S1 Episode 11: Trans Bodies in Art with Mr Leo Mateus Art

00:00:07:14 - 00:00:29:13
Leo
Welcome to the LGBT Consortium Podcast, Consortium supports LGBT plus groups, organisations and projects across the UK so that LGBT communities in need have access to the best support possible. This podcast series will be taking a deeper dive into the issues that matter to the LGBT community and finding out more about our members and the work they do.

00:00:31:20 - 00:00:48:16
Leo
Welcome. My name is Leo. My pronouns are he/they and I'm the communications officer at Consortium. For Trans Awareness Week I'll be hosting this podcast episode with Ocean from Mr. Leo Mateus Art about trans bodies in art and much more. Ocean, would you like to introduce yourself?

00:00:49:01 - 00:01:19:22
Ocean
Hello. My name is Ocean. My pronouns are he and they. I am a trans masc-ish artist and illustrator and I run Mr. Leo Mateus Art on Instagram, which is where I usually am and I have like my website and my little Etsy shop and I just do fun things around trans art.

00:01:20:04 - 00:01:29:15
Leo
Amazing. Thank you. And so, first of all, we're going to talk about you as an artist, Ocean. And I'm interested to know about how you started doing art?

00:01:29:15 - 00:02:01:04
Ocean
Yeah. So I feel like my whole family are very creative, like even both sets of grandparents. So we've always been encouraged to be creative in my family. And like the earliest memories I have of doing art were these like, I used to make these books, well, I say books. They were like the front cover of this Halloween novel.

00:02:01:04 - 00:02:28:05
Ocean
that I wanted to make and all the front covers were the same and in like bubbly writing where it was like bloody and a bit gory. But I never got past the first page, which might have been like an insight into ADHD when I was like five or something. And then, yeah, so I've always been quite creative in that sense, but

00:02:28:05 - 00:02:54:19
Ocean
Mr. Leo Mateus Art started when I was at uni because I would doodle during lectures and then my friends would start asking me to draw stuff for them. And then I started drawing trans specific stuff and then more people would see it and kind of request more. And then I would just be like, this is my niche. And that kind of grew from there.

00:02:55:06 - 00:02:59:22
Leo
That's so interesting though. Amazing. And what's your favourite thing about being an artist?

00:03:00:15 - 00:03:29:06
Ocean
Probably just having the- I think it's a few things. The first being having the flexibility to just make your own rules and do your own thing, but then also the impact that it has on other people. And when I get comments or people message me about like how they've never seen themselves in art and then I did something that made them feel normal.

00:03:29:24 - 00:03:33:13
Ocean
That is what makes me want to keep going and do more.

00:03:33:18 - 00:03:43:00
Leo
Yeah, 100%. And do you have a favourite piece of art that you've made? I know that you've made a lot of art so it probably might be a bit hard. Do you have a favourite piece?

00:03:43:14 - 00:04:20:05
Ocean
I think recently I've been- I did a photoshoot with two trans people and I'm bringing out more content around like T4T relationships and a lot of that art. It's not like very traditional art, I guess, because it's not like loads of drawings, but it's like the infographics about what trans for trans enby looks like or how to manage periods when you're trans and feeling dysphoric.

00:04:20:11 - 00:04:31:06
Leo

I feel like those things right now are becoming my favourites because it's making a difference and it's helping people and it's a bit more taboo, which I quite like.

00:04:32:10 - 00:04:40:05
Leo
Ah yeah, definitely. And besides the prints that you make with your art, what other types of products do you make?

00:04:41:10 - 00:05:18:00
Ocean
I have... I'm just sitting next to my like bookcase, which is like my shopfront, basically. So I'm just going to go through things. I have postcards, badges, stickers, jewellery, candles, and I briefly had pots and trays and trying to bring them back. But I'm having some issues with the material, so they might be back soon. Um I think that's the main things.

00:05:19:09 - 00:05:33:05
Leo
That's still a lot of stuff though. Yeah. Incredible. Yeah. And next topic I would like to talk about is trans bodies in art. Why do you think it's important that all trans bodies are represented in art?

00:05:33:23 - 00:06:05:13
Ocean
I think it's just a case of normalising it because I have gone through so many phases of being so like insecure and ashamed for having a trans body. And I used to go to this trans support group and they had a session on like puberty and trans sexual health. And I remember seeing two trans like illustrations of nude bodies on the table.

00:06:05:13 - 00:06:28:08
Ocean
And the group were trying to be really like inclusive. And, you know, it was a progressive thing to have done. But I felt really embarrassed to see that because I was like, Oh my God, everyone knows what I look like naked now. And this is like the worst thing in the world. So I left that session because I just felt so embarrassed.

00:06:29:01 - 00:06:59:10
Ocean
So it's a bit of a surprise to think about what I do now because so much of my art is like nude trans bodies. But I think I just needed to, like, normalise that for

myself and unlearn that trans bodies are not wrong. Like, I had to, like, tell myself that and make myself realise that trans bodies are just normal.

00:06:59:10 - 00:07:04:03
Ocean
And then that makes you feel normal if that makes sense.

00:07:04:16 - 00:07:32:08
Leo
l00%. I mean, as a fellow trans person, a trans masc person as well, like for me, even before my transition, I always had this like idealistic view of what I wanted to look like after I started transitioning and what a trans body should look like. Yeah. And it didn't help that the art that I was seeing and the media I was seeing wasn't representing all trans bodies.

00:07:32:13 - 00:08:00:14
Leo
Yeah. So it took me a while to fully accept that, like, well, no, we're not all the same and we're not going to all look perfect and our imperfections and our differences are actually what may make us beautiful and individual. Yeah, and it was when I stumbled upon artists like yourself that like, I fully saw my, like you said earlier, I fully saw myself in art and I never had before.

00:08:00:14 - 00:08:22:19
Leo
And it made me it made me embrace my trans body. I'm a plus size trans person as well who had top surgery not too long ago. And I had to accept that, like, my results weren't perfect. My scars aren't perfect, but they're perfect to me. And it's beautiful that I was able to sort of accept that because of art.

00:08:22:19 - 00:08:24:19
Leo
Like, you make it so thank you.

00:08:25:13 - 00:09:05:16
Ocean
Yeah, I totally get that. Like I used to have a blog on Tumblr back in the day and I posted a picture of my scars on there one day and someone commented saying like, your scars look really scary. No offence. And I was just like kind of already insecure about how my body looked because it didn't look like the bodies, the trans bodies we see in the media, there's definitely like a- a vibe that the media likes to pick up on, of these like really toned, muscly trans men that have lots of facial hair and chiselled bodies.

00:09:06:02 - 00:09:21:11
Ocean
And so when there's one picture of someone that doesn't fit that, people kind of panic because it's a reminder that not everyone looks the same, which I feel like would be very boring if we all did anyway.

00:09:21:19 - 00:09:30:12
Leo
Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Like I I'm glad that I'm glad that I'm at a place now where I find my trans body beautiful.

00:09:30:22 - 00:09:31:11
Ocean
And.

00:09:32:03 - 00:09:58:15
Leo
I it sometimes it's hard, but like, yeah, it's nice to have that now than how it used to be. And also, I mean, this brings me onto the topic of plus size representation. And as a fellow plus size person, why do you think it's important that we're represented... particularly in your art and also just in the general like trans art community?

00:09:58:15 - 00:10:26:04
Ocean
Just because it's realistic, you know, like it's so easy to feel like you're the only person in the world that looks like you do, but then when you look around at everyday people who are walking past you in the street, everyone looks so different and it's just so important to recognize that you're not the only person in the world that looks the way you do.

00:10:26:24 - 00:10:58:14
Ocean
And, I dunno, it's just I think the more visibility plus-size people have, the more normalised it becomes. And I don't think that's a bad thing. I think there's a lot of controversy about normalising fatness for plus size bodies. And there's there's worse things to worry about. And like being a bigger person doesn't isn't a bad thing.

00:10:59:06 - 00:11:02:05
Leo
No. Yeah, exactly. I mean, that's a.

00:11:02:05 - 00:11:04:08

Ocean
Very basic minimum. Yeah.

00:11:04:20 - 00:11:27:11
Leo
Yeah, exactly. And it doesn't help that like, you know, when it comes to trans people, especially plus size trans people, especially if we are seeking like top surgery or other surgeries, you know, BMI is such a huge thing as well for us. Yeah. And like, it's so disheartening when you have other people who don't kind of go through these issues.

00:11:28:23 - 00:11:42:15
Leo
But like, it's so disheartening when you really, really want something like top surgery and like you're turned away because you are a particular BMI, even though we know that BMI isn't accurate at all.

00:11:43:09 - 00:11:44:07
Ocean
100%.

00:11:44:14 - 00:12:13:18
Leo
Yeah, exactly. It's stuff like that. That kind of it's really disheartening. If like even if not being able to see ourselves at all is enough. We have to go through that as well. And so I yeah, I think having art like you do and other people in the community and representing plus-size people, even if we're going through like a really hard time, with sort of self-acceptance and the stuff around us at least we can see ourselves being represented and being visible.

00:12:14:16 - 00:13:05:20
Ocean
That's so true. Like I saw a trans person whose been documenting their liposuction from their hips and they got a comment being like, Oh, why didn't you just try and lose weight and not like opt for the easy option, which is surgery. And there's so many things wrong with that. First of all, not recognizing that trans specific surgeries are like not just cosmetic and can be lifesaving, but also knowing that everyone should be entitled to that and knowing that there are surgeons who specifically say that they don't believe in the BMI system because it's false, it's not accurate, but it also encourages people to become more unhealthy or unhealthy in the first place because

00:13:06:09 - 00:13:31:11
Ocean

you have to get to a certain place and do so dangerously. And when- I've had the first stage of Metoidioplasty and in order to get that, I had to lose a lot of weight, and the surgeon would be like, Just do whatever it takes, even if it's like fasting or just having drinks for like a few weeks leading up to the surgery.

00:13:31:23 - 00:13:58:04
Ocean
And people will say like the BMI system is for health reasons to make sure that you're the healthiest you can be before going into surgery, but not realizing that the the surgeons are like asking you to become really unhealthy by starving yourself just so they can get you to look a specific way so their portfolios look better in their eyes.

00:13:59:08 - 00:14:20:18
Leo
Mm hmm. Yeah. I mean, like, talking personally for a second. Like I went through sort of... like a similar thing. Like when I was looking for- I went private for my top surgery and when I was looking into like different surgeons and stuff, like a lot of them had a specific BMI that you had to be under and that it was just so disheartening and awful.

00:14:20:18 - 00:14:43:20
Leo
And like I sort of went with a particular surgeon who wanted me to lose a specific amount of weight in like very few months. And like I did end up like trying to like aggressively work out all the time and not eat as much. And it wasn't good for my mental health or my physical health at all.

00:14:44:02 - 00:15:08:06
Leo
And it wasn't until I found another surgeon that was like, BMI didn't matter to him. Yeah. And he much preferred me to be happy with my body. And so, yeah, it wasn't an issue with him. And I had top surgery with him. No problem. And it still isn't an issue, you know. So like, yeah.

00:15:08:19 - 00:15:23:07
Ocean
I think people need to realise that health looks different on everyone. And this whole concept of like needing to be thin and muscly to be healthy is just so outdated and incorrect.

00:15:24:19 - 00:15:38:20
Leo

100%. And talking about sort of still the same topic of like trans bodies in art, you have a project called Body Like Mine. Um, can you explain a little bit about what the project is and how people can get involved?

00:15:39:13 - 00:16:18:21
Ocean
Yeah. So I started that because I felt like I was feeling really insecure about my own chest because I'm fat and I have lots of stretch marks and my scars are quite like wide and wonky. And so I drew myself and was like, This is what I look like, trying to be unapologetic about that. And people messaged being like, I've never seen a body that looks like mine, but we have the same stretch marks or the same type of scars or my nipples are also a bit wonky like yours.

00:16:18:21 - 00:16:45:09
Ocean
And I was just like, Well, let's turn this into a project and draw more people. So there's a section on my website where I think it's just at the top under body like mine. And there's already a big gallery of lots of different bodies, trans women and femme people, as well as trans masc and men and non-binary people.

00:16:46:07 - 00:17:20:16
Ocean
And you don't have to have had surgery to like submit your pictures or anything. You just fill out a form. Tell me a bit about your relationship to your body and then send a picture and I draw it and nobody's face is included and I can not draw specific tattoos if you want to remain anonymous. But it's just a really nice way to see the diversity in the community.

00:17:21:01 - 00:17:46:01
Ocean
And like also I feel like so many people in their stories be like I feel like a lot of people write that they're really nervous about sending the picture because they don't feel like anyone looks like them. And then there'll be a comment being like, This looks just like me. And that is the best feeling ever. So I just love the project.

00:17:46:02 - 00:18:13:05
Leo
100%. Yeah, like, I mean, when I saw that and I saw like the, the vast amount of diversity, like people who have had top surgery, people who haven't had surgery, everyone, the amazing different identities like it just felt very wholesome and very just like affirming, you know. Yeah. And that's so lovely to see.

00:18:13:17 - 00:18:39:12
Ocean
Yeah. I'd love to get more visual diversity. So people with disabilities that you can see in the chest, or the stomach, there was one image of someone who had a I think it's early ostomy or colostomy. I can't remember the name of it, but I'm starting to do full bodies now. Like from neck to just under genitals as well.

00:18:39:12 - 00:18:57:12
Ocean
Just to show the diversity and some of the images are just genitals as well so we can see the impact of hormones on people's bodies and how different people look and all that kind of fun stuff.

00:18:57:12 - 00:19:07:00
Leo
Amazing and what does it mean to be able to do the art that you do, and what sort of response have you had?

00:19:07:00 - 00:19:33:09
Ocean
I've kind of like, dunno, it's a weird one because sometimes it's very surreal and I just feel like I'm sitting in my little bedroom drawing these little doodles and like it's just lines and lines and lines and it feels very abstract. And then I put it out there and sometimes it has an impact and sometimes it doesn't.

00:19:33:12 - 00:20:05:09
Ocean
But the main thing is that it's a space where it's just trans positivity for the most part, and I think it's just a nice break from the news and talking about the terrible things that happen to the community, I feel like I just want the space to be like, look at how incredible the community is and what we're doing and how we're thriving.

00:20:05:09 - 00:20:32:08
Ocean
And I think it's quite it's a big deal to be a trans person who can live off creating trans art, because we're currently, sadly, in a society that doesn't really want that to happen and so the fact that the community is making it happen for someone like me is just amazing.

00:20:33:03 - 00:20:46:15
Leo

100%. Yeah, definitely. And so, onto your projects that you've done before, could you tell me a little bit about the work that you've done for Netflix, My Genderation, United Nations, etc.?

00:20:47:06 - 00:21:23:02
Ocean
Sure. So Netflix had a project, I think it was last year where they paired up queer artists to their queer colleagues or employers at the Netflix headquarters, I guess. And so I was paired with someone and asked to draw something that represented them, and that was a really nice thing and a really nice project to do that felt really genuine and wholesome.

00:21:23:02 - 00:22:08:13
Ocean
And we got to like have this call just me and this other person and talk about like our journeys. And then I got sent a little book with everyone's art in it which was really nice. Yeah. And then My Genderation is a trans film organisation in the UK and every month I do illustrations for their Instagram and that's all really like trans positive stuff as well as illustrations about how trans people have always existed and trans people in history and things that make you feel euphoric about your gender and things like that.

00:22:08:13 - 00:22:32:06
Ocean
So that's it's really nice to work with trans people as well because there's just- there isn't that need to like sensor yourself which I feel like a lot of the times you have to do when you're around cis people because I'm worried that I'm going to have to explain something or I'm going to have to be really careful about how I talk about my gender because I don't want to confuse anyone.

00:22:32:19 - 00:22:38:12
Ocean
But when it's an organisation that's trans and you're working for trans people, you can just like laugh about it.

00:22:39:12 - 00:22:39:19
Leo
Yeah.

00:22:40:13 - 00:23:02:21
Ocean
And United Nations got in contact with me because they wanted me to illustrate a story about three trans people that they had. And that was last year

as well. And all of these things are on my website, I think. So you can go and have a look at them in more detail if you want.

00:23:03:04 - 00:23:26:12
Leo
Thank you. And like, as you briefly touched on before I asked the last question, like it is, it is an incredibly tough time for the trans community and the non-binary community at the moment. And so it is nice that like people can go to your Instagram or your art to sort of escape that and see themselves represented and celebrated.

00:23:26:13 - 00:23:42:00
Leo
And it's like that, joy, you know, we really need more like joy and celebration at the moment. And also, I noticed on another part of your website, you have a trans inclusive fund. Could you tell me about that?

00:23:42:21 - 00:24:27:06
Ocean
Yep. So every month I try- well I do donate a pound from every online order to a different cause. And it's always trying trans inclusive. So previously there's been projects that support trans people who are victims of domestic violence or trans swimming groups, or they were LGBT swimming groups, but trans inclusive and and then more recently, it's been more about fundraisers for hormones or surgeries that people are going through or even just like trans people who need financial support.

00:24:27:18 - 00:24:59:01
Ocean
So you can go on my website if you scroll down towards the end or there might be like a link in the menu, you can submit your details in there for if you've got like a project or a go fund me and I'll just put it in a spreadsheet so I can donate to it in the next month whenever I can, and I just pick one cause each month to support.

00:24:59:01 - 00:25:15:04
Leo
That’s so amazing. Absolutely incredible. And next and one of the last questions actually, what project has been your favourite to work on? Oh, it's a hard question.

00:25:15:12 - 00:25:48:18
Ocean

Yeah, I feel like, okay, I'm going to say two things. One thing I would probably say the Body Like Mine Project is the most rewarding and I can see the impact that's having. So that makes me love it more. But I also feel like the newest photoshoot with the two trans people has also been so beautiful.

00:25:48:21 - 00:25:49:08
Leo
Honestly.

00:25:49:08 - 00:26:30:21
Ocean
Yeah, that was such. That was my second photoshoot I've ever done. I really. Yeah, I was given a like a grant to cover the costs of that by Out Britain who support LGBT businesses and I'm not sure if it's worldwide or the UK, but they're an amazing organisation. And um, I was granted, I think it was £250 which covered the cost of the studio like the photo studio and part of the cost for the models.

00:26:31:08 - 00:27:22:20
Ocean
And it was just such a nice environment to have, like it was me, these two other trans people and everyone was just so sweet and nice and like my heart was just so full. Just thinking about like these connections that we're making and the content that we're bringing out. And Quinnely, one of the models that I hired, I asked them to write a little bit about their identity and that photo I shared it on, I think I shared it on the 5th of November, but it's a picture of their top surgery scars, their holding some dried flowers and they've got like a robe, a white robe on, and they're just talking about how language might not be there

00:27:22:20 - 00:27:41:10
Ocean
to explain how they feel about themselves. But that's just because we are too incredible for language. It was just like such a gorgeous piece of writing and I just love that my work means I get to meet people like this and be around such amazing people. So yeah.

00:27:42:15 - 00:28:00:00
Leo
That's absolutely like I've seen those photos and they're absolutely beautiful and like, yeah, yeah, we need, we need more. Like more stuff like that. Like, more like art like that, more photography like that, because it's just, it's just so nice to see that, you know?

00:28:00:00 - 00:28:00:12
Ocean
Yeah.

00:28:01:19 - 00:28:09:03
Leo
I mean, it's nice to see that, but I can't imagine what it was like to like, work in that sort of safe space and that environment.

00:28:09:12 - 00:28:18:21
Ocean
Yeah, it's a very unique experience, but something I definitely want to do more of.

00:28:20:06 - 00:28:32:15
Leo
Yeah, definitely. And lastly, where can people find you? So your website, social media ,shops, etc., and like where can people find your art like out and about?

00:28:33:24 - 00:29:09:20
Ocean
My username on everything for now is Mr. Leo Mateus Art. That might change in the new year but before December ends that's what it will be I think. So that's Mr. Leo Mateus Art on Instagram and on Etsy and Twitter, I think. I'm not as active on Twitter. And then I think that's also my name on Patreon, but on my Instagram, I've got a link with all my links and my website is also Mr. Leo Mateus Art.

00:29:10:15 - 00:29:43:11
Ocean
So yeah, I have most of the products are on Etsy and MrLeo MateusArt.com but I have some exclusive things on my main website because I can't like figure out how to get them on Etsy. But for the most part, their the same. So there's the Common Press which is in London, Queer Britain has my jewelry in it and they’re a museum in London as well.

00:29:43:13 - 00:29:55:16
Ocean
Kemptown Bookshop newly has my stuff in which is in Brighton. And I feel like, there's a few other places, but I'm blanking...

00:29:55:16 - 00:29:57:17
Leo
There’s just too many places to count!

00:29:58:13 - 00:30:19:21
Ocean
Yeah, I think in the future there's going to be more because a few places have reached out to me. There's a... an adult store in Germany wants to stock some of my stuff. So that might happen soon, but we'll have to see.

00:30:19:24 - 00:30:42:18
Leo
Thank you so much for talking to me, Ocean. Thank you for listening to the LGBT Consortium Podcast. You can find more about what we so from our website Consortium.lgbt and on social media, @LGBTconsortium everywhere.