

REFRAME CULTIVATING EVERYDAY CREATIVITY CONVERSATIONS

Joanna Pinkiewicz interview transcript

Kerry: Joanna Pinkiewicz is an artist and designer. Joanna hails from Poland, and now lives in Tasmania where she teaches colour theory and interior decoration. In this interview, Joanna shares her creative journey, talks about the influence of colour, and talks about how the pandemic has seen a renewed interest in people wanting to do something creative

So welcome, could you just start with telling us a little bit about yourself, and your creative journey so far?

Joanna: I emigrated with my whole family in 1993. And in 1994, I enrolled in Launceston School of Art. So that happened reasonably quickly after our arrival. And I didn't speak very good English at that times and my first year. During my first year in Ascot, art school, I was still translating my art history essays from polish to English. But I didn't really have any issue with the practice. So, I really threw myself into creative practice pretty much straight after I arrived here. And that really helped me with both the grief that I was feeling after leaving my own country, and also with kind of making new connections. So, it, it was a really beneficial thing for me.

Kerry:

Really interesting to hear, you know, just your experience of coming to a completely different country and how it's just starting in on your own practice really kind of got you grounded and situated in a new location. You now teach colour theory, and colour and interior design at TAFE, colour is really important and integral to your work. Could you tell us just a little bit about how you feel colour affects us in general, some of the things that you might go through and when you're selecting colours.

Joanna: Yes, I do teach colour and colour theory as well as interior decoration on test tape right now and also practice some. I'm a painter and artist. And colour is central to my work, major kind of exploration. But it kind of became central through practice of working as a scenic artist through being trained as a colourist. In a paint company in Sydney, so after I finished my study, I went to Sydney. And the work that I got was creative, so in a way, I had to apply some of the skills that I've learned now, I haven't exactly been producing my own work. But I was learning to apply, you know, colour, texture, creative decision making, through all this creative work that I've got in Sydney. So, and colour theory and colour application was developing and growing through that experience. When I moved back to Launceston, I opened my own paint and wallpaper store, and I ran that store in Launceston for eight years. So, this was the kind of like a practical way of you know, making a living supporting myself as well as still really enjoying this type of work, I provided colour consultancy. So, yes, colour has always been with me, whether it was you know, in a slightly more commercial applied way, or in my own practice.

So, currently, in my art practice, I love reading about colour theory, and I love I keep researching symbology and colour, and a lot of different artists who, who work with it as a main kind of medium of expression. And I kind of developed my own relationship with it. So different types of harmonies or contrasts that are particularly like, that provide kind of certain type of, I don't know, vibration or effect on the viewer. So, this is kind of what I'm after, in my own work. I look to colour to, to communicate a particular kind of expanded state of consciousness. And I use colour mostly for that purpose in hope that I can actually, you know, communicate to the viewers. So, if I feel like the work is talking to me, and I feel a certain type of vibration from the work, either during or after it's been

completed, then it's kind of its passing its test, I like to hang the work around my house and kind of see if it's working or not, and if it's not how I'll take it down, repainted, or you know, do something else. So, it's kind of like an ongoing research practice.

Kerry: You mentioned that there was a particular work that you had it in the house in different locations to sort of see how people responded to it.

Joanna: That's quite a strong work. So, it doesn't work in every room, and I found that it probably is the best in a bedroom. It's, it's got a little bit of, you know, strength to it and slightly, the colours are very bright and really strong. The form is also very symbolic. And goes back to different cultures and history like the diamond shape and it's related to creation and beginning and things like that. So, it kind of got like a really good vibe in the bedroom. So, when people you know, enter my bedroom, they feel you know, quite taken by the colours and, and the form and he also changes observing it changing with the daylight in the morning, different colours kind of appear first. So, it's kind of meditative watching it on and when it kind of goes dark at dusk, you know, certain colours kind of almost disappear and become black. Very Quickly, like the reds, for example. And like the ultramarine is very bright actually in the morning. And then it kind of becomes a little bit muted by the other colours in the painting. So, this kind of, you know, different lighting conditions and placing of the work, I'm really kind of interested in that.

Kerry: One of the things I think that's really interesting is that there's, you know, there's lots of theories around how colour makes us feel. And some of that's culturally specific, you know, obviously, in Chinese culture or Western culture, we have different feelings on things. But just on that, is there anything obviously you've worked with at colour a lot, both as an interior decorator as a teacher and as an artist, observing, you know, a sense people entering the frame of your work. Any particular things you've noticed about certain colours and how they make might make us feel?

Joanna: Oh, absolutely, yes. So, one of my colours that I'm really exploring right now, there's few but ultramarine and the yellow, by our recall, personally, a yellow being my, one of my earliest favourite colours, and kind of almost strongly associated with childhood and that's not terribly uncommon, that's, that's quite common to for a lot of children to be attracted to yellow, it's bright and happy and etc. But it's symbolically also related to intelligence and development and growth. So, it's got a lot of beautiful, kind of, yeah, kind of sensory, and yeah, a lot of beautiful symbology. So, you cannot be not affected by yellow. Every time I work with yellow, I feel elevated, there is an elevation in mood, and I think alertness of the mind as well. And whenever I did put yellow in my work, I did produce some printed textiles in the past with a really bright, but lemony citrusy yellow. It did have that really happy, elevated response in people. So yes, and prior to this kind of really vibrant and work that I'm doing now, I was doing almost the opposite in the past, working with rust and indigo kind of reduced colours, on texture, working on the things of grief and destruction. And that also had you know, emotional response as well which was very different, which was more contemplative and kind of more quieter work. So, I have noticed that response in others, and I do not as how using different colours. It also affects me and my own mood and my own kind of mind.

Kerry: We are quite, I guess, in our day to day lives, probably, you know, reasonably oblivious in a sense to the colours that surround us but at the same time, we could be being affected.

Joanna: The colour effects and interiors are probably a little bit different because you did say that, you know, we, we do have a lot of visual input these days, you know, so not, not everyone wants to have bright colours in interiors all the time, because we do have the screens and we have a lot of visual material. And sometimes, particularly with interiors, it's about subtlety. So, it's about modifying the chroma, the intensity, the value of the colour, sometimes it's about quieting the space

not elevating the space. So, yes, different needs Different people have different needs, and different spaces suit different things.

Kerry: I'd love to hear a little bit more about the work that you're preparing now, which is very much focused around your explorations in colour for the upcoming exhibition, *The Spirit of Abstraction*.

Joanna: So, at the beginning of the year, I after researching colour for quite a long time, I began to work in oils moving from watercolour to oils. And I developed kind of like these few basic concepts that I wanted to explore visually and kind of attach colours and forms to the concepts. And I created a bit of a brief for an exhibition as well when applied for a space at the Salamanca Art Centre. And it's been approved, which is fantastic to be held in January to build to a body of work and present kind of growth, a swirl of these ideas, you know, moving from the initial kind of concepts and work on paper to actually building and developing larger works on canvas. So, the four initial ideas that I started with, were concepts for intelligence, space lozenge, so that was my form that also had a colour. But the lozenge also had a meaning of like creation, beginning of sorts. Intelligence creation and infinity, infinity was the fourth. So, these are the some of the concepts that interested me in terms of consciousness, maybe some of the spiritual kind of practices to literature that I have been reading, I was looking at symbology of like the old European, woman centred goddess cultures as well as more contemporary kind of work of you know, theosophists and yoga practices and things like that and clairvoyant vision or vision with through meditation and things like that. So, I kind of attached forms to these four concepts and basically started exploring them through composition for these artworks and I'm hoping to produce, you know, 20 to 30, paintings, something like that with some supportive work some paper, so it's kind of progressing pretty well. I've got few my bigger pieces now, which are exploring the ideas a little bit more. So, the intelligence, the symbol for the intelligence, for example, use a yellow circle. And like the symbol, the sun, the bright light, and the kind of clearest form of intelligence that we know the source of life in light. And I'm kind of exploring that in different compositions, and also the growth of intelligence. So, exploring the whole gamut of yellows. So, the deema type of intelligence, the basic intelligence, maybe, and the growth and aspiration to, to kind of higher form of intelligence. So yeah, so that's how one idea can, for example, develop and become part of compositions where maybe some of those symbols meet together.

Kerry:

That sounds like a very powerful body of work that you're developing. Over the pandemic, there has been time to contemplate perhaps in different ways, you know, we've had opportunities to potentially do different things forced or, you know, most of it because of circumstance. But I just be interested to hear whether or not, there has there been anything in your art practice or process, things that you're doing, that you feel it could be particularly a response perhaps to the times that we're living in

Joanna: I'm, oh, definitely after the initial panic, there was a bit of a sense of actually consolidation for me. There was a sense of, okay, I've got this space and I've got this time. And what do I really want to do right now? And it actually helped me to feel more disciplined. And in my practice and regulating my practice. So, to me, it actually was beneficial. Even though because I did start to even deliver colour classes online, once we went into lockdown, it was actually pretty much right in the colour theory unit that I was delivering. So, it was interesting. So, then I set up my studio, so I could record short videos for my students. And I was, you know, delivering, usually like teaching colour theory in a classroom hands on with paints and colour mixing. And I do believe in teaching by doing so, because I'm also not only visual, but kinaesthetic learner, myself. So, I do think probably a lot of

people might be saying, particularly being a Tas TAF you know, being in that practical kind of environment where you're actually learning through your practice, I do see a lot of value in that. So, I was thrown for the first time, in a situation where it couldn't be with students that couldn't actually watch them couldn't see their hands couldn't see how they're reacting to what they are doing. And so that was a little bit challenging. But overall, yeah, it was quite good. Because students began sharing their own work and that you know, videoing their own work and asking questions, so they had to begin using certain language related to colour because I couldn't see it. So, they had to describe it and maybe someone sometimes the video the photography wasn't the best. So, I had to use a lot of this new terminology related to colour to be able to, to explain to them why something is maybe not the right combination of hues or not the right proportions when they were mixing and what to do about it and how to fix it. So, it was interesting and a really good practice in communicating and using the colour terminology.

Kerry: Last year, particularly around the first lockdown, there was some really sort of quite inspirational things that people started to do. Really fun projects, like getting dressed up as your favourite piece of artwork, you know, and posting it on social media. You know, this sense of creativity and you know, wanting to share a creative experience, even if we couldn't be together, I think was something really lovely that did come out particularly of last year. What are some of your experiences around this space of creativity and wellbeing?

Joanna: I think it's been really important to people particularly during their lockdown and pandemic times where people were at homes and, and, and kind of thought about how to use their time as well, and how to kind of centre themselves really, and to do something different with they you know, space and also, yeah, I think put their mind into something different than what they were kind of hearing on the news and maybe. So, for that purpose, even at TAFE, we did offer short courses. And these were really popular. So, I did run two colour courses, and they were excellent. So, I could say that there is that renewed interest in people wanting to do something creative and wanting to connect, even though they're in that space where they can't. So that was really interesting. I think it's kind of fundamental to who we are, even if we're not consciously aware to have something that is our way from our responsibilities away from our work. Something that gives us joy, something that we can feel present or grounded, or we are exploring still that we can grow with.

So, whatever that practice is, I do find in my course, that colour is one of the easiest ways to make students feel at ease, comfortable and actually enjoy the work. So, if they are interested in interior design, or even in design, in general, they will more likely like to work with colour. Even if they haven't done it before, when they start actually working, it's quite meditative. It's quite satisfying, the results are satisfying. So that's an easy way to kind of gain some skills and then progress with you know, extra other skills if you are interested in either fine arts or design colour skills are excellent for that. Apart from colour, you can then go into drawing for example, but drawing can be a little bit harder. Some people think I can draw are never going to be creative. So, it can be a little bit frightening for people, colour is a little bit easier, because you can start just mixing blending colours, learning about them learning about the relationships in a very abstract kind of way. And then started slowly build skills to apply them. And then drawing can kind of be built upon that kind of confidence. There are quite a lot of tools that you can apply to encourage people into to begin fascination with a creative practice and they do you need to experience that he does give them that the practice will give them, give them something back and benefit them. So, I've mentioned that make it make the first learning tasks rewarding, very important and yes, doing encouraging people.

In my practice, when I teach, it's mostly women who often come back from you know, having children running a household, maybe holding a part time job. So, as you said, not a lot of time, not a lot of time for themselves. So, creating as a teacher, I find the most one of the most important

things. And it's not something that is even maybe taught that that's a skill, but it's just that experience is to create a space, create a space where people want to come to. So, and that is physical and also psychological. So, the challenge of moving it online is, again, the psychological space, you need to as a teacher, reasonably quickly connect with people and give them feedback on each progression and things like that. So that way, they will more likely stay in engage with the progress and feel a benefit of creative work. For some people, it would take, you know, quite a bit of that encouragement, it's not a very natural thing for them. It's quite a maybe even a scary thing to step into that space, because they never felt good enough. They've been criticized before they really feel competition or feedback, etc. You know, so criticism, the so learning certain type of vocabulary, that is constructive feedback that is not a personal feedback base about the work. It's about the work. It's always about the way of what the work is, and it can be and how can be improved and what's good about it already.

So, these are the kind of like, you know, teacher tools. But I think I'll be the same if I start learning something that I don't know, I would like a teacher that would make me feel comfortable in learning those skills, whether it could be I don't know, let's say furniture making, I probably wouldn't have an idea of where to start using different tools using different techniques. So, I would need a patient teacher.

Kerry: Thank you so much it has a really wonderful conversation, really delightful to chat and hear all your experience on colour, your work, on your teaching. Thank you for giving so generously of your time.