Conversation Transcript: Cultural Reforesting Explores – Sustainable Actions

0:00:00.240,0:00:08.240

Hi, I'm Liv Wood. Um, I'm a photography student at

LCC. I have an interdisciplinary practice and I've

0:00:08.240,0:00:15.680

been volunteering at Orleans House for a year.

Hi, I am Vanessa Portugal. I am an art historian

0:00:15.680,0:00:22.160

and I've been volunteering with Orleans

House again for a year as well. We are part

0:00:22.160,0:00:31.440

of this research group of Cultural Reforesting

and trying to help discussing ecological topics

0:00:31.440,0:00:39.360

at Orleans House together with other volunteers

and here is the result of our conversations.

0:00:43.520,0:00:44.020

Okay.

0:00:46.640,0:00:53.040

Um, Liv, I was reading about, um, your part

of the research, um, and there were some

0:00:53.040,0:01:02.400

very interesting things that I would like to

hear a bit more. Um. You, you were talking about

0:01:03.760,0:01:12.480

the politics. What, what, what is it, um,

that we can do to, to help the environment?

0:01:15.600,0:01:17.840

Um, I think that's a pretty broad question.

0:01:18.960,0:01:25.440

In the context of my research, I would say: so

the Culture Declares Emergency movement is

0:01:25.440,0:01:32.000

asking cultural institutions and individuals

to declare that there's a climate emergency

0:01:32.000,0:01:42.880

and ideally take some action towards that whatever

that looks like for them, um, and that was born out

0:01:42.880,0:01:51.440

of, uh, work with Extinction Rebellion as well -

important for context - um, so I think politically

0:01:53.360,0:02:00.560

what we can do is start to organise, it's the

best thing. Um, but to say like what we can do

0:02:01.280,0:02:09.040

in terms of action as a whole, um, it's very broad

because all of the different inhabitants of this

0:02:09.040,0:02:18.160

planet and all the different, um, people affected by

climate change have different skills, resources, um,

0:02:18.720,0:02:27.520

and ways of being, so I think the uniting factor

and what we can do, um, especially shown by Culture

0:02:27.520,0:02:36.240

Declares Emergency is get together and say

something, take some collective action, um.

0:02:36.240,0:02:40.800

Yeah, I think it's, um, there is a

very important role on creativity.

0:02:41.600,0:02:48.960

So it's, um, what can we do as a, as a person, uh,

personal choice and, and also getting together with

0:02:48.960,0:02:56.720

a group of people that share the interest. It's

the same thing with, with enterprises, um, what can

0:02:57.840,0:03:06.880

different companies do to take care of the

environment, um, and I think, um, we can be like

0:03:06.880,0:03:13.520

a very open road, you know, everybody

can have a say and can give it a go and,

0:03:13.520,0:03:21.120

um, towards this I was thinking on this topic have

you, have you heard about it, um, the eco guilt. Do

0:03:21.120,0:03:29.600

you know what that is? Oh yeah, like, um, consumer

guilt, kind of? Yeah. So basically because, um, I,

0:03:29.600,0:03:36.400

I pollute a bit, but okay I will not eat meat,

you know, so I like to travel, I cannot stop

0:03:37.040,0:03:43.520

you know having my holidays abroad,

but maybe I buy less meat this time.

0:03:43.520,0:03:50.160

I don't know, all these things, um, for example, I

was, um, I was thinking how can this actually, is not

0:03:50.160,0:03:58.720

helping anything because nature is a living thing,

right? So it's not like you sort of kill it little

0:03:58.720,0:04:06.080

by little, but then you try to grow it back. I don't

think it's, this is really working in a way and,

0:04:08.080,0:04:14.800

um, I think it is all, it leads to the

perspective of deep growth, do you know, um,

0:04:14.800,0:04:23.200

how can we think of it, um, like really or is it,

do you do you think it's, it's a bit, uh, utopian this,

0:04:27.600,0:04:28.100

this area?

0:04:29.040,0:04:37.360

I think when it comes to de-growing it's less

utopian and more, um, utilitarian almost. It's

0:04:37.360,0:04:44.080

like something that we have to do and if we

don't it's going to happen anyways, um, at least

0:04:44.080,0:04:51.360

in my perspective, um. When it comes to eco guilt,

that's a really complex thing, isn't it? Because

0:04:52.400,0:04:58.640

when you're not associated with other

people who are aware or actively working

0:05:00.160,0:05:05.120

with the climate emergency towards a

greater goal, um, approaching it from an

0:05:05.120,0:05:13.840

individualistic perspective, it does get messy,

it, it becomes like, yeah, you lose a sense of

0:05:14.880,0:05:19.440

why it's a problem, which is, of course,

because of all the species on this planet,

0:05:20.160,0:05:23.840

um, when you look at it from an

individualistic perspective, I think,

0:05:24.800,0:05:31.200

um. So going back to de-growing like, it is something

that we need to do on a personal level, but

0:05:31.200,0:05:38.000

it's going to happen on a broader level no

matter what, um, what do you think? Yeah, I, I

0:05:38.000,0:05:43.760

completely agree with you that sometimes, if we see

it personally, we just lose perspective and I think

0:05:43.760,0:05:50.480

absolutely that, um, getting together, um, in

collective actions is the, the way forward, um.

0:05:54.320,0:06:00.640

I think, not just to, to have different ideas and to

keep each other going, but also to join the efforts

0:06:00.640,0:06:08.560

right? Um, of course, this will all start from a

personal interest, the personal objective, but then

0:06:08.560,0:06:16.800

it gets strengthened by, by the group and

in the artistic practice, I, I'm thinking of,

0:06:18.960,0:06:24.320

I don't know, all the challenges that this

employs to, to the artists right? Because

0:06:25.200,0:06:31.600

they use materials and ideally materials

that become archives and you know,

0:06:32.800,0:06:37.280

at the end, it will mean something about the

time, and how to reuse these materials is that,

0:06:38.000,0:06:43.360

I don't know, I, I don't know how is it going

to be, the future, if it's going to be some, um,

0:06:45.520,0:06:56.560

like nature kind of work or, um, high enduring

material for like statues for, for art, um, I don't,

0:06:56.560,0:07:01.840

I don't know. What, what do you think? Um,

I think, in terms of material for artists,

0:07:02.960,0:07:07.840

there are two ways of thinking about that

right? So, um, one of the more basic principles

0:07:07.840,0:07:16.880

of ecology is that nothing goes away, things move

around, right? But they're always with us, so, um, as

0:07:16.880,0:07:23.280

a practicing artist that's something I try and

keep in my practice for sure and I would never

0:07:23.280,0:07:32.000

say that other artists shouldn't be doing that,

it's a good practice to have, but, um, as well, um,

0:07:32.000,0:07:36.720

I think in such a time of emergency like now, as

well, it's really important to zoom out and look at

0:07:36.720,0:07:47.840

the macro. So yes art materials do have a carbon

footprint, but the power of culture to shift, um,

0:07:49.040,0:07:55.120

to shift how we act how, we think, is so strong

and there's such a potential there that

0:07:55.840,0:08:03.440

maybe it's worth it. Yeah, absolutely, you, you are

saying something about, um, that it always stays and

0:08:03.440,0:08:12.240

together, um, I'm joining it with the idea of the

collective. We were talking earlier about gardening.

0:08:12.240,0:08:22.800

How, how, how does this, um, can be a way to promote

the, the social change the educat, educative

0:08:24.640,0:08:32.160

way of looking at this change in

our lifestyles. I think gardening is,

0:08:34.400,0:08:41.680

on an individual level, so important for

connecting to the land and to the processes that

0:08:41.680,0:08:53.840

keep us going that have had us going for so long,

um, and then on a collective level as well it's,

0:08:55.040,0:09:04.560

it's such a reclamation of power, almost, to grow

your own food or create your own apothecary. I, I

0:09:04.560,0:09:09.360

think in North London, we'll have to link back to

this, in North London there's a community apothecary,

0:09:09.360,0:09:14.320

they grow all of their own medicinal herbs

on a, on an allotment and that's amazing, you know,

0:09:15.520,0:09:24.880

um, it's a real place of empowerment and it's also

a strong metaphor for other actions as well. Maybe

0:09:24.880,0:09:31.440

the garden can be, rather than just a plot of

land, which is never just a plot of land, but it

0:09:31.440,0:09:37.440

can also be a structure for how we work together

in other places like the office or the art studio.

0:09:38.560,0:09:43.840

Um, I'm thinking about your research

now with the digital gardener

0:09:45.840,0:09:52.000

technology and I think that's really

interesting that computer engineers, right, have

0:09:52.880,0:09:58.320

come up with a way to spread gardening with

what they do best. Maybe they're not very good

0:09:58.320,0:10:04.800

at growing pumpkins, but they can help somebody

else, um. Yeah, I was thinking on so many things

0:10:04.800,0:10:10.720

that we can do about gardening, for example, um, I

think there are always tutorials, how to grow

0:10:10.720,0:10:16.320

potatoes or tomatoes or everyday things and how

important they are for the economic organisation

0:10:16.320,0:10:23.680

or the life without sustaining but, um, of course,

these, uh, digital applications, um, measure the

0:10:25.280,0:10:33.440

chemical levels of the earth and, and they sort of

suggest in your lands which is the best product

0:10:34.160,0:10:37.920

to, to plant and, you know, sort

of help you with this science to,

0:10:38.960,0:10:49.520

to improve them, yeah, the growing, um, and of your

garden and to make it, um, can you say live all

0:10:49.520,0:10:54.000

year long. So I think it's a good

connection between this and, and

0:10:54.640,0:11:00.000

it's of course not profit, not for profit

now like, as you say, it just empowers.

0:11:04.480,0:11:08.400

Definitely, um, and I think it's

important that these things

0:11:08.400,0:11:12.880

aren't for profit as well, because

these systems that have created so much

0:11:12.880,0:11:20.320

profit are also the systems that are

causing this, um, this emergency, right? Um.

0:11:22.720,0:11:25.200

Yeah, I think, I think there has to be a way to,

0:11:26.720,0:11:32.800

to, to completely change the

the perspective, but also, um, to,

0:11:35.360,0:11:44.640

to sort of sustain it economically like, um, you

know, it's not that easy that we can, not all land

0:11:44.640,0:11:53.440

is so fertile for example. No and certainly, we, um,

it is a lot of us in this planet, um. So I think

0:11:54.880,0:12:00.080

all the stress of the initial... looking for

initiatives, yeah, the personal level that, um,

0:12:00.080,0:12:07.280

you know, um, sort of organisations, associations

and companies looking for different ways to,

0:12:07.920,0:12:12.240

to go through this crisis, is,

it's a land of opportunities.

0:12:12.960,0:12:18.560

I think before I used to think, like so what do

we do because there is not, um, enough being done

0:12:20.080,0:12:25.920

but, um, I think after spending some time

talking with you guys and looking at your

0:12:25.920,0:12:33.760

research, of course, all these laws that are,

um, passing through, um, the, the taxes for more

0:12:33.760,0:12:41.440

polluting, um, companies or activities are a

way through but there is so much more to do, no?

0:12:43.840,0:12:48.720

There's definitely a lot of work to do, yes,

and you do, you make a good point that it

0:12:48.720,0:12:52.880

needs to be economically sustainable as

well as environmentally sustainable, right?

0:12:55.360,0:12:59.440

Something that I'm thinking of, from

your research Vanessa that I wanted

0:12:59.440,0:13:02.880

to ask you about is eco-social work and pedagogy

0:13:05.760,0:13:12.320

and how how you think this could be implemented

on a wider level maybe, or the different ways

0:13:13.760,0:13:19.040

that we can start bringing this through our

communities. Yeah, I think again community is

0:13:19.040,0:13:26.720

a key word, usually it all starts with a school or

a community centre and they get kids together to

0:13:26.720,0:13:34.240

show them how to recycle materials, how to use

those materials to, to, I don't know, to do some

0:13:34.240,0:13:42.880

science project even, um, and also getting together

to, to cook, you know, or employ the things that they

0:13:42.880,0:13:50.480

grow in the garden, so, um I think it has to start

at an early age. I, I do believe that, um, all the

0:13:51.440,0:14:00.080

information and, um, and market of the of the summit

now, for, for the, against the climate, uh, change is,

0:14:00.080,0:14:06.960

is helping, um, future generations. I certainly

see more people engaged with this, um, perspective

0:14:06.960,0:14:17.120

even if, um, because it's on the news all the time

because, um, as we were discussing before many of

0:14:17.120,0:14:24.560

the people worldwide who are suffering the worst

of this, um, do not have the economic resources to

0:14:25.680,0:14:33.360

survive it in a way, you know, and, and, and always

the pressure is on poorer countries. Um, so how can

0:14:33.360,0:14:40.240

we open our scope and see the weather picture,

if, if we are really not suffering that much.

0:14:41.120,0:14:49.040

Um, so I think all this marketing is a way to

start all this but I think as, uh, as you mentioned,

0:14:49.040,0:14:58.160

um, the eco-social work has to start early and

we have to definitely keep thinking about it.

0:14:58.160,0:15:04.800

Definitely, that's such a good point and you are so

right it's so important that wealthier countries

0:15:04.800,0:15:10.160

take action first. Um, I think that's been a huge

point of COP this year, correct me if I'm wrong,

0:15:11.280,0:15:21.120

um, the COP26, is that, um, wealthier countries, we

need to be taking action now, or yesterday really.

0:15:22.160,0:15:28.720

Yeah. It does, it definitely, coming

back to eco-social work on a smaller

0:15:28.720,0:15:35.440

community basis, it does really warm my

heart to see, um, children so involved in

0:15:36.160,0:15:41.120

environmentalism. I think there were

some local murals recently in Richmond

0:15:44.640,0:15:50.800

and also some some events I remember you sharing,

some community events, uh, in the borough as well.

0:15:52.880,0:15:58.880

Oh yes we have, uh, the murals from, um,

an artist in, in Twickenham, um, and

0:16:00.960,0:16:10.400

yeah, I think they will all keep, um, happening,

um, again employ... um, children from, from

0:16:10.400,0:16:16.720

I mean children from local schools are engaged

in these activities I think it's very important

0:16:16.720,0:16:25.440

and I'm happy, um, Orleans House is taking part

of, of this transformation and these discussions

0:16:25.440,0:16:31.840

as well. Definitely, I, I think these conversations

that we've been having and also this research in

0:16:31.840,0:16:38.960

this exhibition has been so beneficial and

it's such a, it's such a positive first step.

0:16:40.080,0:16:45.840

I do want to know though, um, maybe this

isn't something that we've touched on before,

0:16:47.040,0:16:53.760

how can we use our community, maybe as volunteers,

or as people who frequent the gallery, um, to create

0:16:53.760,0:16:59.120

meaningful change like in what ways can we

dream about that. Maybe none of us in the

0:16:59.120,0:17:07.040

room have the answers, but, um it's, it's so rich

with opportunity as you said before isn't it?

0:17:08.000,0:17:13.280

Yeah, I think that is a, that is a question,

definitely. [Laughing] I, I heard somebody saying,

0:17:13.280,0:17:20.480

well just identify the problem and then

just try to tackle it and, um, I think, um,

0:17:21.440,0:17:32.480

at least from, from, from Richmond Borough, Orleans House,

the gardens, um, thinking of, of the area. I think

0:17:32.480,0:17:40.480

it's, um, lovely to see all the families getting

together and walking in the in the woods, uh, all

0:17:40.480,0:17:50.480

the dogs, um, spending time as well because I think

it's very popular for them, um, so at that point I,

0:17:50.480,0:17:57.280

I wouldn't know [laughs] because to me it is a bit of

a heaven there, just, just going there, so, um,

0:17:59.120,0:18:06.320

yeah, I, I, I think maybe this is a

point to, to start looking, um, further.

0:18:08.640,0:18:15.760

Yeah, no, I apologise that was pretty... No, [laughing]

no it is the question that we have to,

0:18:16.320,0:18:21.920

to keep in our minds. Yeah, definitely and

I think that's why we're doing this isn't

0:18:21.920,0:18:28.320

it and collectively having these meetings and

doing this work hopefully we'll find an answer.

0:18:29.280,0:18:34.720

I think it's so great that, um, we're bringing all

these different skills and backgrounds, for example.

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I think in our meetings, just as

an example, of some people we have,

0:18:39.200,0:18:45.440

we have gardeners, we have artists we have,

you're an art historian, um, so many different

0:18:46.400,0:18:52.240

skill sets and perceptions of the world

really create such a valuable discourse and

0:18:53.360,0:18:59.440

hopefully something valuable will come out of that

as well, something meaningful. Yeah, yeah, thank you

0:18:59.440,0:19:05.920

for, for this conversation and for leaving some

thoughts to, to think, uh, afterwards and, of course,

0:19:05.920,0:19:15.200

may they inspire future actions. Thank you so

much Vanessa, I, it's been a pleasure and I hope

0:19:15.200,0:19:23.360

we can do this again soon. Yeah me too. All right. So

until next time. See you soon, bye. See you, bye