



So...podcast – Episode # Meg Renou – Reclaim, Reform, Restore

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John: I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land that I am currently on. The Wurundjeri and the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. I would also like to pay my respect to elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge that sovereignty has not been ceded. We are on stolen land and I am forever grateful that I am able to live and work on this beautiful land. Greetings. John McKenna. So... Podcast. My guest is a Bowerbird. Well type of. Meg Renou welcome. Why are you calling yourself a bowerbird?

Meg: I like to collect objects I find, discarded objects that I find and do things with them, make them into things.

John: Very good. Tell us more about yourself please Meg.

Meg: Well I live in Melbourne, Australia. I've got two kids. What else can I say. I like making and creating in my spare time and to keep me sane.

John: That's important right now of course. You pick up junk and you do creative things with it. That's being really blunt. So first of all junk is stuff you find on the street.

Meg: Yep.

John: And then you add your flare to it.

Meg: Absolutely. Either restore it or turn it into something new and give it a new life.





John: So you've got some really cool words which I had a look on your Instagram. Reclaimed, reformed, restored. Tell us more what that means.

Meg: So what that means to me is it's not just about the objects, it's really about a lot of things in life but let's talk about the objects. So reclaimed, reformed for me is to reclaim an object that someone's discarded, is likely going to go to landfill or the like and give it a new life to somehow retain it's original form so it's recognisable but also to reform it into a new shape, new space and do something creative with it and the same with restored, that's more about where I've picked something up that I've wanted just to restore back to it's original beauty or it's original form maybe with a twist.

John: Looking closely at changing something how it looks it's not just about bringing it home and washing it, you then start to cut it, polish it, twist it, bend it, break it. Can you give us a bit more examples of probably what you've most, one you've enjoyed the most?

Meg: The one I've enjoyed, well a commonly discarded object that I can't help but collect is venetian blinds and for those of you that don't live in Australia that's blinds that are blades of aluminium commonly or timber, sometimes plastic, an inch or two wide that you use a little cord to pull up and down or to rotate to block the light or to let the light in. I have thousands of them.

John: Wow. So let's go through the step. So you find one of those on the street, you bring it home, what's the first thing you do?

Meg: So the first thing I do is I'll dismantle it. I'll take the strings out because I use the strings as well, the pull cords and then I will dismantle it all, get all the blades together. Usually I'll have to wash them because when they're discarded most people will discard





them, they'll get dusty and dirty and bent and crooked and then I will put them into my collection ready for picking later.

John: Okay. So you've seen it, you've picked it up, you've cleaned it up, when does the creative thought come into your mind about I want to do this to it or how does that come about because I think the key thing is the inspiration?

Meg: Yeah. So I think in the early days it was either I would just pick up an object because I liked the look of it, the feel of it, the way it sat in my hand something like that. There are other times when I would have an idea in my head and I would be on the hunt for particular types of objects. So hard rubbish is a great time to go out and hunt for materials particularly timber and venetian blinds and the crazier and the wackier the better. Sometimes I'll pick them up and think why on earth would you have this hanging in your house but they're the perfect ones for creating really fun art with. They've got weird and wacky designs on them, funny colours, that sort of thing.

John: I liked how you said earlier that you're conscious not to actually change it's own identity. So people can see that it's a spoon or a teapot lid but just admire how you've modified it.

Meg: Yeah. I like to keep it's history and keep the recognition of what it was and see how it's transformed.

John: You're not a, you're a handy person so obviously you've got skills to do it but it's not all about having a full blown workshop is it?

Meg: No. Not at all. For the last five or six years I've had intention of getting my shed sorted out but the reality is I've done this on my kitchen table so my kids don't eat dinner at the kitchen table. [laughing] I go through phases of thinking I'll tidy it up and move it to the shed but you don't need a big workshop. I started this with just the most basic tools. Some of those of which I've picked up





from hard rubbish or friends or family have said they were throwing something out and I've put my hand up for it but for the most part I use pretty basic tools. So a Stanley knife, a basic sanding block, scissors, little hammer, that's about it, hand saw.

John: Meg, what sort of joy does it bring to you as far as emotionally? Can you take us through the journey where you're doing something, finished it and then you'd reflect because I think as a person who's seen things on your website it's great but I want to dig a bit more into your mind as far as what's going through your mind when you're doing it.

Meg: There's definitely the sense of achievement at the end. I think for anyone if you've put a bit of work in and the sense, to be able to see the finished object but I actually started this in earnest a number of years ago, I was going through a pretty rough time in life and it became my meditation time. Using my hands and I was doing a lot of hand sanding, hand shaping so it took a lot of time, it allowed me to be doing something with my hands and to let my brain switch off from the things that were making me anxious and stressed at the time and this is a practice I've continued ever since and it's definitely, becomes a meditation for me and it's something I can sneak in, being on my kitchen table I can sneak in an hour or so in the evening or dedicate a whole day to it if I have that luxury of having a full day to myself but it's about for me, I really, I gain joy from definitely seeing other peoples art and handcrafted objects. It's something I've learnt growing up in my family, pretty much everyone in my family makes or restores or creates things on side and it's just, it's really that sense of achievement and joy of giving a 3D form to an idea that I've had or a feeling that I've had, a lot of them are about when I've been stressed and anxious about externalising that fear and that anxiety and being able to put it aside and let it go is where it all started but it's now developed into the joy of creating something that's fun to look at.





John: I'm looking at your website now and obviously people listening to the podcast don't have this opportunity at the moment but we'll give your Instagram later, you've got amazing, I wouldn't call them mushrooms, they're a stick with a teapot lid on it on a piece of wood and I've just killed it by describing it like that [laughing] but it's awesome. You've also got lots of paint and colour. Tell us about your dragonfly. What's that made of?

Meg: So the dragonflies are a new idea I'm working on at the moment. The dragonfly body is timber and that's any, so far the particular timber that I've been using is old bed slats that I've had stashed and the wings are venetian blinds. So the venetian blinds they're not as recognisable as venetian blinds as say the birds if you go and have a look, they're wings are quite obviously those metal blades but I like the, I definitely have a lean towards a very simple suggestion of the animal. It's not a literal interpretation but they are just a wedge of timber and four pieces of venetian blind to form the wings and the strings that they're hanging from are old, they're the cords off the venetian blinds.

John: I'm imagining you're not buying anything much. Perhaps a nail, perhaps some glue but the rest of the stuff you're just finding.

Meg: Yes. Absolutely. All the materials I use aside from the fixings let's say. So well some of the nails and screws are just recycled from furniture and things that I find but the only things I really spend money on are sandpaper and glue and varnish.

John: Interesting question, you go into a gift shop, you see stuff on the shelf, do you ever look at that and say well that's \$80, I've got something like that and I've made it for free or [laughing] I'm just visualising what goes through your mind when you go to some of these gift shops and you pay big bucks for this sort of stuff?





Meg: I don't mind paying a bit more for locally handmade objects because I know the effort that's involved in creating it as oppose to say a mass produced object and the love and care that that person has taken to make that themselves probably in their own kitchen or garage or something like that.

John: Yeah. That's where I'm coming from and the mass produced stuff that comes from overseas and the money you've got to pay for that compared to, there's no doubt when something's handmade it's made with love.

Meg: Yeah. It's always worth paying more for those things to me. Absolutely, because you know that that's got a uniqueness as well.

John: Sure. Meg for people that like to have a look at your stuff that you've made, stuff is terrible, sort of you're art, [laughs] it's interesting describing it. Is it art stuff, is it junk, is it creative, it's all of that and it doesn't really matter what word I choose but...

Meg: We'll call it objects.

[overtalking]

John: ... you've got some lovely objects and they've all been reformed, restored or whatever. How do people have a look at them?

Meg: They can have a look at my Instagram page which is meg.renou or my Instagram ID and yeah take a look there.

John: Fantastic. Meg, thank you for sharing your passion. I think it's lovely that we are reducing landfill and thanks for coming on a So... Podcast.

Meg: Thanks John. It's been great. [music playing]





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