Interviewee Name: Alex Creece Interviewer Name: Erin Scudder Date of Interview: 19th of September 2022 Location: Online via Zoom Length of Interview: 44:19

Transcript

Erin: So just to start, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? What do you think is important for us to know about who you are, what you do, and how your experiences have shaped the artist that you are today?

Alex: That's a big question!

Erin: It is!

Alex: I guess I should kind of start off with like my little bio and yeah, so I'm a writer. I'm an editor. I'm also a collage artist. I work for Cordite Poetry Review. I also work for Archer Magazine, and I freelance and do my own writing and then I make goofy little collages on the side that sometimes go into exhibitions, if I'm lucky and yeah, sometimes I write articles or poems that get published. I generally write poetry or non-fiction, creative nonfiction, personal essays, that kind of stuff. I have written a little bit of fiction in the past, but not a great deal. I don't feel like I've got a great imagination, but maybe that's just because I'm out of practice with it but yeah, for the moment, it's mostly poems and articles and essays.

Erin: Yeah, Great. Yeah and is there anything like over the course of your practice - so when did you start kind of actively writing or editing like, as a - when do you see this sort of beginning?

Alex: Yeah, that's so I would say that I've always written, but probably until about 2015, 2016, I would never show anyone anything that I had written, it was all just for me and then after that I sort of started showing my friends my work and they really liked it. So then what I would do is I would just start sending it kind of indiscriminately everywhere in a way that was - looking back on it, it was not really helpful because, like, to me something that has been helpful is getting involved in like more local and Australian writing institutions and organizations and stuff like that because yeah, if I go in to Submittable and then just send my work out to a bunch of like random journals in America that don't pay you anything, and, or kind of just like someone with a website who likes writing, it's kind of like, that's nice and all but for one thing, writers should be paid for their work and for another thing, it didn't do anything to cultivate any sort of community or any sort of like opportunities in my area so, I would say that I kind of went through that stint of just trying to get things published.

Erin: Anywhere.

Alex: No matter what. Yeah and then I had taken a break from uni and then I sort of went back to uni and I was really heavily focusing on creative writing subjects and that's probably when I started realizing like, hey, actually it's really good to be able to sit in a room with people and like workshop a poem or, like, have the teachers say, like, here is somewhere that you can go, reasonably locally, that you know, does events and things where you can connect with people or like here's, you know, an Emerging Writers' Festival or something like that, that's sort of like is relevant to people in your area and will connect you with industry professionals and peers and things like that. So, um, yeah, I would say that something that really has helped me is, for one thing, out of my university studies, I got an internship at Cordite and then they asked me to stay on and continue working for them. So that's been an awesome opportunity and another thing is writing fellowships, things like the Writeability Fellowship was awesome for me because I got to be mentored by an established poet and I have done other fellowships as well, but they're all kind of falling out of my face right now but yeah, these sorts of opportunities where you actually get to connect with people, get to know other writers and other opportunities, like I always kind of have said that, like I'm a writer because I don't like speaking. Like I always sort of resented that part of writing is that you then have to go and share your work.

Erin: Perform.

Alex: But like now that I've done that a few times, it's like actually those experiences are really valuable and like being able to go to Emerging Writers' Festival or another Writers Victoria event and read your work is a really good way of like building peers, building an audience and stuff like that. So yeah, I would definitely say those kind of formal and informal sort of connections with others have been really useful.

Erin: That's pretty much - I think you've answered the next question, which is to ask you about whether (which is great!) there's any particular experiences that have been really helpful or formative, and you've mentioned a few, like the internship at Cordite, which led to a job, and the Writeability.

Alex: Yep.

Erin: Do you have any like favourite, like other key moments, formative moments or experiences or people or favourite kind of things that really helped you along the way?

Alex: Yeah, I would say at the moment I'm actually doing two mentorships. One is the Midsumma Pathways program, which is for queer artists with disability, and I'm really enjoying that so far. It's got a really good mix of like connecting with other emerging artists as well as hooking you up with a industry professional and I am also doing a writing place, mentorship through Arts Access Australia, where I'm getting some mentoring from Andy Jackson, who is amazing.

Erin: Cool, yeah, I'm hoping to interview him as well, yep.

Alex: (Laughs)

Erin: Yeah and has it always, with - in those experiences - has it always been like smooth sailing or have there been challenges or conflicts that characterized them as well?

Alex: I - that is a good question. I would say that. I'm. I'm really sorry. I've got my dog here. I know I'm not meant to.

Erin: No, that's okay. I had to lock my cats out, and I know it's not easy! (Laughs)

Alex: That's what I did. I shut the door, but I obviously didn't shut it properly because she just burst in and now she's crying.

Erin: Oh, that's totally fine, yeah, I really understand.

Alex: Thank you.

Alex: I would say that not necessarily a conflict, but I think a challenge that I sometimes find with these sort of formal opportunities and something that I think other disabled artists also find challenging is when there's kind of like you get an opportunity, but there's an expected output of like you get this thing, but you need to be able to meet these sort of benchmarks like that can be quite restricting in a lot of ways and it doesn't always like meet your capacity when sometimes it's kind of like you want the learning and the experiences without the expectation that you're immediately going to be able to go and create something and be like, look what I did.

Erin: Yeah, come up with it and do you find that it's - is that around the pressure of producing something in general, like ending up with a product that you've created, or is it is there pressure around what you're like the topical or the themes of what you're supposed to be creating? Like the content?

Alex: I think, I think probably more just the pressure to create anything.

Erin: At all.

Alex: At all. Like because I don't I don't know about you, but for me it's kind of like sometimes, you know, sometimes I can write something and sometimes I can't. Like, often it just, it happens or it doesn't like it can't always just be like you can try to do things to get into a groove with it or like, get back into it and inspire yourself but at the end of the day, sometimes it just doesn't happen and you don't want to force it.

Erin: Yeah. Or if you force it, you're not happy.

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: Can you talk about - so we've talked a bit about some like favourite experiences and stuff that really helped. What - are there - is there anything you want to mention that was like a barrier or that stood in the - I mean, you've talked a bit about the way that submitting everywhere or submitting in a way that wasn't really didn't help to build community was unhelpful.

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: Was there anything else that sort of hindered you or held you back?

Alex: I would say something that I don't know if it's a barrier, it's more of maybe a pet peeve is sometimes there's this difficulty with like applying for opportunities where you do want to kind of represent yourself accurately, but at the same time you kind of don't want to trauma mine and have to be like, this is all the hardships I've gone to -.

Erin: Yeah.

Alex: - like give me an opportunity, like give me a crumb of something - it's - that can feel a bit difficult sometimes when it's just like I'm just a person who likes writing and art and creating. I don't always want to have to lead with: here's all the negatives.

Erin: Yeah, yeah, I think that's a really good point to include.

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: It's a really important point to make. That's kind of so - those questions are sort of to do with your past practice and sort of like experiences that have led you up to where you are now. Is there anything else you to say in that sort of regard in terms of like your, your formative years?

Alex: Yeah, I ... sorry, I'm just having a little think.

Erin: Yeah. Take your time. Big questions.

Alex: Hmm. I would say that something maybe I wish I had known or wish I had done more of is like I know when I used to get invited to like, speak at events or something like that, I would always just try to be really easy-going and in access requirements I would just be like, no, don't worry about me. I'll be like self-sufficient. I'll provide all my own stuff that I need, like don't worry about it. Whereas now it's kind of like when there's access requirements, it's kind of like, give me a quiet room. Like, give me like - um - like make these things kind of happen if you want me to be able to be there because I know that if, if they are able to get a quiet room and stuff like that, that will make me more sustainable. It will make me able to engage in the event more easily. So, I think that's just something that I'm still kind of coming to understand is that like that's a reasonable request and like, I don't have to. Yes, I don't know how to pretend like I'm easygoing or that I have no needs.

Erin: Yeah, yeah, really good points. So the next set of questions has to do with where you're at right now with your present practice. So you talked a bit about how creative writing classes and like starting to participate in events and so on really motivated you. What motivates your work currently?

Alex: It's a little slow at the moment. I can't lie. I have been very, very busy. But ... I ...

Erin: I guess you're doing a lot of work, not just creating your own creative work, but for Cordite, editing. And for Archer.

Alex: Yeah. Yeah.

Erin: So yeah, that counts as well!

Alex: Thank you. It does. It absolutely does. I - yeah. I guess with my work currently, I - I just I guess I kind of wait for myself to have this feeling of like, oh, someone should say something about that. Or like, you know, this is an issue that's going around and around in my head. I need something to sort of do with that, which is a bit of an issue sometimes in that it often means that when I am inspired to write something, it kind of falls into that sort of angsty or category of like, things are bad and this is why, like I find that I do struggle to motivate just based on like this is a nice thing. I'm going to write a nice poem. Like that's rarely a motivation that I have.

Erin: Yeah.

Alex: Generally I am motivated by a sense of something being wrong.

Erin: Yeah. Something that's been bothering you.

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: Yeah. And has that changed over time or have you felt like that's been pretty characteristic of your work?

Alex: I think that's pretty characteristic of my work, unfortunately.

Erin: You know, that's fine. Where are you currently presenting your work? And in thinking about that, like, are you presenting where you want to be? Are there places that you're not currently presenting that you'd like to be involved in?

Alex: Is this kind of like events and stuff like that.

Erin: So I guess it has to do as well with, I guess like where you're publishing or like ...

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: ... sort of arenas that you sort of haven't had a presence in yet that where you'd like to be and, you know, is there a reason for that or like a benefit that you're seeking?

Alex: Yeah, I would say that there's a few things that it's like there are certain things where I really like the organization or something like that but for whatever reason, I just haven't had any connection there or haven't had any luck getting published or presenting there. So one that sticks out in my mind in terms of getting poetry published is Overland.

Erin: Oh yeah.

Alex: I would love to be published in Overland, but - and to be fair, I haven't, I haven't sent anything to them in quite a while but yeah, it just hasn't lined up for me. Same with Rabbit Poetry. I think it's such a -

Erin: Oh yeah.

Alex: - a gorgeous, um...

Erin: Yep.

Alex: - magazine, like it's so nicely made and I just have never had luck there and then National Young Writers' Festival is something that I would love to do, but I just, um...

Erin: Yeah.

Alex: - haven't. But to be fair, I've only applied there this year, I think? That was the first time I applied and I got rejected, which is fine. So yeah, there's definitely some organizations where I'm like, wow, I love the work they're doing. I wish I could be a part of it and maybe I will be, but it just hasn't happened yet.

Erin: Yeah.

Alex: And one place that I was a bit surprised that I never had a presence in is Voiceworks. When I was under 25, I would often submit to Voiceworks and I just always kind of thought that would be part of my publishing journey.

Erin: Yeah.

Alex: But it wasn't and now I've aged out, so I won't be published in VoiceWorks. But I have like I've done toolkits programs through Express Media. So I do have some relationship with Express Media, which I really value.

Erin: Yeah, Yeah. It's interesting how you said you always thought you'd be published in VoiceWorks. So the next the next question is about how you think other like spectators or readers perceive your work. So that sort of leads into it, I guess, because when you see a publication where you're like, Yes, I see myself fitting into that ...

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: ... but then you don't get in. So it's kind of like, what in your opinion, how do you think others read your work and is it important to you how what other people's perception, including not just readers, but like funding bodies?

Alex: Yeah ... I would say that my work I think is a little bit polarizing and that's fine. I don't think it's for everyone. I would say that potentially it kind of falls into this weird category where it's like, it's not really it's not really poetic or subtle enough to be appreciated by maybe like older people or like more traditional people in publishing, but it's not super young and cool and hip. So I don't think it's really got that going for it. It's kind of this like awkward in between poetry where it's like slimy and clumsy and a bit awkward, but not in a way that's like cool and irreverent.

Erin: Well, that's your that's your, that's your reading. I know what you mean though, like there's always that, I think in writing - well, in arts in general is that you're, like, emerging, but then like, you quickly age out of that and then there's this big long ...

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: ... pause where you're kind of in the middle. You've emerged. But yeah. The next set of questions sort of relates to this. So it's about your perception of your practice, but also how your perception of how your practice fits or doesn't fit into a larger sense of Disability Arts.

Alex: Yep.

Erin: So in terms of like, Disability Arts - which is maybe you know another but quite different way of saying art by people who happen to have a disability ...

Alex: Yep.

Erin: ... do you think there's awareness of it amongst the public or people in arts, media, cultural industries?

Alex: I would say that there is an awareness of it within the writing and publishing industry. I don't know whether there's much awareness just in kind of mainstream circles. Like it feels kind of like unfortunately sometimes it can feel like a bit of a niche where it's sort of like, you know, here's a place you can go and like read about disability, but it doesn't feel really that integrated into sort of everyday literature and publishing.

Erin: Yeah, yep and how about your work specifically? Like do you see your work as being - do you feel like there's a good level of awareness and visibility for your work? And has it increased or decreased since you started out?

Alex: I really don't know.

Erin: Yeah.

Alex: Sorry.

Erin: Don't be sorry! That's a perfectly legitimate answer.

Alex: Yeah, I have no idea.

Erin: It's a funny question. I wasn't quite sure how to say it.

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: I don't know what the ... here's another one that's kind of a sidestep. Besides your own amazing work, which it is.

Alex: Thank you.

Erin: Whose creative practice or output do you think people should know about but don't?

Alex: Oh, that's a big -.

Erin: It's a big one.

Alex: That's a really big question. Hmm. I'm getting like ... my mind is just gone blank.

Erin: That's okay. I mean, we can circle back around to it later.

Alex: Yeah, let's circle back.

Erin: Of course. Yeah. This is kind of a this grouping of questions is kind of ... they're loosely grouped, I would say.

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: So, again, the next one, you might not be able to think of anything, which is like an answer in itself, or, you know, we can circle back around, but the question is what - in terms of the longitudinal, like thinking about the past 50 years ...

Alex: Yep.

Erin: ... in Australia specifically, what do you think the public would say are the key milestones or big major happenings in the history of disability arts here?

Alex: I ... again, I, I don't know. But I feel like part of that is because in the last 50 years, there have been prominent people in the publishing and literature industry who have had disabilities but wouldn't necessarily be i- - have self identified that way or have people identify them ...

Erin: Yep.

Alex: ... that way? Like I know, for example, like Les Murray I think had autism, but people, unless you're specifically interested in disabled poetics and stuff like that, you probably wouldn't dig that deep and actually learn that? It's not something that's really like part of his canon and his acceptance kind of story that people know and it's not something that's necessarily, as far as I know, integrated much into his poetry, although that's debatable, like - you know, I think these things are part of us, whether we explicitly write about them or not but yeah, I guess my answer to your question is that I don't know, but I feel like part of that is because we don't have a great understanding of like people in the past who actually did have disabilities and maybe just didn't identify that way or aren't well known that way.

Erin: Yeah, it's one of the things I think the hope, one of the hopes for this archive is that because we'll be looking at archival materials from different times as well ...

Alex: Yep.

Erin: ... and looking into those questions of identity and like reading things through new lenses and uncovering some sort of shared cultural history, if you will.

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: In terms of identity and again, like, you know, please don't answer anything you're not comfortable answering - and, you know I invite you just to to volunteer what you want to - but in terms of how you identify as an artist, do you hyphenate your, yourself self as disabled or neurodiverse or having a medical condition with or without a sense of pride, or do you sort of gravitate towards - you know - wanting to identify as an artist without necessarily those other identifiers? Or is it a combination or maybe like depending on the context? What are your thoughts on that.

Alex: Yeah, I would say probably a combination and ... yeah, depending on the context. It's ... I find it difficult because it's kind of like if I don't disclose, I do feel that like that can cause problems for me or it can like make people misunderstand me. Some, like I generally find it easier to disclose that I have autism and mental health issues and stuff like that, but that's more generally in terms of my everyday life and not necessarily how I'm seen as an artist. I would say that I do want people, I guess, to have that sort of awareness of me, but I guess I don't want it

sort of front and center like I don't want it in my bio, but I am happy and I do want people to know and I am, it's not that I'm not ... it's not that I'm not proud. I just don't think it belongs in my authora bio, but it belongs in my narrative and getting to know me. So it is it is like an important context, but I want people to be able to enjoy my work, even if they don't have that full context.

Erin: Yeah. Yeah. I think you've done a really good job of putting some words around how complicated ...

Alex: Thank you.

Erin: ... how complicated and intricate it is.

Alex: It really is.

Erin: Yeah. What do you think, um, what's your sense of how other artists who may have a disability feel about this identity politics. Do you think it's kind of like a uniform sense, or do you think there's like contested approaches to how we should or shouldn't identify or we do or don't identify?

Alex: I think it's um definitely contested. And I would say that like it's this complicated sort of thing where disability pride is really important. However, that doesn't mean erasing the struggles or, like ...

Erin: Yeah. Good point.

Alex: ... yeah, sort of making it as if everything is good and like, don't worry about us, we're all fine, we don't need any more rights or this or that or the other. Like it's important that we can kind of hold pride, but also still be advocating for areas where improvement is needed and also advocating for people who don't have disability pride or are actually like this 100% unequivocally sucks. And like people or like people who are more impacted by their disability and have like varying like functional impacts and stuff like that. So I think it's kind of a complicated area where it's like we never want just one person talking about disability because it's such a broad experience. And like even for me when I talk about autism, I try to like be really clear that I'm talking about my own experiences and that I do have privileges in that like I'm a speaking

person, I don't have an intellectual disability, this kind of stuff. I think like, yeah, there can sometimes be a bit of a danger in being like, this person can speak for all disability.

Erin: Yeah, like "I am the spokesperson for ... so and so."

Alex: Yeah, so I, I think there's a lot of nuance and a lot of different opinions when it comes to disability and how we talk about disability and how we feel about disability.

Erin: Yeah, yeah. What kind of levels of complexity do you think come into play when, when an artist's identity is also intersectional. So, you know, you might identify as an artist with disability, but as well like queer or indigenous or culturally diverse.

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: What do you think the challenges are there?

Alex: I would say a big challenge is that disability spaces in general can be very white and I'm a white person and I do try to be really conscious of how white disability spaces can be and I think it's like anything where we just have to be really careful to not assume that because someone has a disability, they're incapable of engaging with intersectionality or intersectional kind of matters or like I, I say this a lot as an autistic person where autistic men are often given a pass for sort of misogynistic attitudes and it's kind of just chalked up to part of being autistic and like, I really disagree with that, where it's like, I think we need to be really careful to [not] infantilize disabled people and act like oh because that person has a disability they don't need to do any of the kind of internal work that goes into unpacking biases and prejudices and kind of sort of bigoted behaviour and thoughts.

Erin: Yeah. In terms of like the content of your creative work, do you feel that your art is political with some of the ideas we've been touching on are - I guess you could, I guess you could call them political or contested or difficult. Do you feel like your art reflects those concerns?

Alex: I would say yes. I think it's ... I don't know. I feel funny calling things political when for me it's just like a matter of social justice and human rights and kind of all that sort of good and important stuff so it's like not political in the sense of like, you know, Labor and Liberal and that kind of stuff.

Erin: Yeah yeah.

Alex: But it's political in the sense that like, it relates to like yeah, these kind of social justice, human rights sort of issues because I guess I just feel like I wouldn't want to sidestep that kind of stuff and be like, no, that's too hard, I don't want to engage with that. I feel like part of my creating is sort of trying to grapple with things that are maybe uncomfortable.

Erin: Yeah, yeah. Yep.

Alex: Yeah. So. Yeah. Even when I write articles or something like that, often I try to find ways that I can link out or defer to like, here's a non-speaking autistic person and their opinion or things like that ...

Erin: Yeah, yeah.

Alex: ... where it's just kind of like rather than me speaking as if I live in a bubble, sort of trying to bring in the fact that there is a whole range of human experiences outside of just me, and I want to demonstrate an awareness of that.

Erin: Yeah, it's interesting. The next question asks about what you think creative success would look, looks like or which, which things go into it, and the two prompts that are sort of given are in terms of art being political. Do you think, you know, success has to do with creating change and how people think and act? Another option given another potential measure of success is aesthetic quality or appeal to a mainstream audience? But what you've brought up just now is saying like, well, maybe another goal or another measure of success is bringing in other voices ...

Alex: Mmm hmmm.

Erin: ... like highlighting the fact that those other voices out there within the context of your own work. Are there other measures of success that you bring to bear on your own work?

Alex: Um ...

Erin: Or do you want to speak to any of those measures?

Alex: Yeah, I would say that like, aesthetic quality is one thing, and it is, it is important in a sense. I would say like acceptance from like the mainstream masses for me is, is less of a priority.

Erin: Yeah.

Alex: And I think something good about poetry is that it's quite freeing in the sense that poetry is very rarely cared about by the mainstream. So it's kind of like that's already kind of that's, that's not really an option. So, you know, what else have you got? What else have you got to bring to the table? And that can be really freeing and yeah, I think, yeah, bringing in other voices and sort of not just trying to, um, further my own career, but like support other people is really important to me. I guess for me it's important that whatever success looks like is done in a way that's like ethical and aligns with my values is - that's, that's really, really important to me. I don't have a great concept of what success looks like, honestly.

Erin: Yeah, well, that's an answer in itself. Again, like, that's a really interesting, yeah, thing to think about. Like maybe it's not something we think about as often as you might think, you know?

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: I'm just looking to the ... here's one more question that maybe is, like, a kind of slant take on that idea of success. So what do you think is required, in order for disabled artists to - we've said, you know, that's a very difficult as an umbrella term but -

Alex: Yep.

Erin: what do you think is required in order for us to be able to professionally thrive?

Alex: Um ... that's a really big question.

Erin: Really big and it can be, like, it doesn't have to be like the one and total answer.

Alex: Yeah.

Erin: If that helps!

Alex: It's difficult because I do feel like it would vary from person to person but ... I guess something - maybe this is just something I've been thinking about because it's a bit topical - but I have noticed that a lot of festivals have gone back to no longer allowing or no longer accommodating live streaming and virtual attendance of events and I think this is something that bugs me because of course during COVID that could all magically happen when everyone needed it, but when it's just disabled people who need to participate in that way, suddenly it's less of a priority.

Erin: Yeah, yeah.

Alex: So I guess, sort of taking that example and just like generalising it a bit, I think that disabled people, as both writers and artists and audience members - however, like participating at all levels - should be thought of like as a priority and not as an afterthought of like, oops, we didn't accommodate this group and now there's nothing we can do.

Erin: Yeah.

Alex: And I think, yeah, just sometimes there can just sort of be an assumption that there's no disabled people in the room and if that's the case, it's often because the room isn't made to be accessible to disabled people so I think just a broader awareness of like what accessibility looks like for a variety of disabilities, like not just being like, well, there's a ramp and an elevator. We don't have to do any other thinking about that and yeah, these kind of things like virtual attendance of events, are actually treated as something that should be the norm, should always be incorporated and not just incorporated when it's convenient for the like, general population.

Erin: Yeah, that's an extremely good point and like you said before, you mentioned that you're coming, you're slowly coming to terms with like asking upfront for what you need or what would make the participation more comfortable, more accessible for you but also perhaps it would be nice if the onus wasn't always on the person ...

Alex: Absolutely.

Erin: ... to, to stipulate their requirements again and again.

Alex: Yeah, absolutely.

Erin: Yeah. Um, that's pretty much. I think we've gotten through almost all of the questions except for the most important one, which is, is there something I haven't asked that you think I should or anything like you would like to tell me about in order to understand you and your work? Anything, just you know, that you'd like to add.

Alex: Um - what are - um, I don't think so. Maybe just that I know my work is a little bit weird, and even if I didn't have a disability, people would probably still find it weird and that's fine with me.

Erin: Weird is fine. Yeah, well, I think we've pretty much gotten - we did say we would circle back, but no pressure to -

Alex: I don't have any. I'm so sorry. What's probably going to happen is I'm going to go to bed and suddenly think of, like, a bunch of different people.

Erin: And, like, you know I've already taken up almost an hour of your time, so there's no need to follow up but you can always!

Alex: Thank you. That's really nice. Awesome. You did a really good job.

Erin: Aw thanks Alex. Well, so did you.

Alex: Thank you.