



So...podcast – Episode # Brett Ashby

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John: Greetings. John McKenna, So...podcast. The guest we are about to talk to, I met him on the street. I've got a reflection garden across the road from me, saying hello to lots of amazing people at the moment, and we smile, we talk about the garden, and there are those special moments where the conversation just develops into other areas.

Brett Ashby, welcome to So...podcast.

Brett: Hi, John. Lovely to be here.

John: As you know, Brett, that moment in front of the garden, we quickly learnt about each other really quickly.

Brett: Yep.

John: And you spoke about your passion of art and I thought, 'Okay, another artist.' But you are far from another artist.

Brett: Oh, thanks, John.

John: It's really to – we've been talking off air how to describe and be really mindful that people that people at home can't see what's going on. So, we're going to put it out to all of my audience, it's really time to get your mentation flowing, because the conversation between Brett and I are going to cover words such as, 'flow state of motion,' and that's around being an artist, using a skateboard and a surfboard, and basically, inner feelings using art as a medium.





Brett, I'm going to now allow you to paint the picture of your journey so far, and this conversation is just going to flow.

Brett: Wonderful. Thanks, John. Yeah, and it's a lovely garden that you've created, and I think it's great for people to consider that as your inter nook and start flowering on the external. And I think through nature, in the creating of exceeding your own landscape, you know, you can find yourself within your work, and your landscape will continue to grow and evolve as time grows and evolves.

As bodies, we're always changing and in ... with my work, I've been facilitating public art, performance art and my own contemporary art paintings over the last 15 years, and I've been blessed to be able to travel worldwide taking my photography, finding myself in my photos, and then reviewing them to continue to grow my own practicing art, which has lead to doing community murals, working to extract the use of voice through painting the murals to enrich the community, and inspire the inner-creative and the light within every student and pupil that we worked with.

And by working with the youth and working to tell their story, they've also allowed me to find my own story, and continue to grow and understand myself in my art. And by doing this sort of in the later 5 years of my arts career, I started reconnecting to my childhood, where I was skateboarding, and to overcome some accidents that had occurred through skateboarding, I skateboarded again and picked up the paintbrush to combine my painting and skateboarding to paint celebrity-based musicians, who were part of my childhood.

John: Now, we're going to try and verbally paint what you've just said.

Brett: Okay.

John: Because obviously in videos, but some people may not have access to a video to watch what we're talking about.





- Brett: Yeah.
- John: So, let's get down to the bolts of this.
- Brett: Sure.
- John: You are riding on a skateboard, on a ... what do you call that ramp? A skate ramp, which goes left and right, left and right.
- Brett: Yeah, the half-pipe.
- John: Half pipe, yep. So, I'm just going to just dumb all this down, I don't know all the lingo. But you're on a skateboard, and next to the ramp you've got a piece of canvas.
- Brett: Yeah, so, I'm very interested in place and space, and capturing the moment within time. So, I've created two mobile half-pipes that are built and constructed, and then I place the easel in the centre of the ramp, and I mount the canvas on the easel, and then ... I started off painting within nature and painting the flow and the geometry of the sound in the place on canvas. And from that body work and technique and the understanding of that process, then I wanted to raise my vibration to and connect to painting a subject, being a musician, a singer, a vocalist. So, I started working with talents to sit on a chair next to the canvas and then I would – not painting their face – I'm painting the energy and their vibration on a canvas, which does create a portrait, but we're looking at the inner ... inner voice of that subject.
- John: So, let's not be too modest here. You've worked with some pretty high-profile artists. Who have they been?
- Brett: Yeah, it's been lovely to gain access to such talents, and local person would be Mick Harvey, and Sarah McLeod. But yeah, my first connection was with Richard Lewis from Tumbleweed, and he was the first musician





to accept my expression of interest to paint his portrait. From doing that painting with Richard, we started this process.

John: So, I've just got to clarify this again. So, they're singing and they're doing their music, and they ... do you see them, or they don't see you? How does it work?

Brett: Yeah. So, John, the singer ... I invite the singer to have their portrait painted. In some ... some circumstances, I've met them prior, and in some others like Mick Harvey and Sarah McLeod, I have never met them. I've met them through their music as a child and then I've connected with them again to come and do their portrait. But I've set up the performance space and the musician will just enter the space and sit for their portrait, and they cannot see the painting as ... throughout the 1 hour process of me painting them, they can just see the back of the canvas. So, and they can just see the audience and then I'm skateboarding, and they just see my energy, and it's not until 45 minutes later where they can come to the front of the canvas and see the final painting. And that moment is so special, because that musician, we connect with sort of a handshake and a celebration of the portrait and the capture of that moment.

John: Yeah. A lot of people may be thinking about that guy on television at the moment, what's his name?

Brett: Okay. Is it Anh Do?

John: Anh Do, that's right.

Brett: Yeah, yep.

John: But this is even different more, because it relies more on, he ... for those people who don't know this TV show in Melbourne, Australia, he does a lot of talking with the guests and then paints but they don't see the picture. But you've gone one step further ...





Brett: Yeah.

John: ... where you're relying on energy and it could be their music.

Brett: So, John, yeah, it's great to explain it a bit further, I believe, the voice ... the voice of someone and the voice of the universe is always speaking. It's speaking in sound, geometry and through patterns and vibrations as human beings, as the bodies we can ... we're always absorbing that flow of the universal language. And with my performances and my moments in the time territory, I'm painting their voice, their internal energy and we're not using the spoken word. and I don't interview them in any way prior to our performance and meeting. It's a beautiful process of connecting with the like-minded arts practicing people within my space to create that sound and that capture of that osmosis is then of everyone involved is being painted.

John: I think it's fair to say that one of the great point of differences you have, Brett, is your emotion when you're painting. So, obviously traditional art is, the artist is just standing still. But we spoke earlier that you use a skateboard, and you're also looking into and you're trialling some on a surfboard, in the water. Can we talk a bit more about that, please?

Brett: Sure. I think ... yeah, I'm really interested in what it means to roll, and I think using the wheels of the skateboard to roll, or your ... your surfboard is rolling along the water, and what the body then is doing is, it's in a flow state within time and you're going from one point to another point, which is almost ... you're creating your own soundwave. And through the art, by making a physical contribution to the universe by your brush touching a canvas and leaving a mark, that is a documentation of your action and it's illustrating your movement through rolling and connecting with the geometry of time.

John: You've spoken a lot about working with the youth, and I think we don't hear enough about the investment into youth and to connecting with





them, whether be good or bad, and obviously there's been many conversations around what is graffiti? Is it art? Is it expression? We've heard a lot about that. You've worked very closely with even the justice area about why people are doing graffiti. Can I ask you to expand, or paint a picture a bit more, for the audience on your journey interacting with youth and graffiti and the law?

Brett: Sure. I think it's not pretty out there sometimes, but in a way, every city, every town, every community, or culture, we're all evolving in time. We're all moving towards something greater and whilst, when I'm engaged as a facilitator in the public art space with youth, schools and different programs, it really is ... there's that connection that we're all children. The body is growing and aging but we're still children within, and if something has occurred to you as a child, the best way is to let that out.

And I see many beautiful people having to let that out in a negative way, and expressing themselves through graffiti, violence ... it's the internal struggle being executed in a form. They're creating form from the internal battles. And I find that through practicing your art and letting go of the past, finding themselves in the present, in the moment, and doing ... finding their creativity will give them balance and that harmonies, and it goes out the community in a positive way. And it brings such ... it cleans up those spaces and I just ... I just ... I hope we can keep doing it and everyone can find their creativity.

John: Sure. And, of course, you've got people saying, 'Yeah, that's fine, as long as it's in the right space, in the right location.' But the world doesn't work that way and I know, if I just share quickly with my experience, even working in the justice area working with prisoners who have intellectual disabilities, if they've got an anger management issue, they're not going to go home or wait to go to the gym. If they see a phone box, they're going to smash it right now. And yes, it's bad, I acknowledge that, but we don't always have time on our side to make a choice about, 'Where do I express myself?'





- Brett: I think, John, if you ... you're putting out that destruction, you will ... you'll just ... you'll be attracting it again. So, it's about yourself and you're going to have to look inside to why is that anger within? My view of that would be, you sort of ... there's a fire going on inside the organs, the internal battle, and your landscape is showcasing that violence and that self-harm in a way. If you breaking that telephone box, you're going to attract another broken, violent act coming your way. I've personally experienced all this.
- John: Sure. And there is ... and I'm really hoping that people – and we'll ask you to talk later about where people can find you online and see some of your amazing videos – but I do have that one in my mind that I've watched, Brett, where you were painting on a half-pipe ... half pike?
- Brett: Pipe.
- John: Pipe. I'm not a skateboarder, am I? I'm a wheelchair person. Anyway, but where you actually destroyed the picture ...
- Brett: Sure.
- John: ... after doing it.
- Brett: Yeah.
- John: And that just looks weird from an outsider's perspective, but that was all part of the time for you ...
- Brett: That's right.
- John: ... an expression, wasn't it? And you know what, we do see people, rockstars who play guitar, then go and start smashing their guitar on the stage. Now, is that theatre or is that part of the [0:14:19.1]? You know,





we could ... we could always dissect a lot about why people start becoming physical in music or art. I just like to let it flow.

Brett: Yeah, I mean, each painting, each execution of what you're going through, you're letting it out. So, the rockstar, I believe, didn't have a choice to smash the beautiful \$6,000 guitar over his amp. It's a reaction to his consciousness, where a glitch within his vibration, his frequency and ... yeah, I have a series of works based on cancer, I have other works on domestic violence, physical abuse, I've damaged the canvases I'm painting in an abusive manner. I'm trying to represent elements of my childhood surroundings, a boy growing up in Australia. We ... we have lots to communicate, and I just hope that, you know, through your art, you can find balance within yourself.

John: Are you comfortable with the words, "art therapy?"

Brett: In all work I've done with my own painting, I think through colour and therapy can heal you through your eyes, colour can help heal the body. I do believe that. I think light, the spectrum of light and the colour spectrum, is ... I mean, it's all nature. So, art therapy would be almost like sitting in nature and letting the colours of nature go within and help bring balance. So yeah, I do think it's a good way to title it.

John: I will observe the type of work I do in the counselling space with some fantastic practitioners, we are seeing the word 'art therapy' come up more and more, because it's not just about notetaking anymore, we need to be in sync and connect with people who are trying to connect with us in different ways.

Brett: I think, John, there's a real synchronicity with the art, the therapy and almost human to human, we can heal each other. So, in a way, the art therapist is offering colour and creativity, but the human, the pupil wanting to go and talk to that therapist is almost healing themselves and the therapist is healing them. So, they're coming together through art, but I believe that humans and the students ... you know, it's that





connection, that synchronicity within time and space, where we ... we can heal each other.

John: Here's a tough question for you, where you've got counsellors, social workers and other practitioners listening to our conversation right now, they're all going to say, 'Yeah, we know of art therapy and the interaction with my client is going okay,' any little indicators for that therapist to sort of say, 'I've come to a few dead ends, so I'm going to reach out and explore more.' How do they do it? Or as far as – I'm not asking this question very well – but what's a good sign for a therapist to sort of say, 'I want to be a bit more adventurous with how I'm going to communicate'?

Brett: Sure, John. I think that these hurdles will come up. I think it's about looking within the ... the client and what is something within their childhood that you could connect to? A love of theirs, a passion and also on top of that, it's about the client. If they're able to, they need to remove fear. Now, I don't think unless you're practicing ways of challenge yourself of the word 'fear', you can't ... the heart therapy mightn't come through them, because there's a blockage there.

So, I think as I do my work and as I talk to people I'm connecting to, I'm using a skateboard as a tool of connection, a symbol, a representation to the board riders and all the people that roll. And what we're trying to say is, skateboarding isn't about the sport, the physical, the performance, it's about removing fear so you can enjoy your life the best possible way.

John: Brett Ashby, you're a very modest person which I love. I'm not, I am sometimes. I'd like to share some feedback you're getting from people watching Brett's story, his journey. Could you share with us some nice stories from recognition? I'm not talking about awards, and I know this is very hard for you to do, but I'd love to know if you can share with ... just to tell us what other people are saying about you.





Brett: It's been ... it's been in interesting journey for me. It's been lovely to find myself with in the works and what people are ... the feedback is, is we're shining light on a facet of challenges within our existence and just grateful for the lovely comments. And so, John, it's sort of ... the feedback is there's such a rising vibration. People are evolving with me alongside the work, and to describe it the best way is, its energy. We are sharing energy, we are all growing through art, through the energy, and it's positivity.

John: I didn't think you could answer that question well, because you're so modest, which I love you for. Brett, thank you so much for talking. Before you go, I would like to invite you to allow people to go to their computer, learn more about some of the great work you're doing. I know you're in demand so, on behalf of me and So... podcast, thank you so much for coming on the show. But please tell us, where can people learn more about you?

Brett: Thanks, John. It's my website is www.brettashby.com and I'm on the Instagram as well, it's [brettashbyartist](https://www.instagram.com/brettashbyartist) on Instagram. And, John, it's lovely to be with you and thank you for your energy and love to talk to more people.

John: Thanks very much, Brett.

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