

Art of Covid Chat – Podcast Series
Episode 1A – Gen Rudd and Marian Savill
June 2021

David Johnson: Hello, my name is David Johnson, and welcome to the Art of Covid Chat. We're talking with artists who work in the Fens region about the work and the challenges they face during the pandemic of 2020/21.

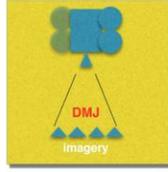
We're now actually, as we're recording, we're actually at the anniversary of the first lockdown. So it's surprising how much has changed in the last 12 months.

Today we have two artists, one from the March area and one from Great Yarmouth area. So please welcome Marian Savill and Genevieve Rudd. Thank you for joining us today. Today's artists have a background in mixed media art. So just like you to introduce yourself to Marian, would you like to say a bit about yourself?

Marian Savill: Hello, everyone. Yeah, I'm Marian. I'm based in March in Fenland, and I am a mixed media artist, which covers all sorts of areas, really. And I predominantly work with recycled materials in most of my work.

I always have loads of projects on the go. I just flit between all sorts of different things, which is just how I work really. Currently, though, I'm in the middle of something called the Hundred Day Project, which is a global project that encourages artists and creatives to do something every day for 100 days. And I'm currently doing #100DaysOfDoodads, which is a bit mad, but that's my very personal hashtag, they tell you to have a creative original hashtag. Basically, I'm just making sort of touchstones, amulets, that was the thinking behind it - most of them hang, so they're sort of dingly-dangly things, really. That was a really bad explanation of it! But I am in the middle of that current project. Yeah, but alongside lots of other stuff as well. Currently obsessed with concertina sketchbooks. I do a lot of work in those as well.

An inspiration? Probably the artist that's had the most influence on my approach, my ethos, and how I just how I create really is Joseph Cornell, who is an American assemblage and collage artist. I've always loved his work and I find his, just his process all so fascinating and inspiring. Outside of him, I have - oh, just everything is inspiring I have loads of inspirations, really. The nature of the materials I use is always inspiring,



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you know, figuring out ways to use recycled stuff creatively and give it a use when it might have ended up in landfill or whatever. So the nature of the materials is quite inspiring. But yeah, nature, texture, pattern, colour - it could be anything, could be a word or a line in a song or. Yeah, lots of inspiration.

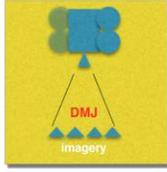
DJ: OK, over to you, Genevieve. Tell us a bit about yourself.

Genevieve Rudd: Yes. So my name is Genevieve Rudd and I'm an artist based in Great Yarmouth, which is on the Norfolk Coast. I feel very lucky to be able to work as an artist in my home town. I think my relationship with the town, I think influences my work because I predominantly work as a community participatory artist. So the work that I do is a lot about the relationship that I have with groups and with people.

I do have my own arts practice that I explore on my own as well. So my training was in art photography and I tend to use cameraless techniques such as anotype or Cyanotype, and I like to combine that with maybe going on a walk and finding materials, using plants or growing plants in my garden to then use in my arts practice. Sometimes I combine it with things like textiles and um, yeah, like Marian said, inspired by colour and texture and nature and lots of different things, I think.

There's lots of things that influence my practice. I like to work outside, so I'm speaking today from the room that I call my 'workspace' because I don't really call it my studio, although it probably technically is – it's the back bedroom in my house. But actually I'd say that my garden is probably more of my studio because that's where I spend more time making art. So, you know, I can kind of get messy out there and make prints with mud and plants and all of that!

And in terms of the kind of people that inspire my practice, I work a lot with people who wouldn't necessarily identify themselves as artists. And I find that really refreshing, really inspiring to see, kind of, alternative approaches. And when people can kind of build their confidence, you know, when they wouldn't define themselves as artists, that



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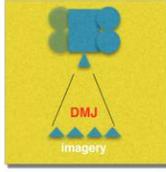
can be really fantastic and really eye-opening and, you know, really great to kind of be around. Yeah, lots of creative people and lots of different ways.

DJ: And your inspirations?

GR: Yeah, erm... In terms of a kind of favourite artist, if that's what you're thinking, David? I would find it really, really, really hard to choose. I think I'm so kind of eclectic that I would find it really hard to kind of pinpoint on one person. I'm just like a kind of a, you know, a bit of a sponge for whatever. You know, I like listen to the radio, and I like the telly, and I like to take in things that are just around me in life, and I think, you know, that can be kind of just as inspiring as stuff in a gallery or museum.

DJ: Yeah. I mean, you're talking about influences, just a quote that I saw earlier, and it was “Every child is an artist, the problem is how to remain an artist when one grows up.” It's Pablo Picasso. And it's quite, it's very apt. I personally was quite artistic as a child, grew up and moved away from the field of art into a military lifestyle which sort of beats the art out of you. You know, you have to be focussed and you do everything by numbers and you don't have a chance to think. Having left that world and come back to the arts field, it's trying to teach myself back how to be an artist and how to be a child again, and how to - to free think and explore things. And it's been quite a challenge. Is that something that you've struggled to keep?

GR: I mean, I've always felt, um, I think growing up as an only child was kind of left to just kind of get on with whatever I wanted to do. So I felt quite lucky in that, you know, in that sense, I probably maintained a kind of creative habit, if you like. And I didn't choose to do art at school as a subject because I always felt like, well, I'm doing it at home anyway. You can imagine what I was like as a child. I'm doing it at home anyway, why do I need to come here and do it? [laughs] So for me, I've always just kind of pursued things in my in my own kind of merry way and quite happy to get on with it. But I think it is a confidence, and it is about that kind of routine and habit. And I think, you know, I really appreciate that - because I work with people who, you know, wouldn't call themselves artists, you know, that it does take a lot of guts to kind of step out of your



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comfort zone and kind of make something that's out in the world - that is a really big thing. And, you know, I don't underestimate how much confidence that takes.

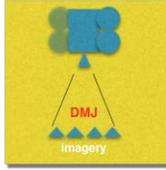
DJ: How about yourself, Marian?

MS: I agree, as well. I think, yeah, I've come across loads of people over the years in my art journaling workshops - well any workshop, really, but it seems to be quite often in art journaling workshops - and the number of stories you hear about, um, I don't know why art journaling appeals to women more than men, to be fair, but it's mostly women, I have had a few chaps, but a lot of women will tell you that they had the creativity knocked out of them at school because they couldn't draw.

DJ: Yeah.

MS: And it's back in the day, I mean, obviously, I'm a lot older than Genevieve, but back in the day to do our O Level, as it was in my day, if you couldn't really draw and paint then you were kind of passed over. So I wasn't an only child, I had a brother, but my older brother, he was the artistic one and I couldn't draw. I would say I'm creative but because I couldn't draw "No, no, no. You can't do that, you've got to go and do academic stuff." And you come across that story so many times. And it's like when people get older and they come along to workshops like art journaling or collage, that sort of thing, they almost need permission. So you need to give them permission to play, you know, and then once they grasp that they're off and away then. But it is, I mean, that's wonderful to see that you that you're instrumental in helping someone start being creative again, not because they want to be an artist, but because it's fun and therapeutic and all of those things that art can be, especially at the moment. But it's quite sad to know that they've spent all those years in the wilderness, as it were, because they had that knocked out of them at school.

DJ: Genevieve, you mentioned Cyanotype and, is it, anthotype? Do you want to explain a little bit about them?

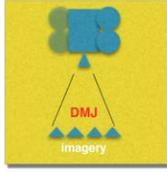


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GR: Yeah. So, um, Cyanotype - people might know architect's blueprints, you know, so that was that was one of the early uses, a kind of common usage of making blueprint, cyanotype photography. And then it was kind of explored in more creative ways. So it's a technique invented by Sir John Herschel in 1842. And it's two iron salts that, when mixed together in water, create a light sensitivity. And I like it because it's quite, um, it can be quite an instantaneous process. So I've been exploring ways that I can make my art practice more environmentally sustainable, so, for example, making little switches. So, for example, never using paper other than recycled paper or recycled cottons, because you can do the process onto fabrics too. Making the solution in collected rainwater rather than tap water, to cut down water usage, and wash imprints in rainwater. So I like that it can be kind of a connection to the, you know, to be a kind of recycled practice and also that it uses direct UV sunlight. So I don't use a sun lamp, I work directly with the sun. So if the sun on that day is really bright, we can get some really bright shadows, really deep Prussian blue colour. And if the sun is quite soft, then the print will take longer and the colour will be softer, and I like that kind of interaction with the weather and the elements.

And also, I can anothotype. So that for me has been growing plants from seed, in the spring and nurturing those plants over the summer, blending up those plants and then straining off that liquid. That liquid is then a light sensitive emulsion that can then go onto to paper and be left out in the sun with pressed flowers, pressed leaves. And then once that print fades, because it does fade, it's not a fixed photographic process, I can then shred it up, compost it and then, hopefully it'll be making a print the next year. And so for me, that kind of photographic technique that really support me to kind of feel more connected to the world around me, the natural world, working outside, interacting with the weather, interacting with the prints and working with plants because I love plants and gardening, that all feels like it kind of encompasses lots of parts of the things that I love, so you know, I love to do it. It builds in lots of my interests, all in one go.

DJ: Is that something you've tried, Marian?



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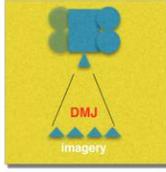
MS: No. I was just saying to Genevieve, when we weren't recording, I'd really like to have a go at Cyanotype. Last year during lockdown, I just decided I was going to do loads of stuff that I've never done before. So I had a really keen interest in eco printing and eco dying, so using plants, you know, leaves, flowers, bark, grasses, all sorts of stuff to sort of eco print or dye. And I was making my own inks and stuff like that, which I too, am trying to sort of make my practice more environmentally friendly. I'm vegan, I've been vegan nearly four years now, and I want to make my practice more in line with my vegan values and beliefs. So yes, I was really enjoying the eco dying and print. It's that whole - like Genevieve said - it's that whole being in the outdoors. And, you know, I was able to, most of what I used, I used from our garden. But fortunately for us, we live right next door to a nature reserve and a cycle path, so they've got lots of lovely trees. I was able to collect oak leaf, some sorts of other stuff that's not in our garden as well. So it was a real kind of local, green, lovely part of new practice for me to have a go at. And I have I have actually bought some cyanotype chemicals but I haven't used them yet. They are vegan, and they're non-toxic as well, aren't they, cyanotype chemicals?

GR: Yes, so photography, a lot of traditional photography techniques are traditionally very toxic, and you'd have to be very careful about how you're disposing it, and Cyanotype is kind of one of the better ones. It's an iron salt, so it's more like an element and you can dispose of it safer. And then anthotype is kind of like the top premium, kind of definitely, just using plants and the most environmentally sustainable. So yeah. I think they're a good couple of techniques to have a play with.

MS: Do you have stuff round your garden, like me, Genevieve?
I've got, I've got a jar rusty stuff –

GR: Yes, yes!

MS: Because I when I was doing eco dying I was using vinegar and rusty iron water and all sorts of different things and there's little pots all round the garden of things. And my husband's like, "do we need this?" Yes, yes, we do need that, it's important! [laughs] But if he had his way he'd chuck it all away, I think! Yeah, and I love that whole -



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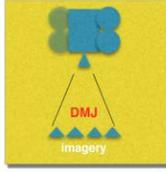
GR: Constant experiments on the go! [laughs]

MS: Yeah. I love that whole sort of evolution as well. You never know what you're going to get as a print when it comes out of the pan, out of the dye bath and then you don't know how it might evolve in sunlight or - I love, I love work that changes and evolves and you know, it's exciting.

GR: Yeah, I agree. And I think that I think for me that gives me creative confidence to then share, when I'm working with people, because you're kind of making, always making creative risks. You never know where it's going to go. And I think for me, I find that quite nurturing because it's kind of, you know, you're in a kind of safe environment where you can take risks and I think that can build your confidence and boost you outside of that when you're doing your art, and I think it has a real ripple effect, to kind of, really embrace the unknown, embrace the kind of seasonality of things. You know, things might decay, things might go wrong and that's all fine, and you can practice that in your art. And then I think it kind of ripples out into your life, I think, a little bit.

MS: Yeah, I agree. I think part of my obsession with concertina sketchbooks currently is that whole... it's always been about the process for me. I almost like the process more than I like trying to turn that into final pieces of work sort of stuff. But with a concertina sketchbook, for example, last year in lockdown, during August I did, I think it was an eighty page concertina sketchbook, double-sided, and I just decided it was going to be August, and I would throw into it whatever I do, whatever I played with, whatever I'd tried out. And it's just - it's really freeing and nurturing. You're right, it is nurturing. And you've got - now I look back on it, I've got that whole month's narrative, really, you know, in a sort of compact thing. [laughs]

It's just, yeah - but playing, it's very similar to my ethos with art journaling. When I teach art journaling, workshops and stuff, I always say there's no rules. You can't do it wrong, there's no rights and wrongs. There's no rules. You can use what you like, do what you



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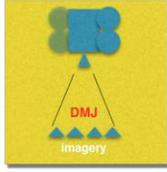
like, you know, because it's that creative freedom that I want to give to people, that they couldn't grow and nurture themselves and, you know, be creative and just, yeah - play.

DJ: How do you find, since the lockdown, accessing recycled materials? If you've not got what you need within your house, have you struggled to actually get hold of materials?

MS: One of the many things I'm doing currently, at the back end of the summer last year, I decided that for September I was going to not buy any new art materials and I've carried that on, I haven't bought any art materials since the beginning of September last year because I have so much stuff already, in my studio and around my house. And I cast my mind back to early lockdown when we did the series of art journal videos for CPP MarketPlace. They were really keen - and I, also, was really keen – that we made it accessible to the people that didn't have, you know, they might not have paint, they might not have particular pens, or posh watercolour pencils, or anything like that. So we worked really hard to make sure that anyone could access the art. And if you had a newspaper or magazine or, the kids crayons out of the toy box, you know, to make it that much more accessible. So I haven't had any problems at all because I'm trying really hard also - as part of my environmental greening of my practice - to use what I've got. And yeah, I've got a lot of stuff, but I think, you know, even if you're just starting out on a creative route, you've got food colouring in the kitchen, you can go in the garden and get leaves to pound on your page and make colour that way. And I really think you can go a long way with homemade, using what you've got around you. I've made glue over this year because I've run out of glue sticks now, which aren't very nice, environmentally speaking because they're all plastic, obviously –

DJ: Yeah.

MS: So yeah, I've been making my own glue, trying different recipes and stuff! So I haven't had trouble. I don't know whether you have, Genevieve, finding materials, have you?



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GR: No, I mean it's probably the same as you, Marian. I think it's just the stuff that you've already got, all the stuff that's in your kitchen and your garden, that you find on a walk. There's been no shortage of junk mail coming through the door –

MS: Yes!

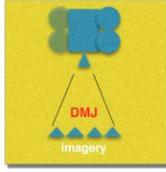
GR: Despite the circumstance we're in, so there's this constant supply of paper just sort of coming through the door! You know, I guess, you're probably the same with your workshops, Marian, kind of supporting people to have the confidence to see what they already have around them that they might not see as art materials, but could be used for creative application.

MS: Mmm, yeah.

GR: And I think I'm the same, I have, um, yeah... trying to not just buy stuff because I think ooh, that's nice. I actually think, well, do I need it? Is it just another bit of plastic? Is it going to come through the door wrapped in plastic? Actually, could I be a bit more imaginative and use what I've already got, or change the use of something? And I think that that can feel more fun actually, that can be a bit more, um, experimentation.

MS: It does make you be more inventive, doesn't it? And innovative. Well, if I haven't got any of this anymore, what can I do to make it? Or use something else instead of it? I love that whole making do and mend, almost, really coming up with a solution to a material you haven't got. I'm sure it wouldn't work for fine artists that are painting in oils and stuff! [laughs] For my kind of work, it works really well, it makes it really accessible.

DJ: We're just talking about recycling over the years. Have you noticed a difference in the type of materials that are then classed as recycled has changed over the years, that you can then start introducing towards your pieces of art?



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MS: There's materials I don't use now that I used to use, because I know more about their sort of make up. In the early days of my assemblage work, which I don't do as much of now, but I did a whole series of hanging, outdoor hanging pieces made from videotape and they went down a storm. They were really popular. They looked great. And I thought, I'm doing a great job, here. Look, I'm recycling this videotape, but I hadn't really factored in that videotape degrades over time. So I was busy - some videotape has a metallic and it has a sort of metal that will flake off, once it starts degrading -

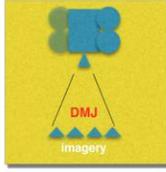
DJ: Yeah, it's like an iron oxide, isn't it?

MS: Yeah. And then, of course, bits of videotape would come off and get hooked in the trees, so fretting about birds and animals that might potentially get caught up in it. So there's stuff - I would never use videotape outside now. I do still use it, not very often now, but I tend to stretch it and use it as a twine, as a sort of string, rather than use it in its form. So in that way, I think, I do think more carefully about the sort of things that I would use in the environment, because I wouldn't, you know, I don't want to add anything to the environment that doesn't want to be there, really. So in that sense, it's changed. I don't know that in terms of different materials, I suppose there's an awful lot of plastic going on now, and I try and avoid that. But, you know, single use plastic is a massive problem, as I'm sure you both know. So I don't use masses of plastic, but I don't know, that's a tough one. Tough question really!

DJ: Yeah. I mean, you've also got the shift towards, in a perfect world when everyone recycles or no waste is produced in, say, 2050, when we're supposed to go all carbon neutral. Is there a potential that there would be no by-products produced anyway and you would then have mixed media arts would then be resorting to finding other forms?

MS: [laughs] I think I've got enough stuff to keep me going to 2050 anyway!
[All laugh]

GR: Yeah, I think I, I don't like for example, in the past I might have been maybe commissioned to do a recycled art project, you know, bring a plastic bottle, upcycle it



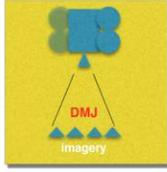
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into something, and I think in terms of the kind of changes that I've been making in my own life, that probably wouldn't sit very well with me now. I probably would decline because I think, well, actually, I don't want to - that feels like a reason to buy plastic bottles, to use them for something, to turn them into - stick stuff on them that that means that they can't be recycled so it can create a problem. And I think that there's - that sometimes that kind of recycled art can sometimes, you know. I've kind of been reflecting and developing my own practices, you know, really kind of looking in and seeing, well, reviewing what I do, because it doesn't always sit right. You know, maybe what would have been done a few years ago would have thought had been a good thing, you know, let's use old crisp packets, let's use the - actually I think we need to move away from that. So as an artist, I try not to go in that direction and think, well, like I said about the kind of junk mail coming through the door, well, that's paper. I don't really have much choice of the free newspaper coming through the door, so let's use that. Or, you know, what's already sitting in my garden, what's growing in my garden, or anyone else's garden, or in the park, or places like that and trying to use things that once you've made your art product with them, you could potentially compost them because recycling is sometimes not a very - um, positive system, because lots of our things that we put in our recycle bin then end up in maybe incarcerated, burnt, or, you know, it's not always the best solution, I think, to the problem. And I don't want to I don't want to input into that so I'm trying to reflect and improve the way I work with materials, I think.

MS: I did a project in a school, it was a collaborative thing with another artist, and he brought along all sorts of plastic bottles and just all sorts of materials that were brilliant for the project. I mean, it was it was all around the UN global goals, you know, sustainable goals. And they chose the ocean one particularly and did a piece of theatre based around that, but also just the whole thing of what happens to this stuff after, because the bottles have been painted and stuff, so they can't go in the recycling -

GR: Yes!

MS: And so they'll end up in landfill. So we've spent time sort of creating this project, and then you've created another beast, haven't you really?



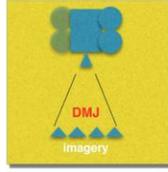
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GR: Exactly. Yeah, I know.

MS: Recycling isn't the answer, it's buying less stuff and having less single use plastic in the world is the answer. Recycling is good to a point because it's already in the world. But like you say, people going out and buying bottles of Coke and stuff so they could use the bottles for a kids project that they know ultimately is going to end up in landfill...not good.

GR: Yeah. And I've found, and I don't know if it's the same with you, Marian, if you're vegan, and I eat as many vegan meals as I can in the week, and I have to say I do eat chocolate and sometimes have an egg, so I'm not vegan. But I've been vegetarian since I was since I was a teenager. And I found that the changes are reflections that I've made my personal life, you know, they kind of flow into my arts practice and then when I'm think about that, kind of flows into my life, as this kind of, you know, all kind of flows. It flows into each other. And then when you're working with people, you're reflecting and sharing and your lifestyle evolves around these thoughts that we're making through our creative practice. That's something that I've found.

MS: Definitely. It can be a bit of a minefield, can't it, if you when you want to be more environmentally aware, more conscious of what you're putting out into the world and what you're doing in your sort of everyday practices, and then it becomes that much harder. You know, when you look at art materials, pens, pencils, paints, a lot of them aren't vegan, they'll be tested on animals, or they've got animal products in them, and it's a complete minefield. If you've got a conscience – [laughs] – it can be really problematic to, you know. I mean, I want my practice to be vegan but I mean, currently, it isn't because I'm still using up stuff that is either got animal products in or has been tested on animals. But I can't waste it because that's another issue. So I'll be using up materials that I've got. If I know they're not vegan, I would then not buy them. And it's the same with if I know something's not environmentally green or it's got a lot of chemicals in it or, you know, is toxic in any way. It is an absolute minefield. But I'm kind of glad I'm in it because, you know, in my own tiny little way I'm making a difference.



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GR: Yeah, I think so. I think it's about, you know, you've got to have kind of good, thoughtful intentions that you're being kind of mindful and alert and you're tuning into what is happening in the world. And, I think, no individual could make that big change and suddenly make their arts practice, you know, fully green just on their own, because we're all in this system together. But I think it is, the good intention of being reflective and reviewing what you what you do, I think is as good as anything else.

MS: Yeah, absolutely.

[♪ MUSIC]

DJ: This is the end of part one of the interview. Join us for the next podcast for the conclusion.

Thank you for joining me, David Johnson, and my guests today. The Art of Covid Chat podcast is a DMJ Imagery Production working with Fenland Film Initiative and commissioned by MarketPlace: a Creative People and Places project celebrating creative communities across Fenland and West Suffolk. Developed by Arts Council England and supported by National Lottery funding. For more details visit cppmarketplace.co.uk

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