**Q: Hello, and welcome back. Welcome to episode 4 of Why This, a Nexus Arts podcast. As always, I’m Aaron Schuppan. I’m the Media Manager here at Nexus Arts, an intercultural arts organisation in Adelaide, South Australia. A great part of my job here is that I get to speak with artists of all different backgrounds; visual artists, musicians, performers, you name it, and this podcast is a way for me to extend those conversations and share them with you, the listener. In previous episodes, I’ve spoken with Nelya Valamanesh an emerging writer here in South Australia, Bec Taylor who is a camera assistant in the film industry, and Lazaro Numa, a musician and trumpet player from Cuba. So if you enjoy episode 4, I encourage you to go back and give the first three episodes a listen. Why this, is a question I ask myself all the time, as someone who works in the arts. All the career paths, why did I choose this one. Today’s guest is Chira Grasby and she has some fantastic answers to that question for you. Chira is a tattoo artist. She’s a visual artist and she’s also a curator. She brings other artists together for group shows, and we had a really great conversation touching on every aspect of what she does in her practice and the philosophy that keeps her going. I first met Chira earlier this year when I interviewed her for a group show that she held at Nexus called Time and Trace and I found her very articulate, very interesting and I couldn’t wait to get her back on the show. I hope you enjoy my conversation with Chira Grasby. Thank you so much for coming in to talk yesterday.**

P1: Thank you so much for having me.

**Q: So you do a whole bunch of stuff. So can you take us through what you do with yourself?**

P1: Yes. So I’m Chira, but I think a lot of Adelaide would know me more as Poko Ono which is my work pseudonym. So for the past five and a half, six years, I’ve been doing tattooing here, traditional hand poke tattooing, but sort of feeling my, I would say “extra time outside of that” which some exhibiting of my own visual arts work and curating other artists’ work and just trying to make sure that I guess I don’t get holed up in just one creative outlet, so.

**Q: Is having multiple areas an important thing for you?**

P1: I think so. I think even when you look at people who work in just visual arts itself, working in even one medium can sometimes get yourself in a rut or feel a bit too repetitive or a bit too much. So, for me, I get to feel like every single thing I’m doing on a weekly basis keeps my own creativity on a flow and keeps me happy.

**Q: That’s been a pretty common thing with the people I’ve talked to so far is that while they are passionate about a specific area of the arts, within that, they like to have multiple sort of strands of disciplines or something.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: It keeps it fresh, I suppose.**

P1: Absolutely.

**Q: Keeps you learning as well.**

P1: And I think even within our creative industry, we have smaller pockets and it’s nice to experience multiple of those and be connecting with different people rather than thinking that you’re only just in this one spot and you’re not, I guess, connecting with other people outside of that.

**Q: So that’s three areas, and I want to talk about each one. Let’s start with tattooing. I mean, I’m covered in tattoos, the same as you. I’ve always loved them, but I think it sits outside of what people traditionally think of as visual art, but it literally is art that people wear.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Can you talk a bit how you got started in that, what drove you towards it and specifically traditional hand poke tattoos is really interesting?**

P1: Yeah. I mean, when I think back to my high school years, I went through a very strong phase where I was tattooing is going to be my career. But I suppose at that age, not getting tattoos and only really seeing them on other people when I went out to gigs or was I guess hanging up posters of hardcore bands on my walls and looking at the tattoos, I didn’t know how people got into that. And I very much thought it was just American traditional Sailor Jerry flash sheets, because that’s what I was seeing. So I would look up online and go, tattoo course, online tattoo course, can you do it at TAFE, all of these things. And of course, that’s not how the industry works. And I remember speaking to quite a lot of teachers in school about that, as my end goal. And a lot of them didn’t really take it very seriously. As I think, unfortunately, a lot of teachers and educators don’t. And so I changed career path ideas. I thought I’ll do something academic. I’ll do something with physics. Maybe I’ll do engineering. I think maybe I was reaching a bit too far.

**Q: Wow, that is a big swing to the left, isn’t it?**

P1: Yeah. I think it sounded cool to me, but when I got to the nitty gritty of the end of high school, I realised I wasn’t quite actually getting the grades and actually not enjoying it as much as I wanted to. And I had a year level coordinator sit me down as I’m in tears in her office thinking, oh my God, my life is going nowhere. She said, “Well, hang on, why did you abandon the idea of doing arts in general?” And she was right to think that tattooing is within the arts. And she said, “Well, you’re doing well in a subject with arts. Just pursue it. Go to uni and do arts and see what you want to do from there.”

**Q: This was a school counsellor?**

P1: Yeah, in Year 12. So I was 17 at the time. So I still hadn’t gotten any tattoos but that was a huge wake-up call for me going, actually, yeah, things in arts can be legitimate. Why did I scrap it just because a different teacher said not to? So I started my Visual Arts Bachelor Degree and started getting tattoos. Admittedly some at home, me and my friends mucking around, but also some in studio spaces. And at that point, I was still like, oh, but tattooing is still not a viable career, so I’ll just pursue arts industry jobs. And I thought I’ll work in a museum or maybe I’ll work restoring artworks. I think it was this very over-romanticised idea I had of what could be for me. But, ultimately, doing those tattoos with my friends, be it appropriate to do that or not, and getting tattoos made me realise, no, this is still what I want to do and it’s still what I’m feeling passionate about. And I’m ignoring it because I think I have to for maybe society around me or maybe me feeling like I’ve got some career security. But that can be a secure career and it can be something that will make me happy. And I started asking my tattoo artist that I was getting work from, is there more of this, DYI tattooing that I’m doing at home? Because I’m researching it and I’m finding that not only is it where tattooing has begun, where it has come from, from today, but I’m seeing cross-overs of my own cultural background in it. And I want to learn if that’s something I can explore here. Because it’s not really, I guess, an accepted thing in our contemporary culture. But it’s so interesting and it has this rich history. So many tattoo artists kind of laughed a bit about it, because I think a lot of them look down on traditional tattooing, or they did at that point.

**Q: This is a really interesting point. You said, like, five things that I want you to elaborate on.**

P1: I say too much sometimes.

**Q: No, no, no, it’s fantastic. Not now, but I’d love to get back to the – you say the traditional cultural practice of tattooing.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: And how that changed and how that type of tattooing is kind of looked down upon by modern tattooing and just there’s a whole bag of colonialist [00:07:14]**

P1: There’s so much to unpack in that.

**Q: Yeah, there’s a lot there. But just for the listeners at home, can we talk about the difference between the tattooing that everybody is familiar with, with the band, the gun and going to the shop and the guy with the goatee doing the tattoo?**

P1: Yeah, yeah.

**Q: So let’s talk a little bit about this traditional – can you just explain the process of that? How does that work?**

P1: Yeah. It is interesting when you think about even the different cultures that were doing it because – not that I have the exact facts in my brain, but widely speaking, tattooing was existing in multiple cultures around the world at kind of the same time, even when those cultures weren’t interacting. I think it’s this maybe human need to record or almost natural pathway that takes us to body modification as a way to express ourselves. So there were cultures who were sharpening animal bones and using the tips of them dipped in pigments made from plants. There’s pigments made from earth and clay or there was sharpened bamboo stalks. So you’ve got almost a bit of a hollow that holds in those inks that they were making. And I think one that a lot of people are familiar with is the tapping method that I’m sure has a more appropriate name. But places like Indonesia are still very much doing it.

**Q: Yeah, with a really long piece of bamboo or stick.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Sometimes they sort of stand over the subject.**

P1: And they do, like, hammer it in while someone else stretches the skin. So that’s the thing, there’s all these different approaches to it. And I guess a lot of us now you could say do a bit of a lazier version. Because we use the same needles that go into tattoo machines, but we’re manually doing what that machine does. So instead of a little motor pushing a needle in and out of skin multiple times a minute, we’re by hand moving that needle in and out. And it’s certainly more accessible and hygienic than some of those approaches of bone or plant materials. And that’s also why it’s good. But the easiest way I explain it to people sometimes is it’s like automatic and manual cars. You can still drive somewhere, it’s just about what you want to experience when you’re driving there.

**Q: I’ve had both, and it is a different experience, like, as the person getting tattooed.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: It’s just a lot slower for one thing, but the designs are quite different as well. How much does the design of, like, a poke tattoo – they differ a lot from a gun tattoo; how much is that a part of the tools or how much is that just a part of a style that you want to do?**

P1: I think when I unpack that in my mind right now, there are kind of two ways that I even look at the realm of “traditional tattooing”. There’s traditional tattooing which I call hand poke which is what I do, which very much you can emulate a lot of things that a machine does. Maybe not 100% precisely but even here in our city, we’ve got an artist who works and manages to do these kind of greyscale shades or more traditional works, that maybe on first look you’d think has been done with a machine. There’s a huge level of expertise that goes into it. But then there is what I more commonly just refer to as, like, stick and poke tattoo, which I think does have that DIY look of the smaller flash pieces, very minimal, like almost little stickers and things like that.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: I think that does have a huge place as its own niche in tattooing and that is from that stem of, you know, the DIY, maybe underground artist groups, certainly had a big spur in places like the UK. But, yeah, I think these days when you think about hand poke tattooing, there are people who are taking it to that next level of not matching machine work, but definitely getting a lot out of it and exploring.

**Q: Yeah, I think often when people think of the stick and poke tattoo, you think more punk rock.**

P1: Yeah, on someone’s couch.

**Q: And sort of getting your knuckles while you’re having a beer in someone’s backyard, that sort of thing.**

P1: Absolutely, yeah.

**Q: Which I’ve definitely done. Not my knuckles, but - - -**

P1: I think a big classic in Australia, at least South Australia is, like, getting your postcode of your first share house tattooed on you or just kind of getting a bit drunk and saying, “What does someone want to put on me?” And then you just wake up and see what’s happened.

**Q: Yeah, it’s a dangerous thing, drinking with a tattoo gun around.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Well, let’s go back. I like to ask everybody the falling in love moments. You said that a really young age, you were interested in it, but what was the spark?**

P1: I’m not 100% sure. I’m not sure whether my memory just kind of fails me with that portion of my life.

**Q: You mentioned posters of hardcore bands.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: You’re not the first person I’ve talked to here where alternative music culture was a part of their awakening. It certainly was for me. I was a little country boy, and when I first heard a punk song come on the radio, I was like, what is this? And my whole life just went off in this whole left tangent.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Was it the influence of pop culture or sub-cultures - - -**

P1: Probably. Even when I think of my family and my upbringing, my grandpa had a lot of tattoos. So I think it was quite normalised in my family. It wasn’t something that was seen as criminal or dirty. At least not verbalised to me that it was like that. He had a lot of old kind of sailor style tattoos and even some from being in gangs in Melbourne. So then by the time I’m getting into hardcore music maybe Year 8, Year 9, start of high school, I wasn’t going necessarily, whoa, tattoos as a concept, how amazing. But I think I fell in love with the way that they looked versus what I’d been exposed to. Instead of me seeing these old, faded, very tacky tattoos on old skin, I was like, oh my God, look at these sleeves of colour. Look at these people getting, I guess, recordings of their life, they cover their entire body stretching up onto the necks. And I was just thinking about the ways that the human body is just this kind of canvas all these guys on my posters are making use of. And I would literally plaster my wall from floor to ceiling. I’d get on a little step stool and make it all the way up the ceiling. And I think was just not infatuated with the people in them. Half the time I didn’t even know the bands I was putting on my wall. It was the tattoos that I was putting up for display.

**Q: Yeah. Right. I was just thinking about my own bedroom. You got me all nostalgic. Mine was the same.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: I even got onto the ceiling.**

P1: Wow.

**Q: I was tacking stuff on the ceiling. I remember when I moved out, I got the angriest phone call from my dad. He was like, “What have you done to your walls?”**

P1: My dad’s opinion of it, which I wish I paid more attention to, was every time I went to change the layout or hang new things up, he’d say, “Photograph how it looks now.”

**Q: That’s cool.**

P1: “And then photograph it next time.” And I never did because I thought, what a waste of time. I’m getting rid of posters I hate, and putting new ones.

**Q: That would be amazing to have now, wouldn’t it?**

P1: If I had like – imagine the zine I could make; just a full life spectrum of my bedroom walls. That’d be great.

**Q: What a great art exhibition, just big prints of your bedroom [00:14:12]**

P1: If I have a kid one day and they get into posters, I will forcibly take photos.

**Q: So tell us about your practice now. You have your own shop, is that right?**

P1: I run my own studio here, yeah. So that was very much born from, I guess, struggling to find a place that me and a few of my close friends in the industry could feel entirely comfortable. It’s very hard to be, I guess, a marginalised artist, being queer or being a person of colour, and really feeling like you’re in a space that maybe doesn’t carry a lot of stereotyped views or maybe some kind of tokenistic views about those identities. And for a long time, you kind of just sit back and deal with it, because you go, oh, the industry is the way it is. It holds so many old school points of view, and I’ve got a job and I’m earning money, whatever, but you kind of get to a point where you go, actually I don’t really need to deal with that in a work setting. I should be able to feel comfortable and happy.

**Q: If you’re comfortable elaborating on that, it’s up to you, but that’s very interesting. And I’m noticing a lot of studios opening up where people are like, I guess, designing them as a space that suits a community that they are a part of. Is it the world in general or is there something specific about this industry that warrants that change now?**

P1: I think it’s a bit of both, but the largest is the industry itself. I think when you look at for lack of a better word, maybe the hierarchies that exist in some of the studios or studios that are kind of buddies with each other, where maybe all the workers or owners know each other, you see a thing where they just adopt each other’s mentalities. And when you kind of follow that through like a little family tree to who has mentored them and who has mentored that person, it is all those old-school values. It’s this idea that tattooing is very much a man’s job or not really for people to be in when they’re just exploring their arts, creativity. It’s just about supplying people with what they want. It’s about printing off things and giving them. And so it’s very hard to change some of those older opinions. And I think as we see more of those newer spaces opening up, more of those places run by artists themselves or by newer, younger artists, hopefully a generation or two later, we’re going to see an industry that doesn’t have any of those things. And you can kind of look at any studio and go, this will default be a safe space or a diverse space. But, for now, it’s like we almost have to voice that we are that, just so clients can feel safe.

**Q: Sure, yeah. Gosh, it would be a wonderful world where it’s just a given.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: It doesn’t have to be, I guess, the selling point upfront; it just is what it is.**

P1: Yeah. And it’s become a bit of a hot word in the industry, I think, were you see some spaces use it because it’s maybe fashionable to at the moment or a lot of people want to go to diverse or safe space studios. But you then have to sit and critique and go, okay, is that truthful of your space, or are you just saying that? And it’s very hard for clients to navigate; not everyone is stopping to think about all those things.

**Q: Yeah. Gosh, how quickly things just get commodified and sold as a product.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Even just words, terms or the promise of an experience that maybe isn’t fully thought out.**

P1: Exactly.

**Q: Tattooing is just so commonplace now. I think nine out of 10 people I know has got a tattoo. It doesn’t have the same stigma that it used to.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Or am I incorrect in that assumption? You’d be more of an expert on that, I think.**

P1: I wouldn’t say an expert. I think maybe I have some good insight on it. I would say it’s definitely a lot less of an issue for some people. I mean, when clients come in, I often ask them about whether they’ve talked to their family about them getting the tattoo, whether that’s an issue. Whether their workplace is happy for them to have it, because I find it generally quite interesting. Most of the workplaces that are against tattoos seem to be fast food restaurants or supermarkets. And of course, we do get the occasional lawyer or private school teacher who is getting one that they’re just making sure they can hide under clothing. Fair enough that those environments are still holding a bit of prejudice but across the board, most people are just like, yeah, you know what, it’s my body and it’s my autonomy and maybe I am hiding this one from Grandma for the next few years but overall my family knows that I can do what I want. And that’s great to hear, and even my parents have been so supportive with the tattoos that I get. I almost feel sad if there is that one in a 100 people that says, “I’m really scared to tell my parents,” or “I’m getting this one so that my parents never have to see it.” Because they don’t own you as a person. They don’t own your skin. You should be able to do what you want.

**Q: Yeah. I know a lot of guys over the years have said, “I’d really like to get one, but I don’t know what to get or I don’t know what my dad would say.”**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Just get it, just go do it.**

P1: Absolutely. And I’ve had a few clients in who are in their 50s getting their first tattoo because they watched their kids get them. And they’ve gone, oh my God, what if one day I’m sitting in a retirement home, I can’t get tattooed, and I want to know what that was like? Exactly, tick it off while you can. If you hate it, just don’t get anymore. If you love it, cover yourself.

**Q: My dear sweet mum got her first tattoo after all of her sons and she got a big bird on the back of her neck.**

P1: Wow.

**Q: And then she got her entire back blasted.**

P1: Oh my gosh.

**Q: Yeah. And it’s of her own design and no-one ever sees it, but she’s like it’s for me.**

P1: I like that, that’s what everyone should do.

**Q: Let’s move onto the second thing you do. Tell us about your visual arts practice and maybe how it differs from the tattooing and what you explore in that and what it brings to your life?**

P1: Yeah. I mean, I’m very similar to a lot of other visual artists at the moment, that post-2020 I am still feeling a bit cynical about my arts practice.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: I think we all got into such a huge arts slump, even just being stuck in lockdown was a bit of a torment. But, yeah, I think my visual arts practice has kind of gone on a bit of a roller-coaster where it moves so far away from tattooing, where I’m exploring video performance and soundscapes, which was something I loved doing during uni. To then in my final year of uni, it almost swung back and became this exploration of painted portraiture with tattoo designs on the figurers because I almost went from going, oh, my visual arts career has to be drastically different to my tattooing. It has to be something that I can really feel a huge separation from and explore entirely different things. And then I realised, well, actually, my tattooing informs my visual arts practice because it is very much part of who I am and maybe I shouldn’t be shying away from it, and so I just thrust them into each other and thought, you know what, let’s see how I feel about this. And now I’m in this kind of coast where I’m thinking, do I stay in that realm where I allow them to very much be intertwined or am I wanting to veer away from it again? And I do have some projects coming up where I’m exhibiting some work in a few group shows and I suppose still tossing up what I want to do for them. Because I feel in this kind of long rut post-graduation about what I want to do. So we’ll see.

**Q: Sounds like a bit of a process that I can relate to, is a bit of a process of sort of getting out of your own way. I find I always get stuck or things don’t work when I’m trying to impose almost my will on what it is I’m going to make or write.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: I want it to be this because I want it to be very different from – I want Y to be very different from X.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Whereas the art just kind of needs to just shut up and let it happen sometimes.**

P1: Exactly. And I think it’s such a hassle, if I can say that, in the arts industry when we have to apply for things. And you are very much expected to write out a huge plan of what you want to make and I always worry, oh my God, what if I start doing this plan I’ve written out and I hate it and I want to change? Am I stuck, am I going to be in trouble? And so even the things I have coming up, I’ve written a page over planning to show to people of this is what I’m going to make. But I’m probably going to make something entirely different because I don’t know until I sit down. And at the end of the day, even me thinking about it now, as much as I try to veer away from certain aspects of my life, it’s almost just unavoidable because everything you make is ultimately a bit of a self-portrait or reflection of yourself.

**Q: You can’t help it. You can try to hide it, but it will come out. Yeah, absolutely.**

P1: That’s what it’s going to be, I think.

**Q: Yeah. I guess is there a particular subject matter that you, if everything is a self-portrait are there themes or ideas that you find yourself on purpose or by accident returning to?**

P1: Yeah, if I look at my CV of things that I’ve done with my visual arts, you could probably nut out that at least 75% of it has been purposeful decisions to look at my identity and then the remaining has been accidental. Because it’s just there all the time.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: And most of the time it’s my experience being a mixed-race artist in Australia because there is this kind of middle ground you sit in when you’ve been born and raised in Australia, but you have a different cultural background that you haven’t been heavily exposed to. And there is a struggle, I think, in Australia to try and connect to heritages when you are quite isolated away from them. And so I found doing exhibitions with other artists with similar lived experiences has been really lovely because we can come together with work and talk about the fact that we’re from such different backgrounds but we’ve kind of had the same lived experience here. It gives me a bit of, I guess, community or comfort in that which is nice through my arts.

**Q: Yeah, that is really interesting, finding community through the fact that you feel separated from the community.**

P1: Yeah, yeah. Being lonely, but we’ve all felt lonely.

**Q: Right.**

P1: It’s fine.

**Q: Yeah. Okay. Yeah. That is interesting. So you talked about – I guess let’s talk about the curating; that’s how we first met was you did a curated show here at Nexus. Can you talk about how you got into that and how you approach it?**

P1: Yeah. I mean, it’s quite a good tangent from what I’ve just said about doing group shows with people of similar lived experiences because that’s what my first curation, I guess, freelance job was. Amidst my thoughts in uni that I would do primarily an academic career in the arts, I thought curation, hey, that’s actually very genuinely interesting to me. We learnt a bit about it in subjects. I thought I’m going to curate my first show. I don’t care that I’m still in uni as a student. I’m going to do it because why not? And that was what I wanted to do my first show on was I wanted to find artists in Adelaide that had a lived experience like mine, put us altogether and then just kind of see what came out of, I guess, everyone representing that experience.

**Q: Sure. So was this curating work that already existed or getting people to create work for the exhibition?**

P1: I had people create work which I think was a good way of doing it because one of the artists in particular, she was mixed Vietnamese and did amazing works talking about, I guess, more feminist topics and her experience with misogyny, but I noticed that never in her work she’d really tackled that fact that she had a diverse cultural background. And I said to her, “Hey, I’ve got this idea for a show. How do you feel about being part of it, but you’d have to explore this topic? Is that comfortable for you?” And she was like, “Actually, yeah, and I’m not sure why I haven’t explored it before but I would love to be in the show, why not, let’s see what happens.” And just seeing the way she felt when work had been created, we hung it up on the wall, was really lovely. Because then going, you know what, actually, this is a really beneficial thing to explore and it’s quite nice along the way to realise that just because we have been born and raised here, separated from something, doesn’t mean we can’t start picking up pieces of it and trying to reconnect with that.

**Q: Wow.**

P1: And I think for that show being my first experience with curation, that’s why I then felt so, I guess, passionate and comfortable about it, because I had such a good experience entering that realm. And I’ve kind of continued a bit of a pattern where a big draw for me is going, well, if I’m going to be curating show, whether I’m making work for it or not, I want to be trying to create a platform for other marginalised artists. And I would much rather see a space transform into somewhere that gives voice to marginalised people and, I guess, have conversations with those artists about what do you want to be able to do in the arts that you can’t currently? Or do you feel like there are those gaps for you that need to be filled? Then doing my best to kind of fill them as I go.

**Q: So often art is a lonely undertaking. So it must be just a wonderful thing to do something as a group. Like visual artists, you’re alone and you’re painting a lot. But to do a group show, I guess, I think it’s really cool. I guess that thing about this artist had never considered her background as a subject to explore in art, that you gave – maybe it’s not a question. I just think that’s rad and I think it’s really interesting.**

P1: And I think a lot of artists do fear being categorised too quickly. I think that’s also a conversation I’ve had with a lot of people, whether I’m talking to artists who are exploring a cultural background or artists who are exploring queerness or even just any topic. People are so worried of thinking, if I start making work about this one thing, what if I’m just known for making that one thing? And what if I’m then only in shows about this one thing and I can’t explore outside of that? And we all have to have a bit of a wake-up moment of going, fuck it, it doesn’t actually matter. You can explore something and then explore something entirely different the next day and it’s absolutely valid. But it’s kind of nice not to purposely ignore certain things.

**Q: That’s great. You answered a question that I wasn’t articulate enough to ask.**

P1: I read between the lines, it’s fine.

**Q: You did, thank you very much. I appreciate that. Let’s take it back to the title of our show, Why This? You’ve touched on it a little bit in particular, like 2020, the year we’d all rather forget. But even outside of that, it’s a hard world and it’s hard to stay motivated. It’s hard to be inspired. It’s hard to compete against our own inner monologue a lot of the time. Can you tell us about the hard times, the struggles and what you do to get through them?**

P1: I’m wondering if I’m the best person to ask that, because I think I do very easily succumb to just kind of whinging. That’s the easiest way. I’m sure my partner would attest the fact that I have my moments at home where I have a bit of a cry. And maybe that’s a good thing. I get it out of my system and then I can move on. So maybe that’s the coping mechanism, just have a good cry.

**Q: Just get it out.**

P1: Yeah. I mean during COVID is a perfect example of that where my industry was out of work, as in not just visual arts but tattooing couldn’t happen. And I just kind of sat at home thinking, I’m never going to work again. Like, what if my industry just doesn’t exist after this, what am I going to do? And I had to hit this weird kind of wave moment after all the crying and whinging where I thought, well, if that’s the case, then it is what it is and you just kind of pick up things and keep going. Obviously I’m very grateful that my industry was not over and I was overacting. But I think very much try to do the same with my arts; even recently I’ve tried to go back to painting after a good eight, nine months of hiatus from it, and halfway through I just wanted to throw everything in the bin and go, I give up on painting, this is horrible, I never want to do it again. I kind of sat there and thought, well, if this one painting is awful, I’ll just put it in the bin. It’s fine. I’ll do it in another week when I feel like I’ve healed a bit from it. I’ll go do something else to distract myself. Refresh, it’s okay.

**Q: I think it’s very hard for us in the arts to be bad at the thing that we love doing, like the first draft of something you write is usually going to be terrible.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Not every song that a musician jams out is going to be great. Just accepting that sometimes this might not be very good.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: But I’m sitting here doing it and that’s worthy.**

P1: Exactly. I even saw a thing the other day that I very much connected with, which said that regardless if you’re getting better at your outlet, if you’re always just looking at other people’s work as a comparison, you’re not going to see your own progress, if that kind of makes sense.

**Q: Absolutely. I like that.**

P1: Yeah, and so you have to get to a point where you go that person is doing this thing and they’re doing great. This other person is doing this other thing and they’re doing great, but I’m also doing great, and it’s okay.

**Q: It’s such an addictive, dangerous thing though.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: The constant comparison to others, it’s very hard, especially these are competitive industries too.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Who was it that said – I’ll butcher this but someone said, “It’s not enough that I succeed, my friends have to fail as well.” I will find out who said that, because I loved it.**

P1: Just toxic.

**Q: Yeah, that’s a constant battle, I think. I would love to touch upon what you see for yourself moving forward.**

P1: Well, the current space I’m in, the studio space I’m running is very much just geared around me and my co-workers as that tattoo space. And we’re in that for a few years to settle in.

**Q: Where do people go, by the way, listeners, if you want to go get your first tattoo?**

P1: If you go on Instagram to Half Pace Studio. We don’t hand out our address actively because I’m so fearful of walk-ins; that is not my environment. But people are welcome to book in. But, ultimately, what I’d love to see, what I’d love to do is have our space expand when our current lease is over. So it’s more of that kind of five-year plan that I always thought what I wanted to was to have a space that could be more than just tattooists on site. And that was my original plan, but of course there’s only so much you can do when you’re a first time leaser of commercial space and you’re young. And I’d love a space where when people enter, it is maybe a small artist-run gallery with a few spots that are rentable artist studios. And then the tattoo artists can be in a studio section joined onto that or maybe at the back. So, ultimately, that’s my long-term goal and then I have space within to explore all three of my outlets in my own building.

**Q: Great. Yeah.**

P1: So it’s maybe a little bit of self-service there but other people will benefit and that’s also the main goal.

**Q: Fantastic, build your own world.**

P1: Exactly.

**Q: That’s what it’s all about. I’d like to end on a thought, call it advice, call it whatever you want, but for anyone out here listening, they might have always wanted to pick up a paintbrush or pick up a needle. Any thoughts for people out there who are curious about your world and perhaps taking the first steps into it?**

P1: What a prompt. I’m trying to think of what I would have loved to hear when I was at those moments. It’s going to sound super tacky and a bit kind of cliché, but literally just the whole it doesn’t matter in the long run, just do it. Because we’re here for a tiny little blip, that’s it.

**Q: That’s been most people’s advice.**

P1: Yeah, I mean, there’s not much more you can say, is there, unless you want to sit and give someone a lecture for two hours. You just kind of go, well, that’s it in a nutshell, really, it doesn’t really matter.

**Q: I love it. That’s a real positive spin on a kind of nihilistic sentiment; it doesn’t matter.**

P1: Nothing matters, it’s fine.

**Q: And that’s great, that’s awesome. What about someone who wanted to get their first tattoo?**

P1: I think push past the fear and realise that you’re going to go through maybe 10 minutes of anxiety to then have actually a very calm, wonderful experience if you choose a good artist that you mesh well with. And then you get a lifetime of an artwork on you and pushing past that first 10 minutes of anxiety and fear will be the biggest pay-off ever.

**Q: I can definitely tell you the way that Chira does tattoos is far less painful than the traditional gun as well.**

P1: Yeah, I have some people when I start with, they go, “Oh, is that it? That’s fine.” Or people fall asleep, it’s great.

**Q: There you go, go have a nap and get yourself some art on your body.**

P1: Excellent.

**Q: Thank so much, that was wonderful.**

P1: Thank you.

**Q: Thank you Chira for a really wonderful conversation. I hope you enjoyed episode 4 of Why This. For up-to-date information on everything that’s happening at Nexus Arts, just head over to nexusarts.org.au. I’d like to thank Arts South Australia Recovery Fund through which we are once again presenting all of our visual arts exhibitions online throughout 2021, to nexusartgallery.com to experience the work of all of our amazing artists. As always we are thrilled to be partnering with Spark Brewery and Rose Kentish Wines this year. Come on in and taste their wares at Nexus Arts venue and be sure to seek out these amazing local socially responsible labels wherever you choose to have a drink. Big thanks as always to We Made a Thing Studios for lending me their podcasting gear. Head to wemadeathingstudios.com to check out awesome South Australian-made films and web series. I’ve got some great guests coming up for you in episodes 5 and 6. Keep those a secret, you just have to stay tuned. Until then, thanks for listening.**

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