussey's of the science world. Because they're the unrecognized female quasi-, not quasi, scientists! You know, that wasn't available to them to, to pursue like academic careers, but they were vitally important in acquiring scientific knowledge. So I wanted to kind of interrupt and challenge those busts. And so I put these giant green, glowing aquatic forms next to them as kind of a homage to those female scientists, particularly Jessie Hussey. And many, many, many women throughout Australia collected for the big guy, the big gun scientists, and many of their specimens and information was shared throughout the science world, you know, throughout the whole of Europe and wherever.

Steph 25:52

Perhaps not given the kudos.

Chris 25:53

No, of course not.

Steph 25:54

Yeah.

Chris 25:55

And you know, like, I because even though I couldn't get into the herbarium, I could get into the library at the Botanic Gardens. And I just spent a lot of time reading and researching there, and there are letters between the Von Mueller and collectors in agar collectors in Denmark and collectors throughout. And they talk quite derogatory, you know, in a in a very negative fashion about those women collectors, and particularly because Jessie Hussey was deaf. I think they just presumed that she was whatever. But you know, towards the end of their exchanges with her specimens, they kind of acknowledged that she was this very incredible woman.

Steph 26:35

She was all that.

Chris 26:35

Yeah,

Steph 26:37

Well I'm glad they came around.

Chris 26:38

Well, I'm not sure how far they came around, they're still blokes.

26:41

[musical interlude]

Steph 26:50

And we better not forget that there was a moving image working there as well. It wasn't just all paper mache, there was lots going on and collaboration, so many moving parts I imagine.

Chris 27:01

Well, I had, there were prints; there were etchings and digital prints, but because the process was so long, I had initially been given funding from Arts SA, to develop this project. But because, you know, it was probably over four years, there was this specific grant category within Arts SA, I think was called the Recovery Fund. And I needed to, you know, make, make more work and kind of, I was kind of challenged to think about other ways of presenting the work. And, and really, it was almost the grant that pushed me to collaborating with other people. Mainly, I work a lot, you know, on my own in this studio. But because of that funding, I thought I kind of had done some...one, I'm saying some, one moving image piece before. And I was really interested in that. And I, I knew a young man who lived nearby who was a, who had studied filmmaking at Flinders, and I just suddenly thought, this is a great opportunity to push myself and to expand that one minor moving image thing. And you know, obviously, I take lots of underwater movies with my little underwater camera, and that goes nowhere. So it was great. I just decided that I would have this collaborative element where I would make this filmic piece. And I wanted to use local people.

Steph 28:27

Yep.

Chris 28:29

And also COVID, you know, like it had changed the way I thought, you know, you know, this was post was, I think it was slightly, maybe not post-COVID.

Steph 28:36

Somewhere in the middle?

Chris 28:37

Yeah. And so I worked with this young man, Mickey Mason, to help me film a piece. I worked with Suzi Benger, who just lives around the corner, who's a designer, and makes clothing and specifically swimwear, which the film was obviously going to be around the ocean. So that fitted in really well. And [Honor Freeman](#) had moved down to the south coast in the last couple of years, and that I swim with her, as well as a couple of other people. And so I wanted to have this group of aquatic beings who could work on this project with me, and funnily enough, Mickey Mason, I have known since he was a young man. And he used to be like a pool attendant, and I would sometimes go to the pool in winter to swim laps, and he would at the end of his shift, swim underwater, and do like four laps underwater. And I'd go "wow, that Mickey Mason can really swim underwater". But actually, that quality was so important because we filmed this moving image really in very deep water out at [Horseshoe Bay](#), and that lung capacity was absolutely essential to the movie.

Steph 29:48

[laughs] amazing.

Chris 29:49

So I was interested in kind of flipping the women collecting thing that if you were a collector, was there a time in the future when the things that you were collecting would become a part of you. With these sea forms, these accretions, potentially become part of a human. So it was kind of trying to explore that idea. And so it was kind of, I say it was a durational piece, because you know, everyone talks about durational pieces now, but we filmed it in winter.

Steph 30:18

Oh my gosh.

Chris 30:19

Yeah, in really like deep water. And it was just kind of crazy, but incredibly wonderful. And I don't even think -that would be two years ago now- I don't think the water has ever been as clear as when we filmed it. Of course I'm gonna say that, but it was completely random. And it was, it was very cold. But it was amazing. And there was a seal appeared. And the seal didn't make the cut, but it's in the rough. But it was this feat to be able to stay there in those freezing conditions for so long.

Steph 30:57

Gosh, that's amazing. I feel like, yeah, couldn't do that twice.

Chris 31:02

It's really, it's really, no you know what, he was heaps of fun too, because we had a lot of laughs and because I, I had the waterproof bag and let the water in the waterproof bag that the spare film was in. So it was very, it was a very interesting moment.

Steph 31:15

Wait, so analogue?

Chris 31:17

Yeah, yeah, it was a Super Eight, underwater [Super Eight Movie Camera](#).

Steph 31:20

Oh my gosh

Chris 31:20

Yeah, it was really... I didn't want that 'high definition' thing. It was the printmaker thing, I wanted this weird layering. And so the Super Eight gave us the ability to make these kinds of layers. And that's, and that's what, to me, I found really interesting in that process of making the film... film sounds too grand a word... in making the short moving-image piece... Does that sound even more wanky?

Steph 31:45

[laughs]

Chris 31:46

Was this layering. So and because it was low definition that kind of looks like a screen print, it kind of looks like the pixelation. So I was really interested in playing with that. And Mickey Mason was the one who did all the work. And I just did the you know, 'nyeah'. So it was a really great collaboration. And the other person that collaborated was another young man called Giuseppe Faraone, who doesn't live... that was kind of my criteria was you've got to live near here or be a... But the other criteria was that you had to be a 'water person' and he had spent a lot of time at my house in the summer time getting bashed at...

Steph 32:22
by waves?

Chris 32:23
By waves. I can't even remember the beach which was just down there. What's it called? Boomer! Boomer beach. Getting...

Steph 32:33
bashed at Boomer

Chris 32:33
bashed at Boomer. So he took some sound recordings down here...

Steph 32:38
Oh, cool.

Chris 32:39
...and incorporated them into the music track that accompanied the film. moving image.

Steph 32:44
Yeah. Was it music-y soundscape? Somewhere in between?

Chris 32:47
Yeah soundscape. I would say it's more like a soundscape.

Steph 32:49
Yeah. Cool.

Chris 32:50
Yeah. And then the other, the other important collaboration was a really, it was a really interesting, highly stressful process, doing all this collaborating. And the other person that I really wanted to have on board was Cath Kenneally. She's a really great South Australian writer, who is also a aquatic person who swims a lot at Henley Beach, and also, I think she has a place at Bruny Island. And I had always loved her stories about growing up at Henley Beach and her fictional books. And so I asked her if she wanted to be involved. And she was really excited because I think she'd hit a kind of hiatus with her writing. I could be slightly exaggerating there. And she was really keen, and part of it was that we would all swim together. And it kind of, it, we'd send these emails that never really kind of evolved. And I was going, "Oh, maybe she's not so crazy on the whole idea". And I'd send her a message and she say, "Yes, I'm going to come" and then she didn't appear. And then one day, she kind of went, "I'll be there

at nine o'clock". And she came, and we had this really beautiful swim and talked about our love of the ocean, and swimming, and all of that kind of carry on. And then she said, "I had a stent two days ago", and I went, "Oh my god". So it was this amazing experience of her having this kind of therapeutic, freezing cold dip.

Steph 34:11

That'll do it.

Chris 34:12

And then she wrote this really beautiful piece for the catalogue, called the Green Room; because I didn't want a catalogue that was kind of writing about me, or the works. I wanted this kind of beautiful piece of poetry. Which she, she wrote this incredible piece and she read it at the Museum of Economic Botany one day. And it was, when she read it, it was very emotive and very beautiful.

Steph 34:41

and great that it was so tied in with the...

Chris 34:43

the whole thing.

Steph 34:44

Yeah.

Chris 34:45

And the great thing is, is that I think now this is evolving into a book.

Steph 34:49

Oh, wow.

Chris 34:50

Yeah, so that funding really has nourished many people.

Steph 34:55

Yeah,

Chris 34:55

So it's, it's really great thing.

Steph 34:59

My goodness.

Chris 35:00

And also then have to acknowledge that [Rosina Possingham](#) designed the...

Steph 35:03

Oh, yes that looks lovely.

Chris 35:04

The said booklet.

Steph 35:06

said catalogue yes.

Chris 35:07

And also the catalogue or whatever you call it, the booklet was really important to me and I thought it was a really an intrinsic part. And I had endeavored to have a [mentorship](#) through COVID with a printmaker from Melbourne called [Trent Walter](#), who is responsible for making many incredible artists books. I think he did the Sydney Biennale, not the last one, the one before with [Stuart Geddes](#), and produced this great book. So I was really, even though I only got to work with him on two occasions, because of 'the unmentionable', that kind of idea of producing this really kind of beautiful booklet was quite intrinsic to the project.

Steph 35:51

Yeah, that reverence was there.

Chris 35:53

Yeah.

36:04

[musical interlude]

Steph 36:06

Have you had a favorite response or reaction to your work? If you've been privy to them?

Chris 36:13

Ah, there's a couple, when I was taking over the studio with the pieces for the Museum of Economic Botany. People would come in here, and, and it was predominantly children. And I really, I really love that idea of creating that kind of sense of awe and wonder. And, you know, I'm hoping that I create that for adults, but with children, it's so magic.

Steph 36:43

Yeah

Chris 36:43

Magic? Magic. But, you know, kids would come in here and they'd go, "Whoa, what's going on in here", and we had this, these people we don't know, really, he just came for some other reason. And came in here. And these two young boys were just so mesmerized by what was in here, that we then sat down and did like a little painting session. And same thing with when the works went into the Museum of Economic Botany. They were really concerned about the potential for damage. And I go "they're paper mache, it's fine". Because the great thing about the Museum of Economic Botany is it has such a diverse range of visitors, you know, because even when we're installing people go there, just to waste time, which is not a derogatory comment about the Botanic Gardens.

Steph 37:30

no

Chris 37:30

But people go there, because there was this young guy who had missed a flight. So he just thought, I'll go for a walk in the Botanic Gardens, like just random reasons that people just,

Steph 37:40

end up there

Chris 37:41

first kiss, root, whatever in the Botanic Gardens, you know, like many things. And so you have this random audience that don't engage with art. And so the audience that goes in there is hugely diverse, and lots of school kids. And so school kids would just scream and carry on and get so excited and want to touch everything. And the, the museum attendants, we were really concerned that things were going to get damaged, and I'm going, "it doesn't matter, let them do it". Because it's paper mache, it can be repaired plus, doesn't need to go anywhere afterwards as at this minute. And so and then when I, when I would go in there, I would see that things would have moved were missing. And we would just put them back. And so I'm really excited that young people can have this kind of crazy engagement with things that they don't really, you know, that they just respond to on a very simplistic level, but it inspires this kind of amazement and awe.

Steph 38:40

Yeah.

Chris 38:41

The other good thing is that Andrea Crowther, the head of the invertebrates at the at the museum, partner wanted to buy something for her for a birthday present and I just, I suggested this print. And it was a surprise but, serendipitously, it was based on the sponge that I'd forgotten that I'd photographed at the museum, that was, that was collected in an Antarctic Expedition. So that was this kind of sweet moment where I had accidentally given her something from her collection and transposed you know, layered other things on top of it

Steph 39:17

Yeah.

Chris 39:18

And you know, she had this kind of really great surprise, hopefully, it was really great. Anyway. And you know, and it was an interesting way of paying back her great support in me looking at those collections held in the South Australian Museum.

Steph 39:35

Yeah.

39:46

[musical interlude]

Steph 39:53

And a little birdie told me, you're not resting; you're just going gung-ho into more things. Is that right?

Chris 39:59

Well, Yes, it's interesting because I'm a mature person and I have been the busiest that I've probably ever been. And whether that's by fortune or just harder working. Both obviously.

Steph 40:15

Momentum, even.

Chris 40:16

Momentum. Yes. So, um...

Steph 40:18

What's coming up?

Chris 40:19

So what's coming up? You know, we, you talked about does where I live influence where I work. I feel it's really important to contribute into the local community. So I've got a exhibition curated by a young man from Victor Harbor, who's put together a show at [Good Bank Gallery](#) in McLaren Vale.

Steph 40:39

Oh, fantastic. Yep.

Chris 40:40

Called... I think it's called South Coast surfing or South Coast group. I don't even know what it's called. And that's in a couple of weeks. And that's, I think, about five of us... maybe six showing there.

Steph 40:52

Mostly locally?

Chris 40:53

Yep. All just south coast.

Steph 40:55

Yeah. Beautiful.

Chris 40:56

Victor Harbor, Port Elliot people, which is fun. And I really, I really enjoy doing kind of shows like that, because it gives me a little bit more freedom to make mistakes. And, and be more playful. I mean, I really think that's an important part of my practice is being in the studio and kind of not being really directed, just having the ability to play. So having those kinds of exhibitions allows you to play but makes you play harder, because you have to have an outcome. And I'm not just going to screw it up and throw it in the bin. And then also at [Coral Street Art Centre](#). There's a show being curated there called [Water People](#) and...

Steph 41:37

Your favourite word!

Chris 41:37

My favourite word. It's becoming my favourite word. Well, it's on the zeitgeist right now isn't it. I mean, everyone's talking about immersion. And the benefits of, you know, sea therapy. But anyway, [Valerie Taylor](#) is in this exhibition. So when I got told Valerie Taylor was in it, what can I had to say yes, because she's like a water person icon. And she does these kind of weird illustrations of nymphs, like underwater nymphs and stuff.

Steph 42:05

So cool.

Chris 42:05

So I want to be in because I want to be supporting the community, but I want to be in it because I want to see Valerie Taylor, I just hope she appears. They're going to be running one of her movies at the Victor Harbor cinema.

Steph 42:15

oh that's cool.

Chris 42:16

And so I'm exhibiting with Valerie Taylor. And then in 2024, a project I'm working on with [Flinders Art Museum](#) is in combination with the humanities department there, and dovetailing in with some history conference and it's around sea grasses, and that's in 2024. So that's more than enough for me to contend with.

Steph 42:40

I daresay

Chris 42:41

Yeah.

Steph 42:41

Still enough excuses to get into the water.

Chris 42:44

No, no, that is integral in most days. Most days. There is a swim.

Steph 42:51

There's a dip.

Chris 42:51

Yeah, there's a dip.

Steph 42:52

And are you... more of a float or hard swim?

Chris 42:55

Oh no swim. It's earnest. Yeah, I have swum with two friends for a very long time. And as I mentioned, Honor Freeman has joined us in the last few years, and she's younger than the rest of us. So she keeps us on our toes. But it's a, it's a, it's an earnest swim. It varies depending on the conditions. But it's a it's a very deep dive.

Steph 43:16

ah!-

Chris 43:16

and it's good swimming.

Steph 43:18

-there it is.

Chris 43:18

Yeah.

Steph 43:19

I don't think we can top that. And we can follow along on your Instagram?

Chris 43:22

That's it. Yeah.

Steph 43:24

Yep. Beautiful. All right. We'll leave it there. Thank you so much. That was, yep, 'deep dive' was the word.

Chris 43:30

Thanks.

43:31

[music]