



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST – SERIES 5 EPISODE 2 (February 2023)

VENICE BIENNALE: ARCHIE MOORE, ELLIE BUTTROSE

Tim Stackpool:

Archie Moore began by describing himself and the nature of his work.

Archie Moore:

Hi, everyone. My name is Archie Moore, Bigambul, Kamilaroi Aboriginal man from Western Downs in Queensland. Been practicing artist for 25 years since completing Bachelor of Visual Arts at QUT in 1995 and received a Samstag scholarship to go to Prague for a year of study there. Ever since I have been exhibiting around Australia and internationally as well, multidisciplinary artists, using lots of different media to explore ideas of my own identity and Aboriginal politics, my personal histories as well, and trying to put people into my shoes, experience things I have experienced is kind of a motif in my work.

Ellie Buttrose:

I'm Ellie Buttrose. I work as the curator of contemporary Australian art at the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art. I had the great pleasure of working with Archie for Embodied Knowledge with my colleague Tina Davidson who's the curator of indigenous Australian art. Archie produced a really incredible project, and so I feel very honoured to be working as the curator for the Australian Pavilion with Archie again.

We've known each other for perhaps maybe 15 years. It's nice to be able to take Archie's work internationally because I think he was really very much deserving of that recognition. One of the reasons I want to work with Archie is because I always remember his projects and they're projects that sit with you and don't leave you. They come up in conversation constantly year after year long after you've seen them, and I really hope that our international audience will feel the same.

It would be great to hear what this opportunity represents to you.

Archie Moore:

To be able to show my work to an international audience and to show them the contemporary Aboriginal art and history of my place in Australia and other people as well because even though they're personal histories, there are universal themes and subjects and exploring. I think it's a very big honour and privilege to represent Australia on an international stage.

Ellie Buttrose:

What are the larger aspirations of your practice?

Archie Moore:

Recently, I got into looking into family history. It's something I've avoided and was wary of going there in a kind of a way. I just got really involved in that in the last three years, which has confirmed... I mentioned I was from Bigambul people. It's in Western Downs, kind of Goonderwindi and west of there, which I was not 100% sure about. So just been putting that research I've been doing into artworks and tackling them into a visual form.

I did a large family tree where the idea was to take it back a 60,000 years. It's lots of little branches and people coming off that. It's a bit like a pandemic.

Ellie Buttrose:

A lot of your projects, as you say, are quite specific to your lived experience and Australia's history of invasion and occupation. What do you think the international audiences will take from this? I know you've sort of touched on but maybe could expand a little more.

Archie Moore:

To gain a better understanding of Aboriginal experience. I'm not sure what people in Europe know about Aboriginal people or Aboriginal art so much other than desert paintings or something like that. I think to show something that's more contemporary art, visual art style. Something they might not expect or they might know as Aboriginal art. Just to share my own experiences and truth telling about how I navigate this place called Australia.

Ellie Buttrose:

You draw on your own personal experience, but I guess there's so many things that happen to us in day-to-day life. How do you come to choose specific things about yourself or about your lived experience to become part of works?

Archie Moore:

There's things I feel strongly about. A lot of my practice has to do with memory and memory of place. If I'm asked to do a show somewhere, I'll do a bit of research on the site, see what's happened there, see if it's a sorry place or something like that, and that might be part of the work. It might not lead to anything, but it's important for me to look at the memory of the place.

My work is a lot about my memories of where I grew up, which wasn't a great experience. Living in a small town, being what I thought was one Aboriginal family of the town until I found another Aboriginal family on the fringes of the other side of the town near the dump. What I remember, what I don't remember that I've been told has happened to me, maybe false memories, they're all a part of a lot of my exhibitions.

Memory of place is a very universal thing. Again, conflicts and bad things happen everywhere. It's also a cathartic process. I feel a need to say these things, but I might not say them so directly, but trying to speak to people. I'm not really trying to make people feel sad or whatever. I'm just saying things that have happened and how I interpreted them.

Ellie Buttrose:

I think that's one of the great successes of your practice is that they aren't moral lectures, but there's also a great aesthetic quality that you always bring.

I think we're now going to open to some questions, but I guess what I'd like to say is that the word that comes up a lot when people talk about your practice is your generosity. Your generosity of baring yourself, your family history, but also Australia's history. I think what's interesting about this project is that we, the public, have to also bear the responsibility of that. Hopefully we can do you justice.

Does anyone have any questions for Archie?

Tim Stackpool:

You said you researched your family history too. Did you uncover anything that connected your family to colonisation?

Archie Moore:

Oh, yeah. My grandparents were pursued by the protector of Aborigines and police across borders back and forth from town to town. They weren't allowed to associate with other Aboriginal people and they had to seek permission from the protector of Aborigines to marry. It was like those kind of documents I found.

Tim Stackpool:

Sovereignty is a theme that runs through your work. Will we see that continue in Venice?

Archie Moore:

Yeah, it will because one component will be...

Ellie Buttrose:

We're not to talk about much

Archie Moore:

Yeah, we don't want to give anything away.

Ellie Buttrose:

Yes, it'll be part of the project.

Speaker 4:

Is the project have a name, the work itself?

Ellie Buttrose:

Not yet.

Tim Stackpool:

Generally, Archie, who inspires you?

Archie Moore:

Just other Aboriginal artists and activists, writers, and thinkers. I watch a lot of film. I kind of look at other media, other forms of artwork as well. That informs my practice a bit. Just literature, novels, and just history. Anyone writing about history.

Tim Stackpool:

There are a number of people assisting you on the project, an architect, a writer, a legal specialist as well. Do you ever second guess yourself questioning what they might be thinking during the process?

Archie Moore:

No, I haven't had that experience. I think we're on the same page.

Tim Stackpool:

Going back to making a submission to the Australia Council, did you find the process laborious or perhaps interfering with your creative process at the time?

Archie Moore:

No, it didn't get in the way. It was a very quick process because it's like last... I think we had a week before the deadline because I was going to wait till the next opportunity, but I met someone who said I should go right now, so I just hit the road running.

Tim Stackpool:

Ellie, how did you come to work together for the submission?

Ellie Buttrose:

As I mentioned, we've known each other for quite a number of years. Archie and I had just worked together on a project at the Queensland Art Gallery. I felt like it was timely for Archie to be in the Pavilion, and so there's only one way to do that. You've got to put in an application.

Tim Stackpool:

Did Archie take much convincing?

Ellie Buttrose:

Well, we had that initial conversation about should we wait until the next time.

Archie Moore:

I didn't think I had enough time to work it out, but Ellie did most of the work.

Ellie Buttrose:

For that part. Now it's on you.

Tim Stackpool:

Given that, do you now feel you are under a certain level of pressure to deliver?

Archie Moore:

Oh, yeah. I've got two years.

Tim Stackpool:

Archie, about Richard Bell famously floating his pavilion down the river in chains. Is he a mate of yours and do you expect a certain amount of good-natured ribbing from him?

Archie Moore:

I'm pretty sure I will, yeah. I know Richard. Not extremely well, but he's a fellow contemporary artist in Brisbane, but he's usually jet-setting around the world somewhere.

Ellie Buttrose:

I think he'll be very correct. Richard is always a big supporter of local talent, and I'm sure this will be no different.

Tim Stackpool:

In general, do you work alone or do you call on others to assist with your work?

Archie Moore:

Usually alone pretty much, but sometimes I have an idea and someone else makes the work for me. Like something I couldn't do like spraying automated paint on a panel or something.

Tim Stackpool:

You are now representing Australia on the world stage. Does that change your perspective when it comes to the nature and the extent of the work?

Ellie Buttrose:

I think we're being presented rather than representing Australia, I would say.

Archie Moore:

I'm won't let you down.

Ellie Buttrose:

I think that's what's nice about Archie's practice is that he never assumes that he's representing other people. It's very much about the representations of the self and how that can be extrapolated to talk about larger issues.

Archie Moore:

Yeah, that's good.

Tim Stackpool:

Are there artists that you are particularly a fan of?

Archie Moore:

Well, yeah. I'm a big fan of all the Aboriginal artists in Brisbane, like Richard and Vernon and Megan Cope and Judy Watson. There's so many from Brisbane I'm kind of in close contact with. But, yeah, anyone saying anything interesting in interesting ways and political stuff-like, too.

Tim Stackpool:

How about internationally?

Archie Moore:

I don't know. I guess I'm kind of influenced by Gregor Schneider, who was that 2001 Venice Biennale. I really enjoyed that. I don't really follow artists so much as probably you might think I do.

Tim Stackpool:

I know you can't really talk about the specifics of what we can expect to see in Venice next year, but would it be fair to say that we'll see a multidisciplinary work?

Ellie Buttrose:

All will be revealed.

Tim Stackpool:

Will it be a new work or a collection of your pre-existing work as well?

Ellie Buttrose:

I think we can say it's new work.

Tim Stackpool:

Artist Archie Moore there with curator Ellie Buttrose talking about their outlook for the Australian installation at the 2024 Venice Biennale. After that chat, I caught up with Ellie Buttrose for a bit more of a curator's perspective, and I asked whether she had first considered collaborating with any other artists for the submission to the Australia Council.

Ellie Buttrose:

Things come at you at different ways, and it's not that I didn't consider other people, but Archie's was the person I wanted to work with at this moment.

Tim Stackpool:

It's quite the responsibility. Are you aware of any challenges that you may face? Not necessarily dealing with the bureaucracy you have to work with, but also dealing with the artist?

Ellie Buttrose:

I've known Archie for 15 years. We've already worked together, and I've attended a lot of his projects. I've gone and spent a lot of time talking to him about them, so I'm pretty well versed. I think I always go into projects understanding what that dynamic is, and as long as we are really upfront about what it is, then it's generally a pretty smooth way of working.

Tim Stackpool:

When you put in the proposal, you never really know if it's going to come your way or not. You have other plans for the upcoming 18 months. How are you going to manage all of that?

Ellie Buttrose:

Yeah, I am very lucky that the Queensland Art Gallery is supporting me in doing this project and helping me navigate that workload. I do have a project coming up in September at the Queensland Art Gallery, but also the Queensland Art Gallery will be the first Australian place where the pavilion will tour to, so they're right behind it. I mean, Archie is a Queensland artist, of course. It's the perfect thing for us to be doing.