

023 Wysing 30th Anniversary Podcast: Taylor Podcast Transcript

Harold Offeh: Hello! My name is Harold Offeh and I'm here at Wysing Arts Centre. We've been recording a series of conversations with different people related to Wysing Arts Centre. It's very much framed by the 30th anniversary of Wysing. Today I'm really excited and privileged to be talking to Taylor Le Melle. Hello Taylor.

Taylor Le Melle: Hi, how are you?

HO: I'm good.

TLM: Good! *laughs*

HO: *laughs* Thank you so much for, on a very busy day, you're here at Wysing and there's other stuff going on but taking some time out just to have this kind of conversation. Really the idea of this is to create a series of kind of conversations that will feed into a podcast that I think will just give different impressions of peoples' perspectives and experiences of being at Wysing and working with Wysing, and I have a few questions that are just sort of used to frame the conversation a little bit. So, I'm going to go ahead and ask the first question.

TLM: Yeah.

HO: I'd like you to talk about or describe your first night at Wysing staying on site.

TLM: Yeah...I actually felt really relieved. I think that, well two things, when I applied for the residency...it was actually around this time last year, maybe it was a few...mid-February when I came up last year so the weather was quite similar, it was kind of cold-ish to chilly, suggesting that it's going to warm up soon. There were little tiny things like starting to grow. I remember being quite like really nervous before I came. I have a friend who actually at the same time was going away to a residency that was like a year in another country like quite far away and I just kept on talking to that person about how nervous I was about going to Wysing which sounds a bit ridiculous because it's like an hour away and I can clearly go back to London if I had to or whatever, and also I'm not from London, I'm already away, so I don't know why I had all of this fear basically. So, I was really nervous when I showed up but when I came I felt...I just instantly felt really relieved. I think that was for two reasons, one is that, you know, you spoke about being busy in the introduction and one of the things I was really, at that point, looking for a way to figure out how to do was to not be so busy. I feel like that's something that I have, or had have...am still in the process of undoing but had taken on as a necessary aspect of this profession, being a curator/writer// all these slashes that we wear right? So actually, just immediately coming here and it being relatively quiet.... I was like, 'Oh, I think I can actually...this could actually be the space where I could figure out what is the pace that I want to go at'. Do you know what I mean when you're just in a place where actually the environmental pace around you is much slower. That was something that

immediately sat in with me. I was really excited. I also realised in that moment, how much of my ability to just plug in and be comfortable here was kind of predicated on...I guess previous experiences of being in rural areas in other places that I've lived. That's been a much sort of larger kind of portion of my life than living in a city, before London right. And so actually, some of the things that I was expecting in terms of maybe I was expecting to feel really lonely or I was expecting to feel really bored. All of these things that you might like, that you might archetypically feel as a 'city person' going to the countryside. None of that actually felt relevant and I think that was because I was able to.... I guess kind of connect back to or realise what had been imprinted in me prior Wying, from things I had already experienced and very much enjoyed. Basically, the first night I was here I remember it I was like oh yeah, you love the countryside, this is going to be fine, basically.

HO: *laughs* Were you staying on your own or was there a bunch of people?

TLM: Yeah so, I was in the live/work flat. I was...I think I was the only person who was here for that long. There were a few people on like shorter kind of few day type things. There was a programme where someone was here for a week and you know, a couple people here and there for a few days for the various projects that Wying supports throughout the year but in terms of being on the kind of like residency here all the time, yeah I was the only person here. I loved it, I thought that was great. Yeah.

HO: I'm interested as well in sort of...you were here for quite a long time, is that right?

TLM: I was here off and on for most of last year. I kept on trying to find excuses to come back if I'm honest. *laughs*

HO: *laughs* So how did that experience kind of change in terms of.... I mean obviously, you're getting to know the place more and more....

TLM: Yeah. Well I think in the beginning, in the beginning portion...and I think that the thing that I didn't plan or have control over, the fact that I was the only person here, really dove-tailed quite nicely with my personal goal of trying to find some solitude and some calm and almost a way to re-enter my relationship with a profession that I don't want to make me super busy and crazy and tired and over-worked, under-paid, blah blah blah, and all these things that are a pervasive character of the profession. So that was really nice, and I think actually as I moved closer to the exhibition that obviously changed quite a bit because then there was a thing to do...and the also to the events that I did in May right. So actually May, when I did the three residency events was actually really busy. So yeah...there were definitely ebbs and flows in that. I actually to be honest really tried to not...I think it might be....I'm not sure if this is really answering your question so....redirect me if I'm going off on a tangent...I think it might be...there was something about being a curator in residence where I actually felt like I really had to or wanted to kind of like set a boundary for myself and remind myself that I don't work at Wying. I think in order to kind of like...do the thing of using the residency to enrich my practice, which I feel like is sort of the

assumption of what a residency is for basically. I actually tired really hard to not just let myself to slip back into a mode, which at that point I was quite good at which as just thinking of myself as an institutional curator or something like that right. So, I think that was definitely like a negotiation within myself in terms of how that then played out as we, as I said, moved closer to the final big thing or whatever of doing the show, so yeah.

HO: Okay. So, the next question is... and this is the one that I came up with because often I struggle with articulating my experiences but yeah, how would you describe Wysing to somebody who had maybe never heard of it or never visited.

TLM: Well...I feel like I did do a fair amount of this during the exhibition and the events because people would be asking me, 'What is this place?' I would always start by talking about the farmhouse...and now I'm worried that I might have been making a lot of stuff up. But basically I would describe the farmhouse and thinking of that as the central aspect or function of Wysing, which is to kind of house artists, then talking about the studios where there are artists who have a regularly tenancy here in addition to folks that come up here for like specified durations. I would talk about the different buildings. I mean I think it's really interesting to just look at Wysing and see the many different types of buildings that are here, literally the structures...so the difference between how the farmhouse looks and the New Block and the New Block and the gallery and then how the gallery looks to Amphis and then actually if you walk a little bit further back from Amphis and see all of the kind of structures and installations that people have installed kind of on the grounds. Land art!
laughs I used to really enjoy very nerdily saying land art to people. I don't know why. I think it's because Americans really love land art.

HO: That's a whole other question...

TLM: ...yeah, that's a tangent! *laughs*

HO: *laughs*

TLM: But yeah...so yeah, I definitely would always start talking about the art by kind of talking about the structures that are here, the buildings that are available here. But then also in terms of the programme I'd say, yeah, they do exhibitions...I think that one of the things that to me seems really distinct from other institutions that I've had experiences with, is that I've been in lots of institutions where the central kind of...or the hierarchy let's say as such in the programme is that the exhibition actually doing an exhibition are tantamount and everything else that happens in that institution maybe either feeds the exhibition or springs out from it whereas actually I feel like at Wysing the thing that that is in the centre is not the exhibitions I don't think, which I think allows them to be their own thing in some nice ways, but actually it is this kind of idea of hosting people in various ways so whether that's Lucy doing an education programme or like some of these residencies or things like that. But then I've also seen and realised the more that I've been here, how much of Wysing is about the kind of workshops and the...I don't want to use the word pedagogy too

loosely but yeah there are pedagogical aspects of what Wysing supports like Syllabus and things like so that so. Then kind of just letting people do their own thing and figure out what it is that they want to be doing. I think that's actually something that...maybe that's the reason why Wysing is really hard to describe, because I would actually say, if I actually had to actually place something in the middle, it would be that kind of porosity and that willingness to just sort of respond and be that kind of blank slate and let certain things just kind of stick to it. Yeah.

HO: Yeah there's that sense of hosting that you used which I think is quite interesting in terms of...it being...I think I'd use the word platform....but like sort of facilitating a number of processes and...yeah you're right in terms of that relationship...when you talk about institutions you can talk very much about like the exhibition programme as this sort of tangible thing, but what actually often makes it difficult here is the various strands of research and learning and dialogue and conversation that are kind of not framed necessarily around like clear outputs and it always seems like the outputs are sort, in a way, are on a continuum with conversations. I think in terms of...

TLM: Yeah, because it's like, how do you?... I think the central....my opinion of the central, not necessarily problem, but central question of Wysing is like, how do you respond to what people need? If you kind of put yourself forward as a place or a space where you're going to host people...I feel like part of hosting is figuring out what that guest needs right and I think actually then again if you want to be a place that hosts many different types of people, practices, things like that then actually you've got to be pretty dextrous, you know.

HO: Yep, for sure. No, it's good. Okay, so this next question is sort of based on...so the artist Ruth Biel instigated where people who've stayed in the farmhouse on residencies are invited to leave a book or a publication for future visitors so there's a kind of informal library or resource that's kind of being created. And I just wondered if you could talk about what you would or have left as part of that project?

TLM: Yeah, I left two books here. I tried to leave things that I really would want to read. I think that...yeah, I don't know, I think that was kind of my sense in terms of just like not trying to overthink it or whatever. But just being like, yeah I just really enjoyed reading this or I would really want to read this...I left a book called 'Emergent Strategy' by Adrienne Maree Brown which came out of a couple or maybe three years ago at this point, and...I guess emergent strategy is like a concept that she didn't necessarily invent in terms of how you kind of use the idea of change and not like think about change as something is like a hinderance or a deterrence but how you use change to bring about the things you want to see in the world. I think how she tries to talk about it being possible for artists, thinkers, writers, activists to do that is...she uses a lot of metaphor with the 'natural world'. So like imagining ones community as a flock of birds or using the way that mushroom detoxify as an analogue or a metaphor as to how you might like work through something that you need to get rid of in order to move forward in your practice or whatever. I found that actually really fun to read here. As I said I was basically alone. I was walking around

the footpaths, looking at all the flowers and the leaves that had the...what do you call it.... plant identification apps downloaded. I was taking pictures of things and being like, 'Ah, so this is milk thistle!'. And like having those kinds of really great experiences. So, I felt it was actually really productive to read that here and think about how actually some of that stuff could be a teacher for me. So that was one thing I left. And also, I had used some of the...I don't remember what I had used but I had used some of that in the programming that I did as well. I think actually the idea generally of the 'natural world' became really influential to me in terms of figuring out the exhibition and in October as well, just like why is that even when you conceptualise, I'm a person, I stop here and then nature starts when I look at it, or this kind of thing... Anyway, the second book I left... a compilation edited by a publisher called Margaret Busby who used to run a publisher called Alison and Busby right? Yeah. And she recently published a compilation called 'New Daughters of Africa' and I left that here as well. I left that for two reasons, one it was huge! It's like 800 pages and I ordered it...because I wanted to read a couple of specific poems that are in it and I didn't realise from the...I didn't look at the page count on the website when I was buying the thing. And then it's like this huge tome, I was like oh my god, I'm leaving this too.... So...but the reason why I got this book, there was this other thing that started to emerge for me while I was here, again one of the things that I tried to do, in terms of creating a level of slowness for myself, was trying to do research in a different way. I think research for me, before that point, was quite like a frantic magpie situation where maybe there would be some event or some thing that I had to know enough to be able to host that thing or lead that thing or drive that conversation and I'd basically try to skim read, and actually I think this is how curators are taught, sorry, but...you know, just trying to read enough to hold a potential space or rather I feel like that's how I was taught to be a curator, I don't know if all curators are taught like that. I was really trying to like really basically, finish a couple of books, do you know what I mean? And really have like a.... yeah just see what happens when I got past page 30 basically and I think part of that was also realising that there's so much.... *sigh* there's so much that has already happened. Like a lot of our...one particular curator, artist or writer in the present day I started to feel like there's this kind of sense of I have all these desires of things that I want to do, everything that I need is already available. I don't actually have to create a lot of knowledge, really at all. I don't have to create any knowledge, I just feel like I want to allow myself this space to kind of get in touch with the things that already exist and represent those and hope that those will be of use to other people. I won't get into it now because we'll be here all day, but I think actually learning about Margaret Busby's publishing practice in the 60s and 70s was part of that. In terms of being like, oh this is someone who...the things that she's already done are so fruitful to me to even just ready on Wikipedia...or even as someone else....an artist and archivist called Ego Ahaime has also told me about is the way that Margaret Busby continues to...I'm rambling now but sorry, continues to let's say publish in a different way by making Wikipedia pages for different artists and things like that, so anyway just like the idea of like okay actually there's this person who already exists who's done everything, or done a lot of things that I'm trying to even find the language around would be possible. So yeah, I wanted to buy her latest book and then it was like 800 pages and I was like, I can't take this with me. I have

engaged with it and so I knew that I would come back to Wysing. I was in the farmhouse earlier today, I was like okay that's great it's still here. I might go look at another couple pages again over lunch, but I thought that actually, that could be...there are so many different writers in that book as well, that I thought that that could be of use to anyone who comes to the farmhouse.

HO: But it's also a model or way of working that you were interested in engaging with, and just to recognise that there is this other way of working...

TLM: Yeah, totally.

HO: ...that sits outside some of the orthodoxies that are sort of imposed.

TLM: Yeah, totally.

HO: I think that's it. I think it's really rich, your insight into your experiences here and I think there's something particularly about the length of time that you spent here and the kind of ongoing engagement. I think that's also interesting, the idea of a... because often institutional relationships can be quite transactional... That possibility of a kind of like extended ongoing conversation that, you know, might have pauses...

TLM: Yeah...

HO: ...but can restart again, I think is something that... There's the possibility of that, I think, here.

TLM: Yeah. Totally. I lived in the live/work, I lived in the farmhouse. I actually lived next door to the recording studio for couple weeks as well...so yeah I felt I actually...this thing that you're saying about it being a ...not that there weren't pauses or shifts in that relationship but the relationship did actually continue for the better part of a year. Yeah.

HO: Thank you so much Taylor.

TLM: Thank you!