

Horizon Radio: Climate Transcript

Hello and welcome to Horizon Radio. Horizon is a new international performing arts showcase at the Edinburgh festivals. Horizon Radio is a chance to delve deeper into the practice of the showcase artists and get to know them better.

What you are about to hear is artist Aidan Moesby in conversation with Horizon Consortium member Kate Yedigaroff, exploring the impact of climate change on his work.

We hope you enjoy listening.

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Kate: Hello, Aidan.

Aidan: Hiya, Kate

Kate: Nice to see you shall we start by introducing ourselves for our listeners?

Aidan: Ah, yeah, let's do that. So I'm Aidan Moesby. I'm an artist and curator and I'm currently at Anne Hathaway's house in the sunshine.

Kate: I mean I have to say as a location for a conversation of one of the artists in a showcase celebrating performance made in England, it feels like you couldn't really make it up. Just hanging out at Anne Hathaway's house, you know as you do.

Aidan: Yeah seamlessly.

Kate: And I'm Kate Yedigaroff. I'm Co-Director of MAYK. We're producing organisation based in Bristol and one of the Horizon Consortium partners. So thanks for joining me **Aidan** for this conversation, which is based around the theme of climate of change emergency. However, we want to kind of understand that together. And and what we're going to be talking about is you and your work.

Aidan: Yeah

Kate: and to get, yeah, just to to hear where you're at and what you're concerned with and preoccupied in the work that you make across all across all of its forms. I think it's important to sort of say straight away that you're a visual artist, recently a performance maker, that there's lots of different strings to your bow, and that is one of the things that feels very interesting in the context of how you meet your audiences.

Aidan: Well, yeah, I mean, you know here we are, not only Anne Hathaway's house, but it's another day of 35 degrees and it's set to be 35 degrees for another four or five days and you

know, I'm here installing a sculpture which stemmed from a residency at Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust and when Shakespeare was alive the average temperature was minus two, there was the ice fairs and there was an airborne plague. Here we are, we've just in a research residency and it's heading towards plus two, there's an airborne plague and the Earth's on fire. So it's like, you know, there's still trying to, there's still those connections wherever we are you know. I work around climate change and find those connections and highlight it in a contemporary way.

Kate: And can you, say something about when those explorations into climate change first became of feature of your work? Or maybe that's not quite the right question. Maybe that's, that's all that's always been the case. But can you just sort of say a little bit more about how that, how you connect to that?

Aidan: Yes, I think I, so I didn't start off as an artist or performance maker. I started off as an environmentalist and then you know, I was active back in the 80s and as an environmentalist and then I became more interested in people and became a therapist for young people. And then lately, I became too unwell to do that and so making art is a way of bringing all my interests together.

And so it brings my environmental interest and the well-being interests and also about you know, how like now being a being a visual artist and curator and latterly a performance maker. And so it brings those issues together in a way that I mean most of the work that I do is is not to make objects or things for galleries. It's the intent behind me making work is so that it acts as a catalyst to bring people together and hopefully to engaging people in conversations and then to initiate some positive social change. And have those conversations which aren't perhaps had around the subject of like climate change for instance. So like 'Naked Smelling of Rain', the performance which will be in Edinburgh, deals with not only like mental health and climate change, but also deals with like issues of loneliness and connectivity and you know those broader issues, which aren't necessarily talked about or as seen as a consequence of climate change and I'm also interested in like the deep into connectedness. So for example, one of the pieces in that work, I talk about going to the shops and no longer being able to say hello to the cashier because they've been replaced by an automatic teller. And so that has an impact on I don't have that kind of conversation which places me in my location, which is a kind of a regular face-to-face, just a little chat which contributes so much to well-being. But then that information about the shopping needs stored on a data bank, which needs cooled, which contributes the climate change. So it's like, it's impacting my well-being, it's impacting climate change, the person becomes unemployed, it impacts on their well-being and their economic well-being. You know, so it's like things are just, it's yeah, it's feedback loops all the time everywhere we look and yeah, I think in some of those conversations are overlooked because we're too busy focusing on, on hungry polar bears. Which are important but it's like we also need hope.

Kate: Yeah, I was. Great. I was going to ask you to speak about hope a little later in the conversation, but I'm interested in what, what is it, do you think, about the process of your art making or how you do that, that creates a different or a kind of special

kind of space for conversation around around climate and well-being? What do you think the potential...

I sort of want to hear more about what..

What art making does that perhaps other things can't do in terms of bringing those conversations to people?

Aidan: So, what I'm interested in is like, I don't, I don't believe that. I mean, sometimes we need to do direct action. Sometimes we need to say how bad it is, but actually I mean, so currently I'm doing a PhD in curating climate change in well-being. And people become exhausted and feel helpless and overwhelmed when all were told is how bad things are and things aren't going to get any better. And you know that just pushes people towards inaction and that helplessness. Where's really, you know, it's like, you know, like Greta Thunberg says, no one is too small to make a difference and if we all make just a small change, then we can make a massive difference, but I think I recently heard a refugee speaking and said that you know without water I can survive maybe for a dozen days, maybe a little bit more without food I can survive for like 30 days. But without hope I can't survive at all. And that is just like really resonated with me and part of, I mean the background, you know, I talk a lot about emotion and well-being. And so I guess my work explores the like the external physical weather and the internal psycho-emotional weather, you know, and it's that linkage between the two. And I with my work I try to distil as much emotion into as little as possible, into as little as work as possible partly because I don't want that big work, I don't want the big work to have like a massive environmental impact. And so I tried to work on quite a small scale but really, really distil as much emotion and impact in it. And so some of that is about...

It's not telling people what to think. It's not telling people what to feel. It's it might be showing something or presenting something or having a conversation and then maybe three or four later they get an itch that needs scratching and they don't know where it comes from. Rather than the kind of you know eye candy of a spectacle and something big that is like wow, but then maybe forgotten about you know, like in a few hours or the next day. And so it's like it, it's almost like, so I guess my first big work was 'The Periodic Table of Emotions', which was like looking at well-being for a city in Dundee and most wellness indices about cities are have they got jobs and houses and buses and parks. It's not about emotion and I find it very difficult to say how I'm feeling when I don't talk about emotions. So this, so I created a interactive installation with emotions on so that people could say how they're feeling about their city or about an event and then drill down and say well, why are people feeling like this and then if it's because there's not enough trees then maybe we can start a tree planting group and then people feel connected because they're in a group of like a minded people. They're planting trees, they're investing in where they are. And all of that improves people's well-being.

But again, it's like it's without ramming it down people's throats. It's like how can we make a piece about climate change without saying this is about climate change and you know and hungry polar bears. It's trying to present something which is which is different which is thought-provoking which is engaging and something that makes people think and has an emotional impact, too.

Kate: And I think that there's one of the things that is so special about 'Naked Smelling of Rain', I mean, it's a deeply personal piece the piece of storytelling really, isn't it, rooted in autobiography, but also has the generosity to speak beyond you and deal with a lot of these things that you're saying about allowing people the space to consider their own well-being and their own kind of place in the world.

And I wonder what...I think it's true to say, or I might have just made this up, that this is one of the first times that you've used such kind of direct autobiography in your work? Is that true?

Aidan: Yeah, I mean apart from like my very early days when I was just really learning how to be an artist because you know, I didn't go to art school. I had to change careers not out of choice, but out of necessity.

And I didn't you know, yeah, and so and perhaps those early days. I was a bit still trying to make sense of it for myself. But this is the most biographical work that I've produced and also. It deals with a lot of taboo such as loneliness and it's almost it's like I couldn't have written this had I still been in that loneliness and still being in, you know in that position of not only with the loneliness, but the neediness and now I can write it from a much more kind of decentred space, but still pulling on my experience. And I think that adds to kind of like the impact of the piece. The last time I performed 'Naked Smelling of Rain' was in in Plymouth a couple of months ago and after that performance, I got an email from somebody saying that they were the person in the audience who was quietly sobbing and that they'd never felt seen or heard and they'd been talking about loneliness to their friends and nobody understood and now finally they felt that somebody did understand because I was talking about my experience of loneliness and you know, at that time.

And I think when you can impact on that kind, at that level it's like I think you can see that it has an impact on the other things that's addressing, you know sense of community connectivity the interconnectedness and the importance of you know, saying and talking about how we are and how we feel. And how that is. I think it's all you know, within the well-being and the climate change it's like, you know, we just need to see how many young people are being referred with climate anxiety to psychiatry in the mental health services to see that it's real and we need to find a space to have these conversations which are a bit uncomfortable.

Kate: Yeah. And what do you think the impact of 'Naked Smelling of Rain' is on your practice. How is it, or has it changed how you picture the future of your work.

Aidan: Yeah. I mean so 'Naked Smelling of Rain' was, I'm an installation artist. I was an installation artist and a curator at the time and I was making an installation. I'd never done performance before I'd never written a minute piece before, you know,

I had done the adolescent poetry. You know as a lot of people do but I wouldn't inflict that on anybody.

Kate: And now you've been hauled unwillingly into the world of performance.

Aidan: Yeah, and but that's what the work demanded. And it went through several iterations. It was a conversation with a psychiatrist before becoming a solo piece and then you know, I was looking enough to be introduced to Daniel by ARC by Annabel Turpin who helped me kind of, shape and put the writing into into something coherent although I mean obviously, you know, there's a...

So I identify as neurodivergent and so I have a difficulty writing long linear narrative. So it's like so it's almost like a series of vignettes. But so it's written in a way that meets my access needs and how I work and, and I think it ties in with with my...

So it allowed me to kind of focus my practice and now I'm working on a like a proper collaboration with Dan about the Antarctic and about the the climate cost of keeping me well and looking at that, you know, what's the consequences and the climate issues of me taking medication every day and that you know again, it's like issues and it's not anti-pharma. It's or you know, it's just...Yeah, it's just dealing with that everyday reality and you know, it's like we get hooked up on like the conversation around plastic in the oceans and things like that, but I was just thinking as as I was driving that you know, there's some really lovely bits of plastic like Bakerlite you know, which which still exists in a beautiful phones and things like that which were made of it and and it's like, you know, so it's we demonize these things but actually, you know, maybe we can start to have different conversations about them. Yes, you know the conversation...

And the beluga whale has just died in you know, and it's these kind of, there's those conversations which are happening, but I think we need to start to have slightly different ones. And so working on a new multimodal work you know because I liked, so 'Naked Smelling of Rain' exists as a film as an installation and as a performance so it allows people to access the conversation and themes in different ways according to how they feel easier or better to do it.

Kate: We've only got about four minutes left. First, I mean as ever I could talk to you for hours, but we've got four minutes left so I just want to kind of land a different kind of question at you, which is about

As an artist working internationally, can you share some thoughts about how you align international working with a sense of climate responsibility?

Aidan: Yeah, I mean all my work. I'm very aware of...How do you make work around climate change and well-being without making things worse, without impacting on climate change and making, you know making yourself more unwell or contributing, you know?

And so on one hand, I think I can do I can make active choices about what materials which that I use, which formats are work in, how much I travel.

The difference between digital and physical work the how much is recycled. All of that kind of stuff. And then I also think that we've got to live within the parameters of the society in which we live in and I think that you know it it was the oil companies who came up with the idea of the carbon footprint to kind of deflect responsibility onto the individual rather than the oil companies and I think you know, we need to have some kind of much bigger plan about on a government level or Interstate level about you know about the unreal cost of Aviation.

I mean, why should it cost me £170 to get the train from from Bristol to Newcastle when it only costs like £30 or £40 to fly? There's you know, the the system is skewed by finance and economics and capital which also impacts on climate change and well-being. And so I also think that You know. It's important to be part of these conversations and sometimes being present. Yes doing Zooms is great and reducing a carbon cost like that. But sometimes there's nothing can replace being present in a room for some direct impact and to have the conversations which need to to be had and to bring those conversations to people who would not necessarily access them.

So I mean, yeah, I'm that's not to make me sound like a missionary on a hell bent on you know, climate change and well-being mantra, but I think you know I take the responsibility and I make the decision to travel very carefully. It's you know, it's not something that I take lightly and it's not, you know, it's and I factor it into what it is. And there's a mixture between personal responsibility, social responsibility and governmental.

Kate: In your work. I'm kind of struck by how you what you're speaking of there is of just the duality of holding contradictions together, you know, the need for connectedness with the challenges of responsibility to movement and

Aidan: Yeah, absolutely, you know and like whether it's climate refugees or whatever. It's like movement is implicit in that and so and you know, so every level you know, it's like the heat waves. It's so today. It's like, you know, one of the side effects of my medication is that I can't thermo-regulate. So it's like I'm really impacted by heatwaves, but that's not necessarily an impact of climate change that people think about.

You know so it's like it's it reaches into that. Why should people on that medication disproportionately die. It's like it's where's the... That gets us into a whole realm of like climate justice and disability justice which you know, which fringes my work as well.

Kate: And there's a whole other podcast there isn't there?

Aidan: Yes

Kate: Let's make a whole series.

Aidan: Sorry to get heavy at the end there.

Kate: No. No. Not sorry, you shouldn't be sorry. It wasn't heavy. But for now just to say

thank you Aidan for joining me from Anne Hathaway's garden.

Aidan: Thank you, Kate.

Kate: That will remain slightly hilarious. And yeah, see you soon.

Aidan: See you in Edinburgh.

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