Episode 4 Nastasia Alberti: Archives and Making Transcript

• 39:58

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

vanessa bell, photographs, people, charleston, artist, archive, bloomsbury, feel, ceramic, lived, bit, patti smith, art, painting, curate, create, craft, eileen, walls, images

SPEAKERS

Quote, Nastasia Alberti, Jade French, Suzanna Petot

Music 00:23

Quote 00:23
After lunch as we watched the rain pour down and premature darkness rolled up, he said in his searching, personal way, Lazarus apart. Would you like to see coming up the drive? I hesitated a moment, and he supplied the answer. Virginia, of course.

Jade French 00:45
Virginia Woolf, of course, is one of the 20th century's most famous writers. But perhaps joining her up the drive would be her sister, Vanessa. In recent years, Vanessa Bell's work has been the subject of the Dulwich Picture Galleries retrospective in 2017, which showcased the breadth of her creative work through painting ceramics, fabrics and photographs. She was a pivotal member of the influential group who were an ensemble of 10 artists, which included Clive Bell, whose recollection we just heard, art critic Roger fry, post impressionist painter, Duncan Grant, and writer E. M. Forster. Hi Nastasia, welcome to the podcast. I'm so excited to talk to you today about your work on the Vanessa Bell archive and find out more about your perspective on photography, archives and making.

Nastasia Alberti 01:29
Yeah, I mean, I'm really excited to talk to you about, you know, Vanessa Bell and archives in general, I feel like specifically, about the photographs. I'm really excited to talk about it, because I think that not that many people know about it yet. And I really love her images. And I think for me, it was a really important collection to work with, because it had a huge impact on my career, but also had an impact – just you know – as an artist to myself, it really inspires me again, at a time that I didn't feel so inspired. It's probably one of the first collections that I worked with as an archivist, where I felt really passionate about, you know, the subject and I really fell in love with her.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

Jade French 02:10
That's really amazing. I can't wait to hear all about it. Well, maybe you want to start with just telling us a bit about Vanessa Bell and your experiences in her archive.

Nastasia Alberti 02:18
So I work with Vanessa Bell photographs at the Tate archive. And so I mean, Vanessa Bell was a British painter, which probably for many years was what was most known to be Virginia Woolf's sister, but she's also a really famous painter, and a wonderful photographer, she took photographs her whole life. And it's really something that I think more now that we are aware of, but for many years, it wasn't really something that people talked about. But she had photographs from, you know, living in London, and then throughout her life. So, I've worked with photographs that will be mostly taken in Charleston. So it really gave you a really great insight of how her life was in Charleston and, and the kind of life she made herself with Duncan Grant, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, her sister, and the three kids – she had Julian, Quentin and Angelica.

Jade French 03:23
So really a proper domestic creation than Charleston, it's kind of it's definitely about building your family and creating a place that they can live and create together.

Nastasia Alberti 03:34
Yeah, I think it's exactly what Charleston was, I think that's what's so beautiful, because it's just such a perfect mix of their family life. And also even just the life as an adult, there were definitely eccentric, they're, you know, they all fall in love with each other, and they're all kind of in a shared relationship. And I think they were, they were allowed to be very creative in that sense. But they also had the kids around, they were able to create a lot of arts. Alongside this, you had the career of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, which that painted this entire house, and used pottery and ceramic to make her home. But it's such a creative way. And I think, you know, they both had this to do there. So they could really fully be themselves and be artists as much as they wanted. They could just spend their entire day do that. And then also when they wanted a break, just kind of paint the the chairs of the table and all the things you know, along the years as well, it became really the work of love because so many people worked on their house, so it was mostly Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, but you had some sculpture from her son and in the garden at the end, and then also they've created a little theatre sort of scene with I think, an old caravan or something like this in the garden and you know, they're all made fake costumes, and then I think all that together, created a really, really cosy warm, creative space to be.

Jade French 05:09
And so how does the creative space of Charleston as a sort of fluid, experimental, familial place, link up to the work they did with the Omega workshop?

Nastasia Alberti 05:19
I think it's very similar in a way because the, you know, the Omega workshop, which were created by Roger Fry, was really about rejecting the tradition, the traditional distinction between the fine and decorative art, and about changing all those assumptions, and I think that what he was doing really with that workshop was - he was selling, you know, furniture, fabric, accessories, but all made by artists,

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

which I think it's exactly what Charleston is, because it is the decorative art what she's done, I mean, it is painting, tablecloths and, and sort of doors and doorknobs, and all that sort of thing, which can be seen. Exactly... It's exactly what he was doing with this workshop, it was a lot of motif. And I think it was a way to close that – you know, that space between fine and decorative art – it's just art. And it's just something that you could have in your home.

Jade French 06:19
It's the ultimate self expression isn't it really,

Nastasia Alberti 06:21
It is the best way you could just kind of show your personality as an artist in your home.

Jade French 06:27
Sounds amazing. So do you think Vanessa Bell's personality comes out in the archive?

Nastasia Alberti 06:31
Vanessa Bell was very funny, she was very, she had a very different personality. She's very funny, very outspoken, very, I think loud. And you read letters that she wrote that she's just really, she's a very funny person, I think.

Jade French 06:50
I want to ask you as well, did you go to the Dulwich Picture Gallery's retrospective [Legacy: Photographs by Vanessa Bell and Patti Smith]?

Nastasia Alberti 06:55
Well, I mean, I know that the photographs that they show in the exhibition, they were mostly from the Tate. So those are the photographs I've worked with. And I mean, they're stunning. I feel like I'm not the biggest fan of Patti Smith [whose photographs were also on view], as a writer, I really love her as a singer. And I think she, you know, she's talented in many ways. I think she's like a great performer. The personality does, it kind of makes sense. Because I see Patti Smith, in my head anyway, as this kind of bohemian, really kind of outspoken woman that, you know, really lives fully her life and ideals. And that's why I think of Vanessa Bell. I think Vanessa Bell was like this kind of free spirit, coming from a very aristocratic family, but then really breaking through from it, and making sure that she could be the person that she wanted to be .She was definitely punk if you think about it, because she really rejected everything that she was from. And I don't think it was easy at that time. I think even the way they were living, was really not accepted at a time it was done, especially not for women.

Jade French 08:02
Yeah, to be choosing your own path in that way.

Nastasia Alberti 08:06
Yeah and to prove that you could be a mother, a wife, a lover of, you know, an amazing artist, all the things that at that time, were really taboo that you could be one of those things. But you were – it's never quite all of it. You know, especially at this time, you'd always hear stories about 'oh, she was the

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

lover of this person', and but then you never talk about their art. It's what you focus on. But then for Vanessa Bell, I mean, I think people focus on all those aspects of her life. You know, the fact that she was married to Clive Bell, but also had an affair with Roger Fry, and also Duncan Grant was, you know, probably the biggest love of her life. All those facts are extremely important. And people talk about this a lot. But they also talk a lot about her painting. Her house Charleston, you know, the legacy she's left as an artist. So it's kind of interesting. And also we've we've also, you know, got the aspect of hearing from the kids about Vanessa Bell as a mother. So all those things that are like kind of goes together, which I don't think it's it was the case... for many women at that time,

Jade French 09:18
Yeah, definitely. No, it's like a radical domestic existence, isn't it?

Nastasia Alberti 09:22
It really is. Yeah. And that's what I think of Patti Smith is very much about her, but I think she fits in that category.

Jade French 09:28
Yeah, that's an interesting way of framing Vanessa Bell, actually, I've never thought of her as about quite how radical her choices and the way she lived were.

Nastasia Alberti 09:39
Yeah, I found a really radical – in so many things. I think we forget about how hard it must have been. To do those choices at that time as being a woman and also being from such an important family. You know, I think it's very difficult to break from it, but it's pretty rare. And actually, I feel like to some extent Virginia was never able to fully remove herself from the aristocracy of her family. But then I felt like Vanessa Bell definitely succeeded in that she had a very, very, very different life.

Jade French 10:15
Do you have – do you have a favourite piece from her, Vanessa Bell's, archive?

Jade French 10:18
Big into every image she took off Duncan Grant, but also I absolutely love Duncan Grant, so... But actually, the reason I love Duncan Grant is because of her. So it's the way she took photographs of him, I found him so beautiful, but also, there's just something about him that's really mysterious in her photographs, and it feels very intimate. I really like that, especially there are some some images that she took towards the end of her life, which was actually not in Charleston but in their house in the, in the south of France. And they were in the sort of garden, and he's just sitting with a cat. And it just is such a beautiful image, it looks so quiet and so peaceful, but they're just look so old. And because I've worked from the, you know, the image that starts so early on – they're very young – to just see the evolution how close they still are I feel, I feel like this image shows that really well. And I love, love that photograph...

Jade French 10:32
So really capturing the intimacy through the lens is what appeals to you the most?

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

Nastasia Alberti 11:26
Everyone she has taking photographs of – she knows them really, really well. And I think that's something that you can only do when you know them so well to have these sort of natural moments captured.

Jade French 11:40
It's interesting as well, because sometimes you might think of a camera as a distancing tool. But there's something between you and your subject. And in the same way in the archive, sometimes you might think of those objects as being distant from the person that made them. But actually in both, it's the intimacy and the voice and the humour and the personality that you're really bringing out of the pieces in front of you.

Nastasia Alberti 12:04
Yeah, totally. I agree. And I think that's really, you can't remove it from the artist. I think it's not something that the distance between you – I think a camera, puts, I mean, if anything, I think it makes you closer to the person taking a photograph, because you're able to look at little details that I think sometime in you know, if you didn't have a camera with you, you might not see that detail. But that forces you to see those details, which means that you become even closer. And I think there's something - but yeah, archive, I think is a great way to be close to people and to understand, you know a person better because it gives you so much information about the idea behind what was done, or why was it done. It kind of tells you about the tone, some people like as I said, I could tell that Vanessa Bell was very funny from her letters, which I wouldn't know that by just looking at her photograph, but I can tell you that by, you know, reading her writing.

Jade French 13:06
Yeah, it's bringing a full picture together of the artistic lifespan. And I love I just want to go back to this image of Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell in their later years. And it's just incredible that you can really trace her whole life through the archive, I think often we tend to maybe focus a bit too much on the Bloomsbury years, or the, you know, the height of the early 20th century and the movements that these people were involved in, but they lived long lives. And that's kind of beautiful that that's also recorded and kept for posterity.

Nastasia Alberti 13:39
Yeah, I agree with you. I think it's it's sometimes a shame because they are, I mean, it's a blessing and a curse, I guess, you know, the fact that the Bloomsbury set are so famous, and people are obsessed with what it meant to be part of that group and, and you know, everything that they've done, but I think we forget that they are individuals. And what's very beautiful, I agree with you, is to just sort of see them evolved. I think even the artwork, even the painting, you could see an evolution that's that's really, really quite moving, I think. And in her photographs, you can absolutely see a whole life you can see her when she used to be very young and with her sister living in London, you can see her you know, when she was starting to understand her camera when she was taking photograph of McCarthy being nude in the studio in London, and it's kind of like young and playful, and you can tell that she's kind of, you know, just trying around and being very young. And then you could also see when the kid starts coming

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

and how the images change around them – and then towards the end you also see more photograph of her and that can ground for example where they are in the garden, having a meal, having wine, and you know, the got these hats, and you can tell the very tan and the old and it just, it's just so beautiful. It's so personal. And it's definitely, you can just kind of imagine the little bit what her life was.

Jade French 15:15
I think that's so lovely. And I mean, Vanessa Bell lived a long life she she passed away in 1961. And you know, we think of the 60s as the free love baby boomers. But Vanessa and Duncan and Roger and Clive, they're, you know, doing that way before...

Nastasia Alberti 15:31
Oh, way before there were there were very, very ahead of the time...

Jade French 15:36
They got the free love thing down.

Nastasia Alberti 15:38
They did, they did. I mean, I think that's obviously something that's really cool about them, I guess is that they're all loved each other. But it is – it's complex. I mean, I definitely all – I think it probably wasn't very nice, actually, for the kids. Actually, I've never read any Angelica Garnett's books, which I really want to, but I haven't had the chance yet. But I know, I know that she she said many times that she thought it was very hard to grow up in Charleston. And she felt like it was very hard to be around those adults, because there are so absorbed in their own lives and their own love stories, and that they kind of forgot about the kids. So I guess, you know, that's also another side of the story. It probably wasn't that easy to be part of that sort of free movement. But I definitely think that they were free and and very gender fluid and honest, you know, with what they wanted?

Jade French 16:33
And what archives do you work with, at the Tate?

Nastasia Alberti 16:36
I mean, I've worked with quite a few archives, I've worked with another archive, actually from an artist that was not part of the of the Bloomsbury as, as we could, you know, as per se, but she was gravitating around them, and she knew them from the encounter. It's Dorothy Brett, who was an amazing British painter, who actually so – started, you know, in that sort of circle. But then her career really, really changed direction because she moved to Mexico. And so her her paintings are very different from everything that has been done in the Bloomsbury set. It's very different. The colours are very different. But then also just the way she would draw people obviously, it's it's a completely different style, and I absolutely love her paintings. I think she is one of the most talented... and um... I'm working with Whitechapel Gallery, they're going to have a show about Eileen Agar. Do you know her [oh my god, amazing] I thought you would. So they're gonna have a lot of archives there – and stuff about Hepworth as well with linking to any Eileen Agar. That's gonna be really cool. I'm looking forward to seeing this. And it's going to be in Whitechapel... so it's near both of us.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

Jade French 18:02
We can walk?

Nastasia Alberti 18:03
we can walk there!

Jade French 18:05
And do you work on the Eileen Agar archive as well...

Nastasia Alberti 18:09
I have not worked on the Eileen Agar archive. My colleague Victoria worked on the Eileen Agar archive. But I have done I have looked into the archive a bit because I did a Show and Tell about a woman in photography, actually, with with that same colleague, and we decided to show images of Eileen Agar. And so I was able to kind of look at all of her images that she's, she's taken. We've got some really beautiful photographs at the Tate archive, actually. And yeah, so that's how – and then I think, you know, those are basically loans items. So it's also not something I normally deal with, but because everyone at the maintenance is furloughed, I've just kind of been brought into it.

Jade French 18:53
Amazing. So the same, as in the same Eileen Agar who did textile design.

Nastasia Alberti 18:59
Yeah. painter. Yeah. The same. Yeah. That Eileen Agar. Oh, my

Jade French 19:03
God, that's gonna be amazing.

Nastasia Alberti 19:04
That's gonna do a really good exhibition, I think,

Jade French 19:07
and when does that happen?

Nastasia Alberti 19:09
But I mean, I don't know, because of what's happening [the pandemic]. I mean, not everything is going to be changed, every programme is gonna have to be completely rethinked. So I'm not quite sure. But you know, soon enough.

Nastasia Alberti 19:21
[Well, something to look forward to!]

Music 19:23
[Music]

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

Nastasia Alberti 19:32
The selection you make is a huge part of what makes you an artist. So for example, when I took photographs, I know that I would, you know, often share it with the person I've taken in the photos, of the people I've worked with, and then I would just tell them, you know, the one I'm selecting to show to the people, and it's kind of interesting, because more often, they would never, they never selected the same images that I would have selected. And I think it's an interesting point is that what I'm selecting is also part of me being an artist, but then you keep those images that you've done, you don't throw them away. So those are things that usually are part of an archive. And that's quite interesting, because then you can also learn more about what they wanted to show about themselves – and what they decided, was best for the, you know, the best photograph the best painting,

Jade French 20:22
I saw an amazing exhibition at the C-O Photography Gallery in Berlin. And it was the Magnum contact sheets. So all of these famous images, and you saw every other shot that was taken of it – and the sort of one that was chosen. And it really did illuminate the process to me in a way that I hadn't quite realised before. And I suppose especially with photography, that is a curation as well isn't it of picking the moment that you've captured.

Nastasia Alberti 20:47
Yeah, exactly. It's curating your work. But then when you have an archive you, you know, everything is in there. So it's not curated. Because an archivist won't remove things, you want to remove it, you want to chuck away things, you know, so you will, you might put it in a different order, or but normally you don't I mean, you try to really stick with, you know, the way it was found – or chronological order, but you don't really remove things. So in a way, you're not really curating it,

Jade French 21:15
How do you curate the archive for a show...

Nastasia Alberti 21:17
So you have to remove the knowledge you have of the artist, and try to make it a little bit more accessible in a way that, for example, I know the photographer Vanessa Bell really well. So if you were asking me to show you five photograph, the one I would want to show you or the one that means the most to me, because I just think the their stunning – but I don't know if that's what would be the best to represent her work to someone that have no idea who she is. So you would need to do a different thought process, if that makes sense. And kind of remove your knowledge and put yourself in, you know, the position of someone that doesn't know anything about the artist. So that's really important, I think when you curate any kind of exhibition but especially archive, because in archives, it can be a little bit obscure, you can have this letter that you get so excited about – but really, if you don't know the artists, it means nothing.

Jade French 22:20
Especially with people like in the Bloomsbury group, it's sort of assumed knowledge, I think sometimes, but who these people are and how they connect. [Yeah]. But actually, it's such a sprawling, connected group you could never know any, like everything about them, could you

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

Nastasia Alberti 22:37
– that's the thing. It's so complicated. There's so many people and they're all – can you say – intertwined? I mean, they all linked with each other, but it's so many people it's like, little stretchy Clive Bell...David Garnett... if you start doing this people are like what?? But obviously you, you work with, you know, the archive for weeks, months, sometimes years. So he's very familiar with these people. You know it really well.

Jade French 23:47
Yeah, you know all their back and forth from the letters.

Nastasia Alberti 23:47
Oh, of course! They were together that time and yes, he you know, he was part of the Omega studio they had or they've worked on this gallery together. But when you don't know, it just sounds really frightening. And also I think they all had so many side projects like the Friday Club, and all those things and then it starts to get even more I think intimidating. If you don't know who they are.

Jade French 23:47
In a generation of renters, do you think a project like Charleston could exist today?

Nastasia Alberti 23:49
I don't think it could exist the same way. I think there were a time where it was a lot easier to buy a house and therefore to have complete freedom in what you want to do inside it. I think that's you know, an amazing creative way to to do your house that comes with the possibility to to really own your house and not even to really think about selling it I think as well, now these days because it's so hard to buy, you want to make sure that if you also have to sell it you know it's it's easy to sell so you may be not going to paint flowers and panels all over your your walls.

Jade French 24:20
I suppose it's hard enough to put up pictures when your landlord telling you to keep the walls bare.

Nastasia Alberti 24:25
Yeah like sometimes you can't even put just like photographs on your wall and you know that's such a...that removes such a big aspect of creativity, you know, you're not allowed to even paint at all I mean, I wish I could paint my walls in colours. Everything is so white. This is not how I would live if I could, but then you know you don't own the place and very few people do on the place. And I guess the people that do yes, they could probably create the same way. But then I don't think it's accessible for that many people these days. All though saying that, I think we should you know, be honest with the fact but as I've mentioned earlier, she [Vanessa Bell] was from a very wealthy family, she's always been very wealthy, although she had not much money at that time, Clive Bell had a lot of money. So there were, you know, when they moved into Charleston, they did had the cook and a maid, they know they didn't move, just them and created that place also had a lot of people taking care of the kids and of all the other things, which meant they could really focus as well on just, you know, creating that place.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

Jade French 25:29
While also I suppose, in a way, breaking down the cost barriers that she faced as an upper class person who couldn't necessarily be a creative woman is one thing, but then there's other class boundaries in terms of working class people not having the access to their own home that they can't then create in that same way. Yeah, it's quite interesting how it traverses both lines really.

Nastasia Alberti 25:54
Completely.

Jade French 25:55
For people like us because we can't dream of creating something like Charleston. Yeah, although I was gonna say I wonder if the way our personality can come out in our houses is actually through buying and engaging with craft a bit more like you buy a little ceramic figure that you can put on a you know, that can move across the mantelpiece, or you might buy a rug, or a blanket that you can throw over the horrible furniture that you landlords put in.

Nastasia Alberti 26:25
Like trinkets! I totally, I think it's such a millennial thing to have all those little trinkets.

Jade French 26:30
Because we're so disparate like we're never, I don't think I've lived in a house for longer than a year. And even then, we weren't allowed to put things upon the walls. So we had all our pictures like framed just leaning against the walls in a sort of haphazard manner. But it's actually the it's actually the system that you have to live in right? Like I was allowed in the hallway. I wasn't allowed pictures on the walls. But I could go and buy one of those ceramic ghosts from....

Nastasia Alberti 26:58
Yeah, I totally love it.

Jade French 27:02
Ceramic ghosts....[laughs].

Nastasia Alberti 27:04
I mean, to be fair, I say I totally agree. I think I'm a bit naughty. Like I just never, quite frankly, I never cared about what the landlord said, I've always put, you know, pictures on my walls. I know, actually, I think I've always lived very long times in places, actually. So I guess that's a bit of a difference. But also, I've always as soon as I moved somewhere, it's always been the first thing for me that I've done. I've always made the house very homely, where there was a room in like a house sharing or like a room in a in a warehouse, or I've always made sure that it felt really cosy. But I know that's like, quite rare, actually. But I totally agree with you. Because I know that when we moved just Alex and I, for me, it was such an excitement. I was like, Oh my god, I can do whatever I want in a way that obviously, you know, I couldn't paint the wall, as I mentioned, but like you were saying the freedom because obviously we had more space. And so the freedom of flooring, rugs, quilts, you know, pictures, plants, everything, it just felt so freeing, and it made me feel much more creative, actually. And it really helped me to feel

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

more in my own bubble, in my own zone, which is what really inspires me when I when I create or want to even think about it. But I definitely agree with you that I think it is such a good way of thinking about it. The reason we are all into having a nice mug, or you know all those little things, it's because this kind of all we can have.

Jade French 28:31
Yeah, when you're so transient and you don't rent from one year to the other the same place, the only thing you can do is knock on your bits and bobs and take them to the next place,

Nastasia Alberti 28:41
I also wonder if it's like link to Instagram in a way that there's such a huge renewed interest in decoration, isn't it? So many like programming about it and on the on the hotlist these days. I mean, I'm totally guilty of it. Like it's literally my passion. But I feel like now we do a lot of this kind of like photograph shot, you know, you just see like the fireplace and it's not even it used to be the selfies to be cool. But now I feel like it's like the fireplace that you take from an acute angle and then you consider the candles and and like the sort of ceramic and jewellery. And so like I think it becomes kind of important, isn't it? Because you curate the way you look so you create your own home.

Jade French 29:23
I love that. I love that the mantle piece is took over from the selfie?

Nastasia Alberti 29:26
I think it does. Oh, maybe it's just because I'm obsessed with it. And some algorithm shows me that all the time.

Jade French 29:35
Could be that as well.

Nastasia Alberti 29:36
It could, it could it's hard to tell these days. Everything is very it's removed from your knowledge. You think you think that's what you like, but it's not really what you like.

Jade French 29:45
Yeah, the algorithms curating your tastes you've got no say.

Nastasia Alberti 29:49
Yeah, I think so. Because it's, it's, I mean really for me it's all I see. I see so many pictures of really nice fireplace like just like the top of your like a table. And there's great cushions and the lighting. And I see so many of these and I'm like, wow, people are just so into decorating now. But then maybe that's just not the case.

Jade French 30:11
No, I think it is. I think you're right. I mean, even just the rise of sites like Etsy and during lockdown, it's been the biggest thing is that people taking up craft again.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

Nastasia Alberti 30:19
Yeah, absolutely.

Jade French 30:20
Slowing things down a little bit and working more with the time that they've got. I think that's it's very telling, rarely that we're moving back towards that. I mean, what, what makes you want to start a craft do you think?

Nastasia Alberti 30:31
I mean, I think there's different reasons. You know, I personally, for myself, I like the end result. And I think that's also why I choose specific craft, like, I feel like I might not completely fail at it. I felt really creative in a way that for me, I always loved making things with my hands. And you know, just doing something that's not just sitting and watching, you know, my computer or things like that, I always find it really interesting. And I feel like because I've always taken photographs, and I've always used analogue cameras. It's such a long process. And it's always, it always was the one thing I loved about it. But it also means that it's not necessarily something you could just do all the time. And also, it's something that I've been personally struggling a little bit with in terms of being inspired. And, you know, maybe I felt like I was a bit stuck at times. And so I really wanted to find other things that made, that brought me this amount of joy and calmness and focus that I can feel when I take a photo. And that's how I felt with some of the craft of I'm choosing, you know, obviously, I like to do clay and ceramic. And then I like I started doing a bit of embroidery. And those are very similar in a way that they're kind of very common, you have to be focused, you know, the end result...I mean, there's high chances that it will be okay, there may not be great. But there will probably be okay.

Jade French 31:48
Well, and also I found, I took up cross-stitching. And it's not great. It's very average. But that's also okay. And I kind of love that.

Nastasia Alberti 31:57
That is not true!

Jade French 31:58
No it is [laughs]..

Nastasia Alberti 31:59
I really like it!

Jade French 32:01
No its...it's, you know, it's not I found something that isn't about the end product being perfect. I think that's been a really freeing experience. Why do you think creating a home is so important?

Nastasia Alberti 32:12

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

Well, I do think that that's a generation isn't it, everything is so fast, everything is... nothing feels very secure. I don't, we don't have very much all of us. For me anyway, I don't really have very much and for me to have a home, it's, it's so comforting, you know, it's something that I really, really put a lot of efforts in it. And I think I personally feel like I struggle a lot with anxiety and I get really depressed, I go really low, I get really worried and to be in the house that surrounded by things that I care for that I like, it makes me feel very good. And it kinds of reassures me and it feels very secure.

Jade French 32:53
It's really empowering as well that you can make the things that you want as well, it kind of yes out that idea that everything has to cost you, has to cost you money or it has to cost you effort, or it has to cost you your fantasy sometimes instead, you can just invest a little bit in the materials and then make something for yourself basically.

Nastasia Alberti 33:15
It's also so satisfying, isn't it? When you look at some you've done it's just a bit different. I mean, it's great to you know, spend 30 pounds on a nice ceramic mug, but then you when you do it, it's just there's something about it, it just makes you feel really good. And you just feel very, very proud. It's I think it's great like to to look at a box that you've made or I don't know, I think it's it has something very different to it. It tells you a story as well. So I think again, it becomes more like an object that really means a lot to you.

Jade French 33:46
Yeah, it was making me think about going onto that distinction between art and what you're making home.

Nastasia Alberti 33:55
Yeah,

Jade French 33:56
I suppose the difference between a professional cross stitcher and myself is what they produce potentially has more artistic value.

Nastasia Alberti 34:07
Yeah, I think it definitely is still today reasoning with what you know, with the way we think of it. Well, I think of art and the way we think of craft.

Jade French 34:16
Like art is a one off and yeah, craft is multiple.

Nastasia Alberti 34:21
Yeah, I think that's often people would say that, isn't it? It's like it's art should be a one, like one precious thing and then craft not really -

Jade French 34:28

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

not for Jeff Koons...

Nastasia Alberti 34:29
and you can have so many of them. Unless, [laughs] Yeah, true though.

Jade French 34:38
Some gripes at Jeff Koons. Was there a distinction between Vanessa Bell's painting versus the work that she was producing at Charleston. Did she have that distinction between what is art and what is handicraft?

Nastasia Alberti 34:53
No, I don't think she did. Actually, you know, I don't think at all I think she sees everything as art and creative. I don't think she looked at her painting in a different way that she looked at the way she painted the panel of her door. I think she saw it all the same. But then again, she is an artist. And she's seen, she sees herself as an artist. And she's seen by others as an artist. Because of that, no matter what she does, it's regarded as art. And it goes back to this whole idea of what makes the piece art? Is it because you decided that you are an artist? Or because people see you as that. There's also, you know, the historical aspect of it is, you know, in retrospect, you know, who she is, you know, what happened to her, you know, a whole career.

Jade French 35:37
Do you think the lines between what different mediums are much more blurred these days?

Nastasia Alberti 35:42
Yeah, I definitely think like it is, it makes a huge difference now that you could just do many things, it doesn't have to be you're not putting one box, you can just, I mean, you know, you could do so many different kind of, of craft, and they could still like fit with who you are and your art practice. It doesn't sound different. I think as well, what I wanted to say earlier, when we said you know what, what is the distinction between an artist and someone just at home making craft? I wonder as well, if it's because, you know, in the past a lot of the craft there, there were more seen as like a historical documents, you know, the way that people were doing craft, it was more to document something rather than to make it for the sole purpose of maybe, you know, the aesthetic of it.

Jade French 36:33
The question of historical value. It's an interesting one, isn't it? Are you thinking of something like the Bayeux Tapestry?

Nastasia Alberti 36:38
Yes, that's exactly what I'm thinking. I think it's a perfect example. Definitely that I mean, there has been an old question, isn't it people, I think are still in debate, whether it's art or historical document?

Jade French 36:52
I read a really amazing chapter on the tapestry, it was saying about how the different women that worked on that tapestry, all had a different section would have had to make do with what threads they

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

had available, colours change halfway through part of it, or you can tell when a different seamstress or sewess takes up a different figure. And there's so many different people that have had a hand in making that document. And yet they're all anonymous, we'll never know who those people were, who they were. And in a way, the reason it's it has to be framed as well as a historical document is because we don't know who the makers were. And what we do know is the context of the battle, or the context of the kings and queens involved but the actual makers are lost to history, really, except the marks that they've made on this tapestry, which is, you know, an amazing feat.

Nastasia Alberti 37:41
I mean, this is such an interesting comment, actually. Because then again, I thought it's from the all goes back to the process, isn't it? It goes back from the people from the beginning, before even starting to do something deciding that they are doing it for art, or that they are seeing themselves as artists, but then obviously, if you know a lot of people doing it, and they are, it's anonymous, then that removes entirely this whole idea that you're making it because of art. So therefore, it's easier to call it a historical document. Even though I personally still think it is I think it's both actually I think, you know, I don't necessarily know why people love to make a distinction.

Jade French 38:21
It's interesting. I wonder if it's about the anonymity of who we so desparately attach the work to an artist. And that kind of brings us back to the importance of Charleston, because it had so many famous artists making the marks on the wall that it becomes bigger than the sum of its pieces. If they, if that's a group of anonymous people painting the house, it's very different to the Bloomsbury Group painting a house, isn't it?

Nastasia Alberti 38:47
Yes, completely.

Jade French 38:48
It has it all. It has process and artistic attachment and finished products and...

Nastasia Alberti 38:54
And historical relevance. Historical value, but ya know, it's, it's the whole, it's the whole it's the everything that..

Jade French 39:00
The whole package.

Nastasia Alberti 39:01
People love it. I love it. It's a little package, I know.

Music 39:04

Suzanna Petot 39:29

Transcribed by https://otter.ai

Thank you very much for listening to this episode of the Decorating Dissidence Podcast. It was produced by Decorating Dissidence and supported by Queen Mary University of London's Centre for Public Engagement. A special thank you to our featured guests. Leo Garbutt is our sound editor and music producer. You can get in touch with us by emailing decorating dissidence@gmail.com. If you're a fan of the show, please feel free to share it online and give us a follow on Twitter or Instagram.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai