

**Interviewee Name:** Jeremy Hawkes

**Interviewer Name:** Racheal Missingham

**Date of Interview:** 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2022

**Location:** Online via Zoom

**Length of Interview:** 23:53 minutes

## **Transcript**

**Racheal:** Hello. Thank you for doing the interview with me. And taking the time out of your day.

**Jeremy:** Pleasure. Happy to.

**Racheal:** Can you tell us a little bit about yourself. What do you do? Who you are, where you're from, what experiences has helped you as a person?

**Jeremy:** Yeah. So my name is Jeremy Hawkes. I'm from all over. I grew up in Tasmania, 20 years in Melbourne, was living in Lismore, I'm now in Brisbane and I'm not sure what next. And I'm a visual artist. Sometimes writer, sometimes performer, not really. But sometimes. I acquired a disability 15 years ago with a workplace accident and it's been quite a journey in terms of working out what exactly it is and exactly what it means. But I always say to people after being born, it was it's been the most pivotal moment in my life. Um.

**Jeremy:** What else can I say about myself? Yeah, I. I'm also queer. It's a very important part of my identity for a long time. But to me, it's not really about priorities. But I think that my disabled community or my my my identity as a disabled person is kind of like more pertinent to me these days.

**Racheal:** With your art form as a visual artist, what motivates you do the work, what themes do you normally work with, what the motifs do you use and the other element that defined you as a visual artist?

**Jeremy:** Yeah. So I went to art school, you know, like 100 years ago and I trained in sculpture and I mainly worked in sculpture for many, many, many years. I still do a lot of wood carving, kind of like really large scale. I used to use chainsaws and angle grinders and things like that.

But after my after the accident, of course, disability, I haven't really been able to do that. So it really caused me to rethink the way I work and pretty much everything. I'd always, I think like all out of sort of always kept sketchbooks and drawings. And I love drawing, but I never thought I was particularly good at it. And when I went to art school, when I was really young, they yeah, they pretty much told me that I was really bad at it. So after that, after the accident and cause of disability, I really, really struggled to think about how I could be an artist anymore, particularly on that kind of professional level that we're all meant to aspire to in terms of exhibiting and looking for professional development. I just didn't think I had the skills to do it. But so it kind of like I really got back into art as a means of just trying to keep myself sane through the whole process of multiple operations and all the things that went along with it. Yeah. So yeah, I started drawing and they were never really meant to be shown to anyone, but I started to show people and I got really good responses and so I really sort of worked on that two dimensional practice. I still do some sculptures here and there, but I'm really physically limited in what I can do. Yeah, in terms of themes. So it's a really tricky one, that one to talk about.

**Jeremy:** I think it's very much about identity in my work though, if you looked at it, I get I get really interesting feedback when people look at my work without knowing anything about it or about me, what they see in it. But yeah, it's very, very much about identity and interconnectedness. Looking at that, that relationship between macro and micro and the universe and a grain of sand, that kind of idea. And I think trying to understand my condition and what had happened and I just I had so many multiple diagnoses and it was it's been a real journey, but it really led to me investigating biology, particularly neurobiology, to try and understand what was going on. So I spent a lot of time looking at those really amazing sort of medical textbooks and these images that you get and they're kind of like, they're so fascinating. So I really sort of delved into that kind of realm and that, yeah, that intersection between like biology and identity and the body as a, as a place of as a site of identity and contested identities. Yeah. Yeah. I find it really funny. I'm always amazed that those visual artists, who can really talk about that their work really well in really long words, because to me it's always been a bit like I do visual art because I can't articulate what it is I'm trying to say very well. But you have those amazing artists, you can give you an image and then write 10,000 words on it. Just sort of it used to be a picture is worth ten, 10,000 words, but we're so saturated with images

now that it's kind of like 10,000 words is worth one image, which is interesting. Sorry for waffling.

**Racheal:** What was some of the key experience and events that helped you get interested and involved in your art form?

**Jeremy:** Gee, there's quite a few. I think a really big one for me was identifying as someone with a disability because, you know, I guess, I guess I have my own sort of internalised ableism about what disability looked like. Had to be in the wheelchair, you had to be Deaf or you had to have vision impairment or something like that. So yeah, I had this period of depression and it was sort of a friend who got me involved with Arts Access Victoria. I was living in Melbourne at the time, first off as a volunteer, and then I did some work for them and I think it was through meeting the community there that I really started to understand the social model of disability and the politics around it. That whole idea around self identification. So I think for me I can yeah, there was a real aha moment when I realised that it was my own internalised idealism that was making me question whether or not I was disabled. So that was a really pivotal point for me.

**Racheal:** Wow. That milestones that has happened and opened up leading to your career as an artists with disability.

**Jeremy:** But then yeah, yeah, yeah. That's interesting. I've done quite a few community projects over the years with artists with disability, like my my first job outside of the finishing art school was working in Access Arts Queensland 100 years ago. So I've done a lot of those kind of work. So it was, it was interesting to me to sort of not be on the other side of the fence because it's not about that kind of division, is it? So yeah, to sort of see myself as part of that community and that how do you put this? I didn't think I had the right to talk about it.

**Racheal:** Yeah.

**Jeremy:** Yeah. And and I think through those friendships and through, you know, being part of that community, I understood that, you know, you're not speaking for people. You're speaking

you're speaking for yourself. But you can talk about these issues rather than trying to be the figurehead or being the person who has the only viewpoint on it that makes sense.

**Jeremy:** It's about speaking with them. Rather than not for them.

**Jeremy:** Yeah, yeah. Speak about. Not for.

**Racheal:** Yeah, yeah. What motivates your work today as a visual artist?

**Jeremy:** Yeah, I'm more prolific than I've ever been. What motivates me? Fear, boredom. I feel like I. I don't know. In my creative practice. I'm 50 this year. I'm. I wasted a lot of time. I never really gave 100%. I think it was the fear not of failing, but the fear of actually succeeding. And it was only a few years ago that I kind of really identified that it's really easy to sort of like sit around and bemoan your fate, which is what I did a lot. And to sort of, I don't know, I was kind of like blaming the whole art world and the whole creative system in Australia for not being more successful. And then when I really looked at myself, I sort of realized I've only ever given my art practice at the most, you know, like 70%. So I just kind of went, well, you know, you're not doing anything else. Why not give it 100% and see what happens? And for me, it was identifying that it's not the fear of failing because failing is easy. It was actually the fear of succeeding and actually giving it. What if I gave it 100 and I failed? Then what would that mean? I'm not putting it very well. Sorry. My dog has been really distracted. Sit down. Sit down. Yeah. So. Yeah. Yeah. I'm the most prolific I've ever been. And if I don't. If I don't spend at least an hour on bare minimum one hour in my studio every day, I feel really guilty.

**Jeremy:** It's almost like, you know, that feeling of, like, when you go to bed without brushing your teeth, like something's just not right. And I've just had the last couple of years have been incredible. I've just had such incredible opportunities and the things just keep coming my way. And I don't I don't want to get to a point where I realise that I haven't. I haven't done everything that I think I can do because I haven't tried hard enough yet. And I'm a big believer in that. You know, the theory of the 10,000 hours. Yeah. And, you know, I think by the time I acquired a disability, I probably put in 100 hours and I thought I was pretty cool at that point. So I'm really trying to work it at that sort of 10,000 hour thing. And I also believe that there's a lot of really bad art out there, and I feel an obligation to contribute to it and that there are visual

artists out there and probably any sort of creative person who sort of they really believe that everything they do is brilliant. And I really don't. So I sort I think probably 99% of what I do is going to be not brilliant. So I've got to make sure that the content is high enough that that 1% there'll be more than one of that 1%, if you know what I mean. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I like to push myself through. Yeah.

**Racheal:** Do you think that arts should be political in creating change in how people think and act and treat each other? Part of how we defined that all arts is about aesthetic and appeal to the mainstream audience or disability arts audience?

**Jeremy:** It's a good question that one, isn't it? It's kind of like, yeah, that, that, you know, art should be political. But my take on it, like, all art is political. It's a political act to to do anything creative, I think. My my my worry about things like that and it's just a personal thing and I would never apply this to anyone else is that if I start out with a bit of an agenda before I start doing art, I worry that it becomes propaganda. Not that there's anything wrong with that either. I have done some work that's purely political, but to me that sort of slides into that crossover between art and activism and advocacy, which is really, really, really important. Yes. I don't know. It's funny, I for years, I always divided my creative practice into two different halves that were kind of like community projects that I did. And that was really about trying to be an advocate and to sort of encourage people to participate who might not have before or create opportunities for people who might not get them. So to act as that facilitator. And I. Yeah, yeah. You know, like capacity building and cultural development. And it's really, it's really, really important to need to do that kind of work. And then on the other side, was my own creative practice and to me, they were really, really separate and they, they did not meet. And I'm as I'm getting older, I'm trying to work out ways where they can sort of co-mingle a bit, um, yeah. And just like it's really important to me to identify as an artist with a disability because I think that visibility is really, really important and I'm sure you know about it Racheal.

**Jeremy:** There's always discussions around whether we have dedicated funding or not. And it's all, all that stuff is really fascinating. And for me, I don't think there's a really right answer. I think the fact that we're asking the questions is a really important thing. And in an ideal world, we wouldn't need dedicated funding. We wouldn't need disability only spaces or disability-led practice. But it's not an ideal world we live in. So it's, it's, it's activism that comes into it. Yeah.

I'm really trying to find a way where I can sort of lean into that a bit more in my own creative practice. But I know that like when I sit down to do work, it's not in my mind at all. Like I just really enjoy the process of art making. But a few years ago I decided not to have not to enter any competitions or any grants or any professional development sort of realms where unless I was identifying as an artist with a disability and trying to help create opportunities for other artists to. It's so tricky, isn't it? It's a really very tricky. And, you know, like I think all art practice, there's always been this idea of the high moral ground of the art. You know, like art is above politics and it shouldn't the two should never meet. And I really disagree with that. But I also think art for art's sake is okay and it is valid and that there there are so many different forms of art and creative expression, and I just think there's room for everyone.

**Jeremy:** I really found that when I went to Berlin and met artists from around the world and had this residency there, and they were sort of like really selling a really particular type of art. And it's a type of art you get in art schools as well, and it's very conceptual and it's very ideas based and it's all around projects and just drawing for the sake of it or things like that is not kind of as valid. But I just really disagree. I just think there's just enough room enough for everyone. I think I'm I think I'm I'm kind of really envious of those artists who who do have these really amazing conceptual ideas. We're talking before about Marion a real friend of mine who works amazing not only for the ideas which are really unique and really clever, but she brings her amazing aesthetic sense to it. And so you get this really good marriage, and I always feel like I should be coming up with these clever. And Jamie Lee, who does all that work around chronic pain and builds these installations. There are so many of them. John Lewis is another one. And I just think I wish I was like that. And for years I felt bad that I wasn't and I wasn't a good artist because I wasn't working in that way. But now I just think there's just room for everyone, and I think that works great. It doesn't mean I have to do it, though.

**Racheal:** If there something we haven't asked about that we should? That we really need to know about, to understand you, your work, this type of work?

**Jeremy:** Heaps of things, yeah.

**Racheal:** Yeah.

**Jeremy:** Heaps of things. The things we wish as a community, we could be a little bit more open to talking about something like, there are some things I want to talk about in my community, but I'm a bit scared to float these ideas.

**Racheal:** Like what?

**Jeremy:** Well, I'm not going to say no. You know, like, I think maybe it's not relevant, but, you know, just on a on an a broader level, cancel culture has become a real thing. And there's a lot of policing. And I hate it when I see amongst different communities that have really struggled to have acceptance or, you know, like minorities when they start policing each other. I think that's a real issue. Yeah, I wish we could talk about, you know, things like or I'll give you some examples. I wish we could talk about discrimination within our own community or within disabled arts organizations because it does happen. But everyone's a bit scared to talk about it. And I know why. You know, we all know why. Yeah, I, I always, I always want to talk to people about, you know, I sort of feel like a bit of a ring in, you know, like I've identified as disabled for 15 years, but some people have lived with it and very different disabilities their whole lives, you know, like do they see us as ring in's, you know? And then I guess that comes that brings up questions like what is disability and what is disabled? And do we have a right to question each other on that? Tricky stuff. Hey, like really tricky stuff.

**Racheal:** Yeah, it's very tricky because disability is a broad umbrella that covers a lot of areas with regard to if you were born with it or acquired later in life. And that's where it becomes so problematic.

**Jeremy:** Yeah.

**Racheal:** To define disability.

**Jeremy:** Yeah.

**Racheal:** It's the same with being Deaf. You're either you're born with it or you lose it.

**Jeremy:** Yeah.

**Racheal:** You know, the Deaf community don't like seeing other Deaf people with a cochlear implant and they get labelled as hard of hearing.

**Jeremy:** Yeah.

**Racheal:** Despite the fact that you were born with it, to be Deaf. It's a bit, it's very critical in the community, whether its Deaf community or disabled community. They're yet ready to talk about that, but everyone would debate about it.

**Jeremy:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And like I, I never mind being corrected because I've made some real mistakes in, in just the thing you're sort of talking about. I use the word disabled and in my head I'm including Deaf, but I don't, I don't use the term and I think it's great for people to go, Jeremy, you got it wrong. You know, and I think we all learn from our mistakes in that way, which is great and I think really similar in the queer community as well. There's a lot of discussion and sometimes it can get pretty nasty around those distinctions and those areas of self identifying. But to me it's really fascinating. It's, it's really interesting and I'm probably coming from a place of place of privilege in that, you know, like I am disabled, I am queer, but I'm also a white male, you know, which I'm really conscious of. So for me, it's allowed to go. I think we should be able to talk about it without anyone getting offended, you know, says the white guy, you know. Yeah, but yeah. Yeah, I, I think these discussions are really to me, they're just really interesting. And as I say, maybe, maybe there isn't an answer, but I think the discussions can be really enlightening.

**Jeremy:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Other things like yeah, I want to see more dedicated to specific arts and disability funding. Um, I really want to see, um, there's been no national survey in a really important gallery of artists with disability, you know, like we are the last avant garde and we are kind of rewriting art history because talking about all these different identities and how they view the visual world or sound or dance or whatever. We across all cultures and genders and, and socioeconomic divides, you know, like we're kind of like everywhere but we're not represented everywhere or we get put in that, you know, like that happy clappy community arts kind of world. Isn't it wonderful that they can do that kind of thing without sort of seeing it as a really distinct and special culture? And yeah, one thing more and more, you know, yeah, I



really think what's happening in Disability Arts in Australia today is just amazing to me. It's kind of like it's just, it's, well, I thought it was at its peak a few years ago, but I think it just keeps getting better and better.

**Racheal:** Yeah.

**Jeremy:** More opportunities, you know, there are more than they used to be, but we still need more. Yeah, I want to see like a, you know, like a dedicated studio. You know, if I win lotto, that's going to be my first thing to do is to, like, buy an artist studio so artists in residence who have disability can come or, you know, like have permanent spots there. And I think, yeah, I think we need our own art fair. I think we need our own national cultural event, you know, like, yeah, disability arts festival and these things are starting to happen, aren't they? Like yeah, it's the beginning and yeah, tackling is sorry I could go on.

**Racheal:** We need more opportunities in Australia.

**Jeremy:** Yeah yeah we do pretty well here I think – I – part of the residency. I got to go to Berlin. I was going to go to New York to do this course in New York City and they cancelled the course. But I still went to New York because it was going to cost me more not to go in a way. And when I when I was there, like I was really looking around for disability arts organization or disabled artists or anything like that. And you sort of go in New York, it's got could not find a thing. It really, really surprised me and I think, you know, like the UK still continues to lead the way but Australia is doing really, really well I think. But yeah, we need more and more. More, yeah.

**Racheal:** Is there anything you would like to add?

**Jeremy:** I hope I haven't said anything out of turn.

**Racheal:** Well, thank you very much for your time.

**Jeremy:** Thank you.