Artist Interview: Kaspar Schmidt Mumm

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[Blob Funk - Slowmango pays]

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Hello and welcome to the SALA podcast. My name is Steph and today I'm catching up with Kaspar Schmidt Mumm. We're coming to you from a meeting room in the SALA office in Adelaide, which is a stone's throw from Kaspar's massive show at Adelaide Contemporary Experimental Gallery. I want to acknowledge the Kaurna People as the Traditional Owners of the land that we're meeting on and working on, and pay respect to Elders past and present. Kaspar, thank you for making time to chat today. I know you're so busy.

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It's actually the calm after the storm for me now, and I'm happy to be here.

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Oh good, thank you. Usually, this is the part where I'd give a bit more information about your art practice. But ...where do I start? I mean, you, you make physical objects, you make music, you make digital pieces, you perform your work individually, you work collaboratively, you make costume? So I'm gonna handball this to you. Could you please describe your practice?

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Well, yeah, it's, it's an interesting one, I'd say I'd make process driven performative works using local materials, and create site-specific installations or participatory sculptures.

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I love that you managed to find an umbrella for the scope of what you do

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there's a lot of words there, you know, sometimes you just boil it down to three or two or three words. But yeah, it's hard. I love all the little different processes and materials that I get to use.

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I think you'd have to be with the amount of work that you're putting in, you'd have to have some hyper fixation on that aspect.

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oh definitely, yeah.

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And I get the impression that you were always going to be an artist, is that fair to say?

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Um, yeah, I guess I was kind of born into it, in a way, like my mom is an artist and she does a lot of like, really rehabilitative work. So she, she's an artist in residence in hospitals and aged care centers and community centers. And yeah, kindergartens, schools, like what wherever she kind of orientates herself

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so she'd be very in tune with, like the very tangible therapeutic benefits of art. Is that kind of it -like art therapy and all those kinds of things?

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Exactly. Yeah. But like, I guess she doesn't see herself as an art therapist, and she doesn't necessarily want to be one either. She's actually quite against that idea.

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Yep, don't put her in a box

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Yeah, she doesn't want to fix a problem. She wants to prevent a problem, do you know what I mean?

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right

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So I think like therapy and hospitals, and those kinds of environments often react to an injury or react to... whether it's even a brain injury, you know, whereas I think that she's really interested in the, I guess, the preventative nature of the just the happiness and, and belonging and purpose you get out of making art. That's her thing.

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That's a great distinction. Yeah. Thank you for making sure she felt represented there, yeah.

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She always reiterates that to me, and I'm like, I'm starting to understand it fully. But I haven't always regarded myself or regarded that part of my practice as the most important. You know, like, for most of my teens and early 20s. I really wanted to be like, a famous artist Jean Michel Basquiat, painting paintings and selling them for millions of

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Yeah, yeah, so grandiose

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That is exactly it, I really romanticized that idea of an artist; alone in the studio. You know, painting my sufferage onto a surface using vibrant colors, you know. And I did that, I loved it, and I got really good at it. And I sold my paintings and I did it you know, but um, I felt like there was more to why I wanted to be there in the first place. And I now know that it was completely linked to just making stuff with people.

And it really is that simple. It really is just, it's a privilege to be able to play with nonsense to to do things out of boredom and no reason and and just because they're beautiful, you know and be able to chase beauty for for no reason other than to be happy. You know that. That is to me what art should be.

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That is it, isn't it. Amazing. So from early Kaspar, who entered a seal photograph in a show... which show?

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yeah, I, it was my early teens, I remember that. It's a long time ago now, you know, it's like literally 15 years ago.

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Don't put numbers on it.

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But my mom was in this collaborative show in the Drill Hall, across the road from the festival center. And I had taken this really good photo of a baby seal on Kangaroo Island. And she was like, we'll print it off and frame it and we'll put it in the show. And I was like ... I'm in SALA.

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[both laugh]

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And I thought I was so cool. And then, you know, I got to hang my work on this on this giant buildings wall. And there was all these artists doing this crazy stuff.

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Yeah. And that building has vibes.

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Yeah. It's such a cool spot.

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That's so cool. So that was like the early...

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I said, that was my first exhibition ever.

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Amazing. I love that it was a SALA one, that's so good. And good on you mom, for making it happen.

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She's been exhibiting around the world forever, you know. So it was pretty normal for me to have to go to my mom's like, install because me and my brother would always have to come and like sit in the corner of the gallery while my mom put up her work with the other artists.

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That's such a cool insight. To be like, seeing the behind the scenes from such an early age and being like normal.

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Yeah, yeah. No, it is great. It's, it's cool. Because the type of people that you get to hang out with in those environments, like, you know, they're really they'll give you some paper and some art materials, you can just sit there and draw, like, when you're a kid in that environment. It's like, great, because you've got crafts and creative people around you that are willing to listen and play. I guess that's a great thing about it.

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Yeah you would have been around those nice energies.

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And so... I'm still struggling to just find the right inpoint to the behemoth that is your practice. Because it's looked like lots of different things. Gosh, I don't even know where to like, can you talk maybe a bit about how you regard the collaborative work that you do, and then also the really individual projects that you've done - like, are they distinct in your mind? Are they one in the same? Is it all enmeshed?

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I think the beauty of an individual practice is that you have this meditative time to yourself to really go inside of yourself and understand why you're doing what you're doing. And it doesn't even have to be why you're painting a canvas, you can think about an inner dialogue that involves why you love the people you love, why you live in the place you do, why you do the things that you do in your life, you know, and it doesn't have to be that, you know, your life revolves around painting; painting can just be the medium for you to be able to have the agency to contemplate within yourself. You know, I think that was really important for me when I was younger and and it still is today. It's just I think I've changed my medium a lot. And there's been, you know, revolutions in my practice I think. My most recent craft based work was paper mache, because I was really interested in recycled material, I realized that I've been painting with plastic my whole life really and, and I'd kind of wanted to get away from using materials that weren't biodegradable and and I think paper is related to my Indo Aryan heritage and like the Persian, Pakistani, Indian ancient crafts of paper are like all over the world now, you know, the the French adopted it for their furniture, and, yeah, that's what made me interested, I guess. But, um, there's that part of my practice, which is like, solitary, and I think I find a lot of that in writing now as well. Like, I love to write now. It's so integral to my practice, I think. I don't think I could be where I am without it.

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Yeah. And that sort of sits within the solitary reflective vehicle for deeper introspection.

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Yeah exactly. Whether it's creative writing, or, I guess, grant writing, you know,

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There's merits in that.

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reviewing, even helping other people write their philosophy to their practice and their politics.

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Yeah. I'm a big fan of being forced to find the words; I do like that.

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Yeah, I love that; I love sitting down and being able to read about something that's happening in the world and then react to it with my own writing. I like doing that now. But collaboratively: I think... each artist has their individual practice and they have their own like, way of finding their place in the art scene or the world and, and then, I guess now now that I have the power to have had so much experience and made such a huge community in the art, literally everyone I know as an artist like my mom, my dad, my brother, my girlfriend, my Best Friends -I almost need less artists friend, I need to make [friends] outside of art.

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Dilute!

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Like my, my father was a scientist, but since retiring now he's a sci fi novelist, apparently, you know, I guess he just saw the rest of all be artists was like, oh maybe I should do it too. But yeah, so I think the power that I have now is to enable other people to make stuff the way I have. And I think, like I said before, making art is a privilege, it's something that like, only societies that can really afford and like, not just monetarily, but like, psychologically, is the society happy enough to have the room to want to make art, you know, and I think that's, that's something that comes into play. So I want to be able to facilitate people to find that privilege. And to understand that, you know, maybe, I think there's heaps people in our state in our country that volunteer already and do those kinds of things. But I think the arts are... it's probably the best way to express yourself. And now my job, I guess, is to facilitate the people who, who are really pushing the boundaries of understanding who they are, and what our society is, and encouraging tradition to exist in Adelaide. I know it's a big call to make that I'm someone doing that, but I think that's my drive towards life, that's what I want to do with my life is to make sure that the community that exists within has the traditions that it needs, in order to identify with a culture that, that we all share, you know, that's, that's my drive in. And I see there's a lot of disparity in that in our country, you know, like, even just the fact that our country gives a gives an acknowledgement, every time we do an event is something to be to think about and, and not every country in the world does that even though every country in the world has First Nations, you know, they all every place in the world has had ancient civilizations that are completely connected to the ecology and, and spirituality of the land, you know, like, but not everyone, not everyone needs to acknowledge it. And, and I think we really do, and I think we're all and we've actually learned so much in the just the past five years of how that

can be done. And, and integrated this identity of, of so called Australian culture into what we do, and, you know, figured out that we are the oldest culture in the world. It's just that it's hard to identify as it, you know, when really you've been part of the vehicle that's abused it.

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yes. But I hope that the momentum of leaning into the difficult conversations continues.

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and I think as an immigrant, like I'm, I'm technically a third generation immigrant, that means that both sides of my family have immigrated for three generations. Yeah, so my grandparents on both sides were also immigrants. Yeah, so, you know, like, my grandparents, my parents, and I; even my great grandparents on my on my father's side, but that's another story

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yeah we only have half an hour

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[both laugh]

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But so I think, you know, in within all of that, immigration, there's a lot of identity in, in diaspora and, and with that comes these ideas of colonization and, you know, colonization is a big word, and it's being thrown around a lot at the moment. And I think there's a lot of intricacy to it. And there's a lot of unknowns in in that political agenda, that theme, that topic, and it interests me because it is so broad, and it does, it has affected my life, you know, and, or at least intergenerationally. And so yeah, through my ancestry I'm learning about colonization in the world and through colonization the world I'm learning about Australian identity and the politics of why we think we are who we are.

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I can see why... where am I going with this? There's a lot going on in that brain. A lot. Yeah, okay. Let me... there'll be a piece of music in here. Just...this is a lot of words before lunchtime.

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Yeah it's not even noon yet.

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yeah, chill out.

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[music plays]

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Kaspar and I have just committed to really trying not to talk to fill spaces, so there may be some extra pauses from here on.

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Don't ramble, don't ramble.

15:00
Don't ramble, don't repeat myself... and now I won't be able to put a sentence together. Coming back to the sort of themes about diaspora and you know, all of those things that just kind of come into your thinking: is there a work in particular that you can sort of tie it to make, to... Oh my gosh, words. I think you said the IMMI works are probably the best example of that. Can you maybe speak to them a little bit?

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Oh totally. I guess for seven years, I explored cultural identity, cultural alienation, representation. You know, what is appropriation? And what is, I guess, pushing tradition and how do I, how do you identify with tradition when you're not "from" (quote/unquote) a place or a culture. And that's been a huge part of my life because, you know, I was born in Germany, my mom's Pakistani Canadian, my dad's a German Colombian. I live in Australia, I look like, I'm brown and I look like I'm from India, or Pakistan, but I don't speak the language, nor do I have the accent, nor have I ever been there, I still need to go there. You know, like, so those things, really mix up your idea of where you should identify, traditionally. But then living in Australia, you want to identify with the people around you. And you know, you want to be part of the society you're in, and IMMI is the prefix for immigration

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oh, that's where it comes from

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to put something in, you know, that's the, 'im' is the prefix for putting something in. And so, yeah, I created essentially, because I couldn't, I didn't feel like I could identify with being German. I didn't feel like Australian, Indian, Canadian. I don't feel like any of those. So I was like, alright, well, I'll just make my own.

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That's so good

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[both laugh]

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And then, and then I can test all my theories on my own, and I don't have to appropriate anyone I don't like, I don't have to subject any of the cultures that I partially identify with, with my experiments, I can just subject myself to it. And so what I did is... I was doing heaps of workshops, as I always do with different communities all around Adelaide and Australia. And I just started to use the colour blue in association with all of them.

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Yeah, it was this lovely, vivid, deep, rich blue.

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Yeah, greeny, bluey like, it wasn't quite an electric blue. It was a bit more of like a greeny blue I feel

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in the in the realm of

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Yeah exactly, I mean, I wasn't too particular. If there was something blue, you know, I was like a bowerbird.

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[laughs] A bowerbird!

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Yeah and I was obsessed with the -and colour has been such an important part of my practice. But, um,

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but that tied it together.

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Yeah what it did is like... it did! it really did tie it [together], it gave it uniformity. And I think that's one of the things that people think of culture, you know, they think, Oh, if it's red, it's Chinese, or, you know

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It's such a simple thing isn't it. I mean, that's a bit reductive,

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I mean it's not black and white, you know, everybody has different ideas for colour and where they are. But I think, giving my audience this kind of overarching aesthetic to the work made them think that it was all tied together. Whereas like, if I just done it, like any community art project is done, my audience would have looked at it and gone 'oh, that's just community art'.

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Isn't that interesting?

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So I used the illusion of aesthetic and uniformity, to tie everything together culturally. And, and to me that, you know, it was almost like my gag that I use to, to fool people into thinking that everything I did was connected, because it was. You know, all of my work is connected thematically, it's just that you can't see that. If you look at a community center, and the art that's made in it, it's all different colours, by different people with different fonts because they all have different handwriting, different subjects. There's no tangential, visual, connection. And I don't necessarily think you need one either, it's just that

I forced myself into one in order to make it digestible for a contemporary arts audience. You know, I think that's why I did that. And I think that speaks to cultural representation in general.

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Yeah, there's a lot of layers there.

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I did a six month residency at the Museum of South Australia through a mentorship with John Carty, and essentially we went through the museum and just looked at the ethics of cultural representation in a museum context. And, you know, I have a lot of problems with the Museum of South Australia, I have a lot of problems with museums in the world in general. I've been doing a lot of work with the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, which is a very controver- people protested the building of the building that Humboldt is in for 20 years. And then by the time it was built, they decided to put one of the largest colonial organizations for ethnological collections in the world into it, you know, it's like, imagine taking a capitalistic represent, like the architecture of the castle of West Germany, it just really represents the the early like ideas of capitalism within society, whereas it was a, it was a republic building before that. It was like a socialistic building that was in that same spot. Anyway, at the Museum of South Australia, with John Carty, I looked at a lot of the displays of indigenous culture. And, to me, indigenous culture isn't necessarily like boomerangs, and clap sticks, and, like, you know, making a fire with sticks. And, you know, it's like that we, we really think of First Nations culture as being like, ancient and being something that is, has like, stagnated within a certain era of humanity, like, you know, hunters and collectors. And, you know, my

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almost at arm's length.

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Yeah exaclty, It's like, that's how society was, you know, whereas I just think, like, indigenous cultures can be contemporary. Like, there's, you know, and really, like, if you go to a museum and you want to, you want to see indigenous culture, you shouldn't go to see it the way it was represented, like, the way that it was pre colonization. I think that's I think that's wrong, I think that all representations of culture should be contemporary; for, with, and by the people who are a part of it. And so that was my big problem that I had with the museum. And I still have, I think it's a bit controversial to say something like that. But I yeah, I definitely think there could be some major changes made in our cultural institutions. And so I went there, and I just like, took the aesthetics of anthropology that the museum use, you know, gloss cases, little plaques. And

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yeah, that real like, 'here is the artifact' kind of thing

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exactly. Yeah, the artifacts.

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And here I'm presenting it for you.

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I think John was the first one who instigated [that] the plaques underneath the objects [would] say who the artists were that made them, not who the anthropologist was who found them.

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That's an important distinction.

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Yeah, you know, it's a major difference. But it's very small as well, it's just changing a little piece of paper that's underneath it, you know, and so things like that I took into consideration for the work. And then I presented a variety of portraits and objects that I'd made that were in context to cultural representation of my own culture that I invented, using artworks that the community had made in workshops, you know, so that was kind of, I guess, it was like, I was gathering folklore from all of these kids and, and like, people that I worked with in Adelaide over the years doing workshops, and used it in context to representing my own culture. So you know, my family and friends were all in the show, my my brother's band played, and the most interesting thing I thought was that we had is that, it was at Floating Goose, like right at the beginning of Floating Goose. And inside the window, we set up this kind of set with a, like a tarp as the backdrop. And then we had the band play inside, real real humans, like we were giving out or like vegan hors d'oeuvres to the audience, and everybody was on the street. There's like, all these people in the middle of Morphett Street watching it. And then we played, we actually made a short film. And then we put the curtain down, remove the whole installation, took all of our costumes off, and then let the audience into a kind of anthropological study of us.

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Gosh, there's so much going on there.

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[both laugh]

24:19
oh wow. I'm gonna need another pause to soak that in.

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[music plays]

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All right, I think it's time to talk about ROCKAMORA, which is currently on at Adelaide Contemporary Experimental Gallery. Now you were announced as the recipient of the Porter Street Commission, and this is the outcome and I'm very excited about the whole thing. And it ties in really well with what we were just talking about because you're sort of saying... You know, I think it's fair to say that you tend to have these projects that they don't just have one single life, they sort of have these iterations. And there's this lovely development that happens between and building upon these projects. So ROCKAMORA actually does sort of tie in with the IMMI works. Maybe I'll just throw to you, can you... how... maybe we should talk about what the the actual theme of ROCKAMORA is, because I think it's

really fascinating. And maybe just paint a bit of a picture of what the install looks like, as well, or what it is.

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I guess... where do I begin?

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I know!

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creak goes my chair. I guess, technically, this is the fifth ROCKAMORA. You know? Because we've toured it around Victoria, we toured it regionally throughout South Australia, like,

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and 'we'; collaborative kind of, you know, large scale kind of multi-faceted.

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You know, it's funny, saying "we", I don't want to say "I" because every single time I've done it, it's been with other people. Yeah. And you know, like, sure, like, there's the Jeff Koons and that would always say I when they talk about their own work, but I just don't, I don't think that's the reality of definitely my practice. I think people put so much of themselves in it for so little, you know, and they just do it because they love me and, and

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the energy of it all

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Yeah, we have a community and we have a family that makes cool shit together. Sorry, my French.

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Oh we're not bleeping that.

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But yeah, so the first ROCKAMORA was completely off the cuff. It was built out of remnants of an old bookstore and some awnings from a community center. And we just used a couple of hinges and like, put some kind of drum kit stools as the eyes and then we had my brother and Ben Sargent, who are musicians, set up a microphone and then, you know, we just installed this big puppet at Carclew. It wasn't like... I never thought of myself as a puppeteer, do you know what I mean?

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Yeah, okay.

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I don't think of these works as puppets. I don't, I don't know why. To me puppetry is very specific to a time and a place. You know, I think it's very western idea. I mean, there's incredible puppetry in Eastern

cultures as well. But I think of the works as participatory sculptures, because I don't want only myself to be controlling them, my aim is for the community that gets to see them and interact with them to actually control them as well. And that's different to being a puppeteer. I think you know, a puppeteer just makes an object that they create an ontology for to understand and move and speak for

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and the audience receives it very passively

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Exactly, whereas my sculptures, you can go inside of them, or you can become them yourself. Yeah. And I think that's an important difference to make. And so yeah, first ROCKAMORA was at Carclew; kids feeding chips that they found in the in the yard to this giant monster. Some kids got scared and we were like, Don't worry, dude, this is all fake, took them around the back and then they get to have the microphone and control the sculpture. We just sit back, drink coffee, and let them play with it.

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Yeah. imaginations going wild, love it.

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Yeah, and that toured to Streaky Bay, to Onkaparinga to, you know, all around. And then we went to Melbourne, and we built a new one at Seventh Gallery, which was blue. So that's where I kind of tied IMMI to ROCKAMORA. And what we did is we hung a giant parcel from the ceiling, and then at the opening of the exhibition, we played pass the parcel. And we had a bunch of microwaves; in between each layer of the parcel, there was popcorn, you got to make a bag of popcorn in the microwave. And then you would unwrap the layers of your cultural identity, which is what

28:46
Wow, there's a lot there

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that was the idea is take a layer off of the parcel and feed it to ROCKAMORA, they'll eat the layer of your pop cultural identity and spit out some information or just talk about, you know, the binaries of how we identify, and how to break down binaries in our identity and become more... have more of a spectrum in how we see ourselves. In all kinds of ways, not just culture, gender, whatever we could feed into it. We had a bunch of poets that helped us write stuff, and then we gave this dialogue that reacted to people feeding layers of this pass the parcel game to the puppet.

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There's such a great dynamic between the ideas that you're tapping into that, you know, I really have to pay attention to make sure I'm following properly, And yet it's, you know, juxtaposed with, you know, this very, like...

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just playful

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It's so playful! and accessible and unpretentious and, you know, what a great marriage of these two things that and I think maybe just for anyone who hasn't seen it yet, at the moment, the current iteration is a giant head like and you know there are these comically big... maybe we should tap into the actual, who/what ROCKAMORA is based on and what it means.

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yeah so ROCKAMORA is the name of my mother's -and her sisters', so she had to she has two sisters. And they all went, they all got to Canada and they they landed and they were the brown girls in the white school. And they had a bully, and the bully was called ROCKAMORA. But yeah, so they always when I was a kid told me the story of confronting ROCKAMORA as a way for me to deal with my own stuff, you know, and so I really had this kind of absurd or exaggerated idea of this moment in time that they, for them was just like, you know, they just scrubbed it off. And they, they turned it into this story that they tell their kids, but like, it wasn't that important to them. But because I was a kid and I had this, this idea in my head of who Rockamora is, you know, Rockamora was probably 10 feet tall.

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of course

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in my eyes, you know, and like in her eyes is just like a little kid that she had a rough time playing with. And my auntie is really good friends with Rockamora and the real Rockmora still is alive and lives in Toronto and has no idea that this is a giant sculpture in Adelaide that's made with

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why are my ears burning [both laughing]

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maybe one day Rockmora will go to Toronto, and they'll just be like, Whoa. But, you know, I think the reason why, like, I think it became clear to me through me, and through the beginnings of representing the first Rockamora is that like, you can't represent culture, if it's not your own, you know, you really just can't. And so I ask myself, How can I represent ideas and stories that are necessary to society to feel better about existing, you know, like to find purpose and to deal with the stuff we deal with every day. And I was like, I want to tell my own stories. That's the best way to do it. It's just like, figure out what stories have affected me, and then open open myself up to show people what I've experienced, so that they can feel like it's normal. You know, that's what you want. When you go to school for the first day, you want everybody else to be late, do you know what I mean? You want everybody else to wear the weird shirt with the crinkles in it, you know, that's what you want. You just you want to feel belonging in that everyone's flawed, you know, and that's why Rockmora is the bad guy, you know, because everyone is flawed. Everyone is a bad guy. But we still need to treat bad guys with benevolence, we still need to care for the bad guys.

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And that's part of the participation, isn't it? Is it that we're invited to care for the bully? Like, yeah, and that's such a interesting... you know, reading the copy and the blurb about what the show was about, I was just like, what?

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Why?!

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I'm being invited to be a good person? No, it's a lovely empathy, but it's, yeah, still playful. and

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I feel like, it's counterintuitive, though, you know, it's like a very simple element of counter intuition. I think most stories we hear are about, like, the defeat of agonist you know, and I think that's a very patriarchal story, you know?

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and tired!

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Literally, I'm tired of that story. I'm tired of superheroes. I'm tired of the protagonist being this sexy blond, white man that like wears a cape and destroys the ugly Purple Tentacle.

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It's always purple!

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Exactly. Like why? why? Give me something that I can be, I can feel, I can understand and identify with

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or is just a little more real and nuanced and dynamic and contradictory, and, yes, more things at once.

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And so, one of the best fantasy sci fi novelists in the world, Le Guin, -everyone knows Le Guin- wrote an essay that's called the carrier bag theory. And it's the theory that most stories in our history had been written about a man who makes a weapon to defeat a bad guy

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gosh that does cover a lot, yeah.

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It's a lot of stories. And she argued that really, we need to start telling stories of the carrier bag, which is the person who creates a vessel to collect the information, the necessary tools to overcome something from within, you know, it's like this idea of like, taking in aspects of your ecology, aspects of your antagonist, and your family and whatever to combine them together or to compare them to understand their relationship, so that you can come up with a solution. Through care, understanding, empathy.

Through combining resources, you know, and that's what care is, to me, it's like, you have to combine resources with the person affected by whatever thing that you they need healing for, and then you problem solve a solution. And that's what care is.

35:26
And so important to underscore that actually, that is a very valid and interesting and brave thing to be doing. That's much more interesting than just defeating a bad guy!

35:37
They should be the superheroes, the people who cared, like in our society, you know, the people that do the hard work that like actually takes listening, and reacting and problem solving. That is, that's the beautiful, powerful narrative that I think we like, and it's not just made who tells that story, I think, a lot of people dealing with topics of colonization, discrimination, even gender politics as well, like, they talk about self care and, and healing in general, as a, as a form of, you know, contemporary storytelling, a way to take the attention off of the victim and put it onto the perpetrator. But still tell the story without, you know, damaging the the ecology that exists to uphold those narratives. You know, like, if we constantly tell the story of like, a post colonial decolonial narrative through the victim, then the victim has to do all the work, you know, all of it. And we just can't do that, there needs to be like, I'm an antagonist within myself as well. Like, I'm, you know, I've got many stories in my history that are flawed, and probably took advantage of whatever situation.

36:55
everyone is someone's ROCKAMORA.

36:56
Exactly! Everyone's a Rockmora everyone's ROCKAMORA. And I think, you know, I think I still want to be able to tell those stories, I want to be able to, I want to be able to stand in front of my community and say, My ancestors, and I have done some bad stuff. We've done some terrible things, you know, but I've also got good things, and maybe I can use the good things to fix the bad things, you know, like, let's just admit to stuff, yes. And then figure out how to fix it instead of just

37:24
not talking about it

37:26
ROCKAMORA, to me, is my idea or like my representation of the elephant in the room. That's how I see it.

37:32
That is a great way to put it, isn't it? Because I mean it's big enough.

37:36
Exactly, I'm like this is how big the friggin elephant is, guys. This is how big it is.

37:42

Like, you can't ignore the giant head.

37:45
And it's having a bath, that's how comfortable it is. It's comfortable. There's hundreds of you here. And this elephant in the room is taken a bath.

37:55
Yeah, there's so much to unwrap there, I love it. But what a great just unapologetic just like no, this is a conversation we're having. And it's fun. And you can you know, I think it's it's not scary, which is funny, because, for some people when you read the word 'participatory' is a bit of a trigger, because you know, I don't know, I think of like going to a comedy show and not sitting in the front row, you know, noone wants to be picked. But it's not like that at all. It's just, it's welcoming. I mean, you know, we were talking before about, you know, isn't all art participatory, really, you know, that kind of thing.

38:32
Actually, one of the best moments in this entire process has been on the first and second performance, but I just remember the first one really made an impression because it was the first time it happened. We had like planned like Kate Cheel and I working through the performance structures and like some of the dramaturgy of, essentially there's six levels and the third level is feeding. So you feed Rockmora,

38:57
Yeah, so like different phases of interacting with the work?

39:00
Yeah, so it's sleep. So you wake up Rockmore using making by making sound, then you clean them; you brush their teeth, clean their ears, and

39:08
I love that giant cotton bud

39:11
and then you feed them, so you throw like protein balls in their mouth; and then they do a poo. And then they get embarrassed and they get angry. And then there's two endings and you either calm them down, or you break them.

39:28
wow - should we have this power? but what a great commentary, and the choice.

39:35
but one of my favorite moments in this whole process has been on the opening night when we had planned for a few people to maybe get up during the performance and throw some food in the gob, we had this big pack of chips, we had all these like recycled Styrofoam off-cuts and we like painted them yellow. And then we sewed the chip packet closed and there was this moment where like, as soon as we smashed it like ripped open this packet of chips, Blob Funk played, was like [sings Blob Funk]. And so during this really up lively song, we would try and give out these chips to people to feed Rockamora.

And like, obviously every single kid in the venue got up and sprinted for the stage, they're like give me one of those!

40:17
yeah give me giant chip

40:19
but not only the kids, like as soon as those kids stood up, literally the whole room stood up, like I'd say, like, close to 200 people, and I was like, I just didn't think that, you know, we thought maybe a handful of people in the front row might help us out and do it. But like the entire room, grabbed a chip and threw it in Rockamora's mouth.

40:38
That is so good.

40:41
My faith in humanity restored. Just like participation can work. And yeah, people do feel like they want to be involved in our art

40:49
Yes, and are willing!

40:50
actively participate in it, you know, and I just was so astounded.

40:54
Oh, that's goosebumps-good.

40:56
Yeah, literally shivers up my spine.

40:58
Amazing. This is so interesting. Because I mean, if you didn't know, like, if you hadn't read the copy, and then even then, talking to you now, there's so much more than I'd really thought behind the work. And it would almost be if we hadn't heard you speak about it, because it's fun and colourful, it's almost like you could almost assume it was just fun and just play and just -not to be [rude], I feel terrible saying that but- it's one of those things where I'm glad we're talking about it

41:30
I think that's... it's such a common thing, you know? That when something is happy and sprightful and optimistic and playful, it can seem a bit superficial.

41:45
Yeah. Which is weird! But I know what you mean, yeah.

41:48
I think it's, I think it's a flaw in how we see art, to think that play is superficial.

41:55
Yeah. or less?

41:56
Yeah. Because play has strict boundaries.

42:01
Do go on.

42:02
Like, if you don't have parameters set in place for play, then you can't play. Because otherwise the world's too big and you become too scared. And so I think that's a big thing in our company, you know, so we've got The Bait Fridge, which is our like, 30 plus collective of artists from anywhere and everywhere, you know, we're trying to create as much accessibility as we can with our company. So there's people from literally every corner of Adelaide in our collective,

42:31
there's a lot of really engaging workshops, and, you know, projects that are just larger than life

42:35
and process based, you know, we're just like, how can we let people that don't have the power, take over?

42:42
[both laugh]

42:42
who let you guys be in charge? Amazing

42:45
Yeah. And then there's Slowmango, which is the band that was kind of born within and without the bait fridge and kind of has created this beautiful structure for the bait fridge to exist upon.

42:56
Oh that's a great relationship.

42:57
So yeah, music is foundational for the parameters that we set for our play in the collective. So my brother really took the play that we'd done and solidified it into something tangible. And you know, we released a record last week, and we've already sold half of them, you know, it's, it's been amazing

43:18

oh my gosh, do you sleep?

43:22
[laughing] Yeah, I do. I do. We all have to.

43:23
Sometimes. Fit it in on Wednesdays.

43:29
But I think one of the big things that I've come to terms with recently is trying to understand how important the work we do is, because it is so playful. And I think, I want us to be seen, like we are accessible and playful and open and optimistic towards the world. But I also want people to understand that what we do has intense processes for accessibility, for like comfortability, for safety, for you know, we aren't ageist, we aren't sexist, and those to be able to say those things is big, especially in the contemporary arts, you know, like, I don't think many people can say that. And, you know, we literally do work with people that don't have a platform because they don't have the access to have one. And when you see a performance in front of you, it's just like, oh, yeah, that person is just in a costume dancing around... they've never danced in a costume before. They've never made a costume before. They learned how to do it with us. They, they hardly they don't even have a studio because they can't organize one for themselves; the only time that they make work is when they're in a situation where they're being facilitated or helped. We don't help people, we just want to make them feel like they're equal to us, you know, and in order for someone to get to there is hard enough in the first place, let alone make the work itself. And so it might seem like the topics and the themes and the facade of our work is really superficial and playful, but there's so much more to it than that, which is hard to convey. And also, we don't want to make someone parade their baggage if they don't feel comfortable.

45:22
Yes, I think that's an important thing, isn't it? Because, as much as it's so easy to for people to not observe that, that's probably the way it has to be, because yeah, you don't want to labor someone's difficulties, or someone's that inability to access something.

45:37
And that's like, one of the biggest reasons why I've always done masking, or costume. And is because it allows you to not have to identify as what you look like. do you know what I mean?

45:48
Yeah... this will be part 2

45:51
I think that's a huge part of it, as well as like, it all seemed like, Masquerade. You know, it's like a parade of this kind of beautiful thing. And, but it really like what is underneath the mask? You know, that's, that's what really counts. But, but the great thing about our performances is that you don't have to show that. You don't have to be brown, you don't have to be disabled, you don't have to be male, you don't have to be female, you can just be what the character you invent is. And I know that seems pretty simple. But like, yeah, that

46:26
in the context of everything that you're saying, yeah. And it makes sense, I mean, that is one of the ways that you can facilitate, no 'othering', you're just all weird characters or

46:40
And it's an even playing field, if everyone's in a mask, it's an even playing field, you know, and, and, and then, behind the scenes, we create a safe space, you know, that's where that's where it's just us. And we can say you deserve the equity, because you haven't had the opportunities that we have. So you get to do what you want to do, how you want to do it, and then we facilitate those people that need that access, or to be able to present their work the way that they want to present it. It's the job of the people who have the privilege to help them behind the scenes. Yeah. Because help doesn't need to be presented on stage. And it when we don't want people to think like, 'oh, all the white people are helping the brown people', that's not what we want to do.

47:26
yeah, and the difference between performing the help and just doing it for the right reasons.

47:30
Yeah exactly. And just having fun and not having to confront those politics on the stage. You know, we can confront them in our own time, behind the scenes, you know,

47:40
and that not laboring the point of the help, because the important thing is the work and the art.

47:47
Yes, and then once people are comfortable, like if once people are integrated into our work, then they can go and then they can present their baggage if they want. Everybody wants to; I do it all the time. You know, like, I mean, there's so many forms in society of performance and art where people are parading their baggage, you know, like just showing the world how they suffered because that's what is freaking beautiful, but it's not easy getting there. You gotta you gotta really know yourself yeah, to do something like that

48:14
and you have to be safely in that position to make that choice. But amazing, I love I love it all. And I love the just the enigma of like, Bait Fridge, but what is it and like, what? There's just this like, I don't know, mythology around it all, that's great. But um, yeah, quintessentially, like, so South Aussie, but also worldly and untethered.

48:42
[laughs] Unhinged!

48:44
Unhinged! Can we finish on that? Thank you for your... delving into the unhinged with Kaspar.

48:50
and honestly I couldn't do it without them. Like, my name might be at the front of the Porter Street Commission title because that's how the Commission works. But in the end, you know, my entire career is hinged off of the community that I have here. And you know, I didn't go to school. My community is the one that I made art with while I worked, you know, in every context from SignWriting, to festival to exhibition to you know, reading and writing, you know, everything

49:23
no better foundation than that. Yeah,

49:26
Cheers to The Bait Fridge. And SALA! oh my god we didn't even get to talk about SALA!

49:31
Haha, that's alright, we're in it baby!

49:35
[both laugh]

49:57
[music plays]