INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST – SERIES 7 EPISODE 9 (DEC 2025)

FIRED INTO BEING: The Enduring Legacy of Alan Peascod
ATEMPORAL - The Animated Vessel: Avital Sheffer

In conversation with curator Professor Pedram Khosronejad
and gallery director Dr Jane Kreis

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: Curator

Tim Stackpool: Pedram, it's great to have you on the podcast again.
Prof Pedram Khosronejad: Oh, hi Tim. Thank you so much for having me

Tim Stackpool: You're always welcome. Now, Alan Peascod is described as one of Australia's most influential ceramicists.

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: Yeah.

Tim Stackpool: What made his practice so groundbreaking do you think, within Australian ceramics?

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: Well, Alan Peascod, belonged to a generation that I feel they are peers of Australian Ceramists and Potters. Alan as maybe, you know, passed in 2007, he was someone like Alchemist of the glaze and glazing. Was very inspired by Middle Eastern and Islamic Ceramic especially. Glazing. He traveled first to Egypt by being influenced by Egyptian archeologists and a professor here in Australia. He then travelled with him to Egypt. And so, you know, really that's when his eyes became open to the gaze and beauty of Islamic art. Then he visited Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and went deeply to the story and the meaning of Islamic art. And not only stay on the surface of aesthetic and the beauty, but culture. Ceramic and pottery are not only applied art and objects and mostly they contain, some sacred meanings.

So Alan also had a special interest to the topic like mysticism, sufism, and sacredness of Islamic art, especially where calligraphy is mixed with the body of ceramics and pottery. And this is why I think, I believe the way, he practiced his work or this school of pottery and ceramics that he created is quite separate and probably not unknown to new generation of those who practice.

However, those who were with him in the same period know him very well, but also he was a very good teacher and professor. So, but. You know, he passed very, you know, um, in his early ages and didn't have a major survey exhibition as what have at the Grafton Regional gallery.

Tim Stackpool: You talked about him being influenced by the Middle East. When we look at the works in the gallery, how obvious is that to us as, as people that perhaps don't know his history?

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: The way that in this exhibition, I try to create his works is a survey exhibition. Of course. Always the text will help, labels and signage and what we provide for visitors will help. But this big body of his works I'm sure people, they don't know about it. Other non-Western cultures can understand that these type of works are different, because not everyone, could be specialised or be familiar even with Islamic art or Islamic ceramics and pottery. But I can confirm that there are significant number of objects in the exhibition that visitors can learn more about this background of him.

Tim Stackpool: Now his retrospective that you put together here, it does span, as you say, like the early dry glaze experiments and the richly layered works that he did later in his practice. Do you think a lot of people who are visiting the gallery are gonna learn more about his creative evolution by you actually putting these different aspects, the different chronology of his work together?

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: The exhibition is not curated based on chronology of his career.

Tim Stackpool: Right.

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: It’s a survey exhibition is because that is mostly art history, right? Exhibition and, you know, I'm, I always say I'm, anthropologist curator with the background of art history.

Tim Stackpool: Of course, of course.

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: I need to go a little bit back when I actually was introduced to a works of Alan, which was not direct. As you remember, I came to Australia from US in 2019 and I began to work as a curator Persian Arts at Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. So my role there was to run exhibitions based on the very rich collection of Powerhouse Museum, which around half a million objects.

And it was there that I did a deep research to see what exists there. And it was for the first time in the collections of Powerhouse Museum that I became familiar with talented artists that they are not from Middle East or Islamic world, but they had special interest of the art, including Alan Peascod, Avital Sheffer, John Brack, and others, you know, Jack Cadre. And this the first time in the collection, I did see those very beautiful jars and ceramics attracting my gaze. And when I, when look at them closer, I could say, well, there are some traces of Persian, Calligraphy and art and glazing in those.

And then when I, on the catalogue, I searched name of Alan Peascod, and then I searched a little bit to see who he was. And then I reached out to the family, and it was the beginning of the connection. So back to your question. Object itself could tell me, because I'm trained, my gaze is trained to find those objects.

And it was very interesting to know that. In the same time, in the collection, I also found similar, not the same, but again, it was interesting for me to find other series of ceramics and potteries is very, very deeply connected to Middle East and that part of world, not Islamic, but very Middle Eastern or Oriental, elements.

And that was, you know, the work of Avital Sheffer

Tim Stackpool: Yes. Right.

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: Another contemporary, magnificent international, well-known artist who's living actually in Northern Rivers, closer to our gallery. So it was the beginning of the road for me to look at the similarity and differences, and I had no chance to meet Avital Sheffer until I began my job here at the Grafton Regional Gallery in 2024.

And it was very interesting for me to hear from Avital Sheffer that she was really interested in the works of Alan Peascod, but never met, you know, him in person to talk to him, but always wanted to work with him. So that occasion, I was thinking, okay, so maybe we can have an exhibition dialogue between two artists, one eminent who passed, but many years passed his love to discover the secrets of Islamic glazing and work. Alan travelled also to Europe and Italy and learned about different techniques that,

you know, in European ceramics also they use and created his own palette of making ceramics.. But also Avital Sheffer is very interesting, you know, she's immigrant from the Middle East came to Australia and settled down and her entire work is how she can present her cultural background through her works, the Heritage Motherland Motifs. So a combination of these works brought us to this idea to have this exhibition here. And as you know, we have in Grafton Regional Gallery, an arts residency and opportunity for artists to come here and develop their research projects for creating an exhibition in 2024.

We invited Avital Sheffer to come and be one of our artists in residence. And in this occasion, I provided to Avital Sheffer research, visual research, notebooks of Alan. Alan has around 50 magnificent unseen, visual notebooks that wherever he went, he had one of them with him, all of the notes, writings, sketches.

So we provided those visual material, also several sample works of Alan and charts, archeological charts that he collected in the Middle East that shows he was really in the middle of investigation to find through those ancient early Islamic period piece of ceramics and potteries to find what they are and how they made them.

So based on the work residency here, Avital also created 30 new, ceramics magnificently based on communication with the material of Alan. So these two exhibitions are in dialogue with each other. And the beautiful thing is when Avital has her own space of exhibition, Alan has his own space for survey exhibition.

We dedicated one special gallery when we mixed their work together. As a research visual lab that visitor can understand that influence or inspiration how these two artists from that part of work through the work. We can learn “okay, what's the process of making.”

Tim Stackpool: But not just that Pedram, it's more, I, I'm kind of getting the feeling here, you've got Alan's work influenced by ancient techniques, and then you have Avital's work, influenced by the work of Alan, which you know, had been influenced by ancient techniques. Is there anything, In Avital's work, which kind of unpacks Alan's work? I mean, the two never had a direct dialogue with each other and the influence is really in only one direction.

But do you see anything in Avital's work, which unpacks something that Alan created, which is unique in itself, which almost indicates that perhaps, you know, you could imagine that Alan had a dialogue with Avital, although it never really existed?. Does something new come out of all of this?

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: This is very good question. I think the right person to answer that is Avital. But of course, as a curator, I had several it's three years we are working together on this exhibition.

Tim Stackpool: Yes. What, what, what's your perspective on it?

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: Avital, as she's stated nicely in her artist statement for the exhibition, she was influenced by thinking, looking at Alan. But as inspiration, not as repeating the technique or shape of object.

So, for artists, inspirations have different levels. So, and I think, you know, because for many years Avital knew Alan's work. I as a curator, when I look at this new thirty objects by Avital, I can say yes, I can see the trace, which is embedded in concept, colour and maybe a little bit of structure of the works, but is entirely different artwork created by another artist.

But the beauty is that we can see the Middle Eastern culture, intangible heritage that is embedded in both artists. You know, Avital, I put her in the category of migrant artists that they are in far from home, they try to preserve and promote their own culture, heritage, folklore and social history and background, and most importantly, for majority of migrant artists, identity. Who I am today in Australia? Alan's view was mostly go, as you said, deeply go to the techniques. The mystery of probably Islamic glazing and techniques of production.

Also, this is my personal interpretation of Alan's story. You know, Alan was born in United Kingdom. And in childhood he had some health issues and the doctors advised the family, you know, his father is one of the most famous British painters that his works are in NGA. But you know, in young age they advise that they bring Alan to Australia because weather is better.

So since childhood, for several years, he should stay in bed. And just, I was told, he was with his pad and pencil began to drawing. So he was engaged with thinking, solitude and watching, looking, researching, and I think that character of researching solitude, being alone even he was amazing teacher, very social.

When I look at his trajectory in life, I think when for the first time he went to Egypt, he was inspired by Sufism and mysticism in Islamic world, and the healing that those rituals of Sufism and Islamic mysticism could bring to him. And heal maybe his past and childhood. And looking at his objects, repeating and using his own way.

Those sacred calligraphies on his object, I think this is more Alan, who make things personal to himself, used those sacredness somehow. Talismanic way of motives, images. And the glazing altogether made something very personal. But again, this is only one corner. These series of objects.

Alan was and remains, I think, multifaceted, contemporary artist. He, as I said, had many, many visits to Europe, especially Italy, and created beautiful pottery and jars based on Italian and style. And something which is quite not very known, are Alan's sculptures. He made amazing figurines, human figures, but with humour because he was quite somewhat critical to the society and people and how cruel humanity is.

So in this series of sculptures, human figures of him, they're all porcelain, beautifully made, rarely seen.

Tim Stackpool: Yeah. Can I ask you a practical question? Pedram, the source of Alan's work that you have in the exhibition.

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: Well, as I said at the beginning when I began my work at the Powerhouse Museum, so I did research who acquired those objects, including Avital Sheffer's works for the Powerhouse because it was interesting for me in an Australian museum, which is Museum of Applied Art, Science and Technology, why these works are there. And I understood a very good colleague now,

Professor Paul Donnelly, who's “Vice President” at Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney acquired them. So, Paul is archeologist of the Islamic World, mostly Egypt, and he, for the first time, acquired those works of Alan, and Avital for the collection of Powerhouse. And then through some colleagues, I was introduced to Alan Peascod Estate.

So it was the beginning, in 2022, that I began to talk to his family. They invited me to their estate to look personally, the collection and step by step we decided to develop the idea of an exhibition. So it took around three years. If you want to know.

I should here say thank you to Ellen, and the family of Alan, who really worked well on digitisation project of the collection and delivery of objects to here, to the Grafton Gallery. So all of the material are coming from Alan Peascod Estate. It's very rich. We didn't need to loan from any other museum or galleries around Australia or in Europe.

And we have more than a hundred objects in this exhibition. Only for Alan Peascod.

Tim Stackpool: Wow. And Avital's work. Are we seeing the work that she developed during the residency or, or more than that?

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: The beginning of work was always as a curatorial artist. Discussion and brainstorming. I visited her studio first.

We had several chats and then, I proposed the idea of the artist residency when I had the green light of Alan's estate to do that. So it was very important time, you know, for the first time, Alan Peascod Estate shared unpublished, unseen material of Alan Peascod with a contemporary artist, you know, and it was very nice time that we had here with Avital. We looked at the archeological objects collected by Alan from Middle East and Islamic world together. She was alone to read notebooks, make her own notes, whatsoever she wanted to do, and then she backed to her studio in Mullumbimby and began to work on the creation of these 30 amazing new works. In between I visited few times her studio and we discussed things and the result is the exhibition that you'll see.

Tim Stackpool:

So the, the exhibition we see is actually a work of art in itself. Pedram, if I can put it that way, because it is born out of the experience you had with the Powerhouse Museum coming across these works. Speaking to Paul Donnelly, then actually putting two and two together, having Avital come in and do a residency, when you started with Grafton Regional Gallery, and this is like a culmination of, of these months and years of, thinking about how such an exhibition could come together. Do you think it would only take a curator with an anthropological type of brain who would've pulled a show like this together, such as yourself?

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: Not only anthropological, you know, as always, you and I, we had several collaboration together through you know, inside the Gallery podcast. I'm always saying that I'm grateful to the Powerhouse Museum and the colleagues, especially the CEO, who allowed me to work really three years deeply in the collection.

And this is true that it's, you need, you need to be a good researcher. Multifaceted multidisciplinary visual arts researcher. I believe I'm one of those because I'm visual anthropologist with degrees in art history. I work a lot on, you know, different collection and museums all around the world. But the first thing, we should say thank you to Paul Donnelley with the sharp understanding of the importance of this contemporary artist. Paul acquired these objects for the Powerhouse collection.

And this brings us to the importance of museum collections. And then someone like me goes there and find the objects. But yes, you need to be curious. You need to have some deep engagement beyond the formality of your work or hours of working. Okay, this is time I go home. No, I love my job. Let's be clear.

I love where I'm coming from. I'm from Middle East too. I'm a specialist of Islamic art too. And when I see, this is what I say. Every time that I think you and I, we talk, I'm grateful to Australia because, Australia remains one of the only countries that, since I think the beginning of history of immigration, hosted many immigrants from all around the world, including Middle East. And those who also came here, from Middle East State influenced local, non-Middle Eastern. You know, Australians as example? John Brack. If you see the series of women that he painted, they're all sitting on the Persian carpets. In the paintings. He never visited Iran. Or Jack Cadre, first Iranian Jewish immigrant to Australia, who is the father and founder of the great Cadre's Carpet in Australia and et cetera, and et cetera.

But all of this works sitting in the collection of Powerhouse Museum, so a multidisciplinary brain that teamed with all of these things that I said. Need to, you know, go there and find the objects and be lucky. I'm grateful that, you know, Alan Peascod Estate accepted me. I'm sure many others contacted them and the answer was different.

I, I'm, yes, I'm grateful. To Avital Sheffer accepted me. So, because what's the beginning of all of these projects? The work of, you know, engagement with community, engagement with the artists. And the first word is “trust”. So I'm grateful to many, many colleagues, friends, families that helped me elsewhere, the organisation where I was working and I'm working to achieve and arrive here to have these two great exhibitions together.

And you are right. You know, many things should help and, of course, as a curator I'm very proud, but you know, visitors should tell us what they think and what they feel. But I think it was one of the great projects that, with the help of colleagues here, I should say “thank you”. At Grafton Regional Gallery, we are delivering together.

The projects always is teamwork. As I say, I always say, if it's great, is it teamwork. If something is wrong, I'm personally responsible Tim. And I should add that, you know, we are very lucky to have our new director, Dr. Jane Kreis,

Tim Stackpool: We'll speak to her shortly.

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: Yes, because her vision is very global and bring amazing things that happened with this exhibition. And we are very, very, you know, happy because now our exhibition program is

booked until the end of. 2027 so, we are real lucky with the new director and her strategy will deliver amazing projects in the Clarence Valley.

Tim Stackpool: Alright, so before we get the chance to speak to Jane, just let me ask you, Pedram, as, as common folk and a lot of what we've talked about now is kind of academic in a way, but we're gonna walk into this gallery and see the work, this ceramic work by these two different artists. One who was very much influenced by the other, but not in the other direction.

What do you hope we might take away? We see the work made by artists who are very much influenced by the Middle East, but produce the work here in Australia.

What do you hope is the message that you give to people who come and see this exhibition?

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: Very good question. Tim, I have several answers for that. The main thing is, especially in Australia, I think still there is a big gap between those that we categorise them as a craft people and the other contemporary artists.

Alan Peascod, his generation are always labeled as “you're craft people”. You are not artists and their exhibition remained, you know, published in craft magazines, craft catalogues, not in contemporary galleries of same periods. And I think Alan, he's one of the rare crafts or ceramists or potters of his generation that passed that line and jumped into being a contemporary artist.

But the lack of a good art critic or curatorial, like today, he remained where he was for the public. So, coming to this exhibition, my hope is that the new generation of artists, especially those that working on craft, understand the importance of what they are doing, but also understand this is not a limit.

This is a genius thing that you are doing, but you are visual, contemporary artist. And this is a good example to look at Alan Peascod survey exhibition because there is cultural work, there are applied, you know, potteries, jars and many other things. Avital exhibition also, I think what is in 21st Century Australia, the question of identity for immigrant artists.

How we can say who we are, who we were, and who we want to be. Here again, artist is using a technique which, you know, labelled as a craft potter, ceramic. But we, we see that the identity of art is embedded. From intangible to tangible material, shape of works, colour of works, motives and images used, that creates everything.

So when you come to Avital's, you see, oh, something is different even if you are not familiar with Jewish culture, because this is where she's coming from. And as a curator, I’m always inspired, you know, I'm somehow curator of immigrant art. Immigrant, you know? Artists. When you come in, you can just feel in the space that the colour is different.

Shape is unusually different, and immediately you ask yourself what it is. However, when you go to the galleries, the first you have is a very beautiful setting, you go through Avital's exhibition and then you go to Alan Peascod exhibition and there's some materiality of a space that connect these two exhibitions together.

Paint on walls, simple decoration, and plinths and tables and shelves. The decoration is the same, is like, is one space, two artists. Then when you walk through and come back, especially in the gallery that I said, we mix their work together, you understand there's a connectivity somehow between West and the Middle East, and this is the beauty of art.

That the art material culture is a vessel of the transfers of intangible culture and heritage. I think this is what I wanted as a curator to achieve in this exhibition. Let's not judge and be transparent and just go through the gaze of beauty, of material culture created, by different people.

Tim Stackpool: That's a lovely note to finish on. I really appreciate your time talking about this exhibition at the Grafton Regional Gallery. We are gonna speak to the director of the gallery shortly, but I thank you for your time.

Prof Pedram Khosronejad: Thank you so much, Tim, and I hope the visitors and those who are listening us come to this beautiful exhibition and enjoy it.

Dr Jane Kreis: Gallery Director.

Tim Stackpool: Jane, thank you very much for joining us on the podcast. Great to have you.

Dr Jane Kreis: Oh, it's a delight to be here. Thank you

Tim Stackpool: Now, as we just heard from Pedram, the Grafton Regional Gallery, it's presenting two significant ceramic exhibitions at the same time. From your perspective as a director, and I know you're kind of new in the job, what does it mean you think, for the gallery to host a pairing of these two and of such depth at this time?

Dr Jane Kreis: That's a really interesting question. There is a lot of talk about blockbuster exhibitions and when you're your organisation is coming from a local government perspective, the focus on visitor numbers and that blockbuster type of mentality or the community engagement can be quite strong, and that's really valuable.

There's no denying that that can draw in large crowds. But what I think about this exhibition is that it is equally large, but in a quieter and more considered way. The Peascod exhibition alone has 120 works, but it's not the number of the works that are significant really. It is, as you say, the scale, the depth, and I think the time behind it.

Some of the latest writings of Alan's work are from 2008 2010. We are looking at 15 years ago and the depth of this retrospective. And of Avital's exhibition alongside of that is really profound. And I think we are lucky as a facility to be physically able to exhibit these exhibitions.

And I think at the same time it's the sense of antiquity. Both exhibitions really reflect contemporary Australian ceramics, but both through their master of the fire and the form which are recognised in the exhibition titles, they're able really to transcend time and cultures and boundaries.

And I think that all of us in our lives understand the ability of ceramic objects to transport us. They hold memories of loved ones, of hands holding objects, or where they've sat in homes or in our memories. They have shape, they have texture, they are vessels which contain sometimes, and I think what both Alan and Avital's exhibitions do is create a conversation with the viewer about that.

It's this conversation which exists across space and time and cultures. And it's a moment for us or for the viewer, the visitor, to slow down and consider the past and the present. And I, I think too, that with so much going on that asks us to consider technology and our place in technology and our environment and our economic security, these exhibitions are balm really. And a lesson to us that craftsmanship and our ability as humans, and in this case as artists, is to learn and respond to each other and to create something that is beautiful and useful and intrinsically human. And for me, that is very significant offering from our gallery.

Tim Stackpool: Yeah. That, that's the connection you hope to make with those who are visiting the, the relevance, first of all, and also being able to connect with the craft and the labor which is involved in the works. Do you think that connection has been achieved with your exhibition?

Dr Jane Kreis: I do, I know firsthand from speaking with people in our community from other ceramicists and potters, that there is a deep desire to witness and experience these works, and not only to come in and experience it as a whole, but it offers that ability to connect with them, with the works individually, to revisit and to reconsider, and to be up close to these works.

Tim Stackpool: Alongside Alan's work is Avital's work as well, and it engages in a contemporary conversation about Alan's legacy. So, what do you find meaningful about placing these two exhibitions together in dialogue, if you like?

Dr Jane Kreis: It's not just me that finds that meaning. I know that Avital has found the residency in which she was able to work with Peascod's journals and drawings. She found a really deep sense of connection and ability. To have that conversation with Alan through that access. I mean, I found the same sense of wonder in being able to explore his journals, his conceptualisation, his scientific formulas, the drawings, the designs within those, the touch of the paper, their captivating, and to see that then transcend into the actual artworks themselves that are exhibited is really exciting. And I think having Avital's, Atemporal there it uses her own experience to speak to that and to the connection that both artists share, because of course there is a connection not just across the mediums that they work with, but through the cultural experience and the techniques that they are sharing and using. So I think what is really fabulous is what are visitors to that exhibition going to be experiencing between the two. And I think the way that the exhibition has been curated will really bring that to the fore.

Tim Stackpool: Yeah. Both artists draw from a Middle Eastern history, correct? But how do you see the regional audiences engaging with that? Perhaps you know, the, the broader cultural narratives, if you like.

Dr Jane Kreis: I think regional audiences are part of a broader cultural narrative. We all come from somewhere and we know what it's like to have to be self-sufficient as a community and how important our connection to country and to heritage and how important our connection is to others. So I think some of, in fact some of our most natural connections as regional galleries or as regional institutions, I see this often in our exhibitions, are with artists and cultures outside of Australia. Sometimes those connections from region to region are stronger than regional to metropolitan in a way.

But even so within the northern rivers and within the mid north coast, we have a really strong cohort of professional ceramicists, and I know that they are very eager to be part of this experience. So, you know, for some of our community, this will be new work for them. For some it will be a wonderful way to experience Alan Peascod's legacy and to see it in conversation with Avital's work.

And for others they're not gonna be viewing it through that lens. They're going to be coming in and seeing. New forms and new shapes and seeing ceramic work done in ways that they may never have experienced before. Of course, some of our community, they may have never experienced a ceramics exhibition before, or if they have it will look completely different.

This is an exhibition at a really high level. I think, to have Avital’s work in conversation with it. At the same time, also at the same time, we have the Australian Design Centre 60 exhibition.

So it's a summer of ceramics, that's for sure. So I think for people coming into this exhibition space, I do think they'll be blown away by the complexity and the craftsmanship and the creative spirit, which Peascod always speaks to, but some of them, that that's a journey that they're used to taking.

I have spoken with many people over the last week as I walk the streets of Grafton or my community, and I've had several people say to me, and they are not artists, but they do come to the gallery regularly, how much they're looking forward to seeing this exhibition. Because they're excited by it.

They're excited by the work, and they do follow that type of work. So I think as a regional community, like any community, we are gonna have a mixed bag of experiences. But I like to think that we're a community that is really. Open and engaged with these types of exhibitions.

Tim Stackpool: Yes. And you certainly want reaction, don't you?

Dr Jane Kreis: You do. Yes. Yeah, you do.

Tim Stackpool: If you could just indulge me because Pedram and I have a relationship that goes back many years to when he was curator at the Powerhouse and he talked about his experience there a little bit earlier in this podcast. Do you think that perhaps the perspective of him as a curator with his background actually influenced not only this exhibition coming into being, but also how it was shaped. Would it have been different perhaps if you had a curator that wasn't from such a multicultural background, I guess is the question I'm getting at?

Dr Jane Kreis: Absolutely. Because firstly, that's the curator's role is to bring their own experience and their own lens to an exhibition. Absolutely. But it's also because through his experiences as a curator, he has those connections, with those artists and he's able to draw on that from not just a professional level, but from a cultural level. It is telling a very unique. Story through both of those artists' works, but it, it is that curatorial lens that enhances it.

Tim Stackpool: I've got the opportunity having you here in this podcast to talk a little bit about you because you are new. If I could put it that way to the gallery.

You've only been the director for a few months, right?

Dr Jane Kreis: Yeah.

Tim Stackpool: What, what drew you to take on this, this position at Grafton Regional Gallery?

Dr Jane Kreis: When I first came to Grafton, because I've worked in arts and culture. Across all of my career. The first places that I go when I come to a new community are those places where I feel at home.

So they are the galleries, they are the cultural centres, so when I came to Grafton, the gallery was the first place that I came. I was made to feel very welcome here. I have worked as a contractor, as a consultant, and on committees with this gallery for 11 years now, but I've been working with Regional Arts New South Wales Theatre Network, New South Wales more recently with City of Coffs Harbour.

For me, it's an opportunity to come home and have all of those parts of my experience and all those things that I love, come home and be dedicated regionally. It really does feel like a bit of a homecoming. I live not far from the gallery. It's a three minute walk for me to go home. So for me, it feels very natural.

Tim Stackpool: You alluded to it: more than 30 years, working across theatre festivals, research, regional arts organisations. I've listed here, you're bringing all of that experience into shaping the gallery's strategic direction. Is it a lot of work?

Is there any sense of being overwhelmed with what you have to achieve over the next 12 months?

Dr Jane Kreis: No, I don't think so. We're busy. I'm busy. There's no denying it. And I wouldn't be happy in a role if there wasn't a challenge, but I know that we've got a really good team. I know that we have fabulous connections with wonderful artists, and I know that for a lot of those artists who are coming in, they value their time here.

We have an artist residency. Quite a few of our artists, if they're not local artists will come and spend time here and I'm always fascinated to read their reports or to speak with them about their experiences here. It's always very positive and I think that's something that, again, when we are talking about time and space.

It's so valuable. It's so valuable to the creative process. It's so valuable to us as human beings, and I think we don't get enough of it. And to have that is. Not just an opportunity, it's a gift. So if we are able to give that gift to artists, if we're able to give that gift of exchange from which our community benefits culturally, and we all benefit from as human beings, then.

I can be as busy as you like and I don't care because I'm gonna be getting joy from that. So yes, I'm busy, but if you haven't been to our gallery, you might not know what a pleasure it is to be busy here. I have spent my day in our Prentice house, which dates from 1880. We've got a large paved courtyard with its big sentinel rain tree.

We've got decks and gardens in our cafe, and as I mentioned, our, our artist cottage. We've got studios and a sculpture garden. I mean, it's a beautiful buzz. So to actually have a cultural community in this space, using this space to be able to have conversations, and for me, those conversations are really the vision, and I think to think about it in a different way. I work in a highly collaborative way. So for me, it's important to sit and question and listen and then consider where the gallery's energies are best placed. And I think our energies are really well placed and we've got a really strong curatorial vision. We've got a really strong community and cultural vision, and we have great partnerships and a real human connection and a connection to country, and if we are working within that context, that's a really positive context to be working from. I mean, I have had to make some important decisions because of the nature of the industry at the moment.

We do have to pay our way and we do need to be professional and we have to respond reactively to opportunities and funding challenges, but our strength is in our facilities and our beautiful facilities and

our really, clever, considerate staff. And by the way, we work in partnership and focus on high quality art and experience.

And I think , my vision for this place, I suppose, is that it generates conversations, and I don't care if that's an internal reflection or consideration or if it's coffee conversations or if it's formal cultural and artistic exchange.

For me, that brings joy and strength and place and purpose. So yeah, we're busy, but it's good busy.

Tim Stackpool: And, and it's helping position Grafton Regional Gallery within the broader landscape of Australian regional arts and cultural institutions. More and more I see how regional galleries are presenting, you talked about blockbuster exhibitions, , earlier in this conversation. It's, it's quite amazing the work that regional galleries are turning out in this respect and having, the curatorial weight behind them.

Dr Jane Kreis: Yeah. That, that is definitely true. And I think as with everything, Things ebb and flow across our sector.

And when you have certain people in certain roles in certain places, when you have facilities and artists who base themselves in certain areas, it's personal and professional connection that enable us. To grow and thrive and to create connection and opportunities. So for regional galleries, if we, now, since 2021 as a gallery, we now have a space that is able to have these exhibitions.

That in itself was groundbreaking. So in 2021 for our community to decide that they wanted to invest in a building. That would be able to have these types of exhibitions. They made that decision. So they, that's an act of self-determination, which I think is very, very important. And then it's looking to the staff and the team that they employ and to making sure that that staff, that team, those curators, the director, the people that are working on the ground in the gallery are interconnected and working at their peak professional level. And I think that's what we are seeing is, a strong upswing in professionalisation, across regional galleries. But that has been occurring just as Australia and our metropolitan counterparts have also been seeing that upswing. The way we work now is not the way we work 20 years ago.

And the level, the types of exhibitions and the way we curate those, the way we tell those, those stories with our audiences, with our communities, that's really changing too. But I, I think it's also offering some really fabulous opportunities for artists and for retrospectives and for that reinforcement of valuing our Australian artists and, and the incredible amount of craftsmanship that's there.

And this, this exhibition really reinforces that and enhances that.

Tim Stackpool: That's a lovely perspective, Jane, and I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with us on the podcast. All the very best. It's a great exhibition and I'm sure it will be very well, received by anyone who comes to take a look at it.

And good luck with everything coming up over the next 12 months. You have a wonderful gallery there and as you say, a great team and uh, and I'm sure you'll have a great time,

Dr Jane Kreis: I'm sure we will too. And I hope that you will too when you come.