

# 103. Being an Artist w/ Dr. Ally Zlatar

**Dan Dissinger:** [00:00:00] Hi, everyone. Welcome to another episode of writing remix. I'm your host, Dan Dissinger. And, um, today I'm here with a really awesome guest. Um, we've been communicating back and forth planning this episode, and I'm been looking forward to this conversation. I'm here with Dr. Ally Zlatar, who teaches at the university of Glasgow.

Ali, thank you so much for being here.

**Ally Zlatar:** Um, no problem at all. And yeah, I mean, I can give you a little bit more about my background. Um, for me. Yeah. Okay. So, um, my bachelor's is in art history back in Queens in Toronto, Canada, move all the way across the pond to, um, Glasgow where I did my master's in curatorial studies and contemporary art.

And then my PhD is with the university of Southern Queensland. So all the way in Australia. And that's really where my research is focused. So it's, um, looking at creative arts and the lives and experiences of mental illness. So what art can contribute to this conversation. [00:01:00] And currently, um, like, like you mentioned, I'm at the university of Glasgow.

I teach on way too many courses, but my favorite is definitely arts research methodologies.

**Dan Dissinger:** It's interesting. Like we've had very different educational experiences. One thing that I feel like we have in common is that like a lot of our education was in like Different schools, like, like from BA to this.

And I went here for another degree because I know a lot of people sometimes stay at one place and like, almost like do their whole education there. And it's sometimes actually work in that school immediately after I'm curious, like what it was like to kind of have such a varied educational journey in, in you kind of also in, in locale geographically, like so vast.

**Ally Zlatar:** Oh, my goodness. Yeah, I guess. Um, I think part of it is just really understanding the culture behind a different academic institutions. So, um, in Canada, [00:02:00] things are very traditional and they have very set structures, especially in art and art history, where they're like, here's the process. Here's the

way we've been teaching things for a very long time, whereas in Australia, they're very focused on innovation within creative arts.

And I love that too. So much. And, um, and then in the UK, there's so much, um, experience within industry and they really try to tie that into practice and just realizing that so many different cultures have, um, different ways that they view academia. I think that's been really impactful for me to see the diversity of outputs and the way that students can actually progress in academia.

So it's not just one trick pony instead, you get to see the benefits from so many different views.

**Dan Dissinger:** Yeah. Yeah, I feel, you know, when it comes to arts education, too, it's in and what you're doing, especially with research methodology, which we'll go into as well. But how do you feel the, that kind of mix [00:03:00] of arts education from traditional to the industry to innovation?

You know, in terms of your own approach as an, as an artist, I guess first, like how did it influence your approach to your own art?

**Ally Zlatar:** Yeah, I mean, um, going through very traditional education, I was taught that the main output would be to either become an artist, an art teacher, or something within that traditional art space.

But after going through, um, different cultures, different educations, realizing that arts is supposed to be impacting society and having that industry element that's been neglected for so long. I really want to expand that and focus on arts as a way for public engagement. And I think that it's no longer just about color theory and being able to draw nude models.

Instead, how can you use your art to engage in society, whether it be political discourse, social discourse, even, um, in terms of art therapy, whatever it may be, that has [00:04:00] really helped me just explore beyond the, um, what do you call it? The traditional rubric of what artists should be.

**Dan Dissinger:** Yeah. And you know, we, when you emailed me, you left some amazing links to like your websites and the work you're doing.

And it's obvious that you really took that to heart because that idea of impact and public and the way you said, like public engagement. Um, can you talk a little bit about the things that you've been doing, especially the, you know, the,

the work you've done and the, the, the foundations that you set up and things like that.

Cause I found it to be. Extremely inspiring and I just want to say even before you answer because like I've had so many students like working through their like working through so many issues and working through mental health issues that they've had recently in the last few years in writing and I'm curious like the the impetus of setting this up and [00:05:00] kind of the the impact it's had for others possibly.

**Ally Zlatar:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, prefacing all of this, um, a lot of my own art and my own journey has been focused on my own mental health struggles, um, for such a long time. I thought if I was thinner, I'd be happier. And then the opposite occurred and I really became to my, um, well, became confined in my body with an eating disorder for over 10 years.

And I came from a very traditional Eastern European family. And so mental health was not talked about at all. And medical practitioners saw me as a diagnosis rather than someone actually suffering from a disease. And then that left me struggling for years and years and years because I didn't feel like anyone understood what I was going through.

Um, then I did my dissertation on the starving artist. And originally it was just supposed to be an exhibition and publication with five international artists all sharing their lived and experiences of eating disorders. Um, I did get a lot of traction from it. However, [00:06:00] I had over 50 artists that want to get involved and over 30 universities that want to pick up the publication.

And I really saw this need for this voice to be heard about people actually struggling. Um, from there, like I said, it's. been about four or five years now. And so the starving artist has manifested into an initiative. So we do exhibitions all over the world. Um, we also focus on workshops. So helping people be able to explore their own mental health through the artistic voice because often people lack those tools or resources or even the words to describe what they're going through.

Um, we also do lectures and talks, but also, um, for me, one of the biggest aspects is art is not just an accessory, but a way to broaden perspectives and have that actual change impact. So, um, part of it is that the sales from exhibitions, publications, and events goes towards the starving artists scholarship fund to help people access inpatient [00:07:00] treatment for eating disorders.

Cause there's either very long wait list or people don't fit the criteria. And, um, yeah, I mean, the work has gained a lot of traction. I've gotten, um, several international accolades, which has been amazing, ranging from the princess Diana legacy award, um, Y20 award, which is part of the G20 summit and recognition from the British citizens award.

So it's been really nice to see that

**Dan Dissinger:** impact. You know, I, I always think about when, when I talk to academics and I talk to teachers and people that have gone through kind of all the higher ed and I'm always like, how do we make what we do matter? And it seems like what you, you know, you found that, that path and put it out there and people kind of really gravitated towards it.

Um, when, when you're in the classroom, how do you, how do you communicate that or how, how do you get that across to your students [00:08:00] as well for them to kind of see their work or what they're going to research or how they engage their, their art. to kind of show like, yes, it can go past just like this small little community or art is something that like the public really wants.

So, you know, because a lot of times in art, I mean, maybe here in the United States is like, there is like a track, possibly it's like, you're an artist that you might be in marketing or, you know, especially when an English major, you're going to do what I did. And then all of a sudden it's just like. You're a teacher.

Do you find, like, you're able to get students to see past, like, these, like, very narrow pathways, possibly?

**Ally Zlatar:** So, yeah, my biggest issue was that I didn't see these role models growing up in academia, and I always thought, as an academic, your job was to go through your bachelor's, master's, Ph. D. Do post doctorate research and create academic texts.

But I realized that so much of what I do is practice based. So generating research through actually [00:09:00] doing. And for me, I realized that, you know what, there's so many alternatives to what's been out there. So for my students, I really show that I'm. Someone who's actively involved in the industry, which makes me an example for what the diversity of what you can do is.

So no longer is academic education, just a degree to write and generate papers. It's actually being able to use your research, use your knowledge and expertise to actually work with society because often academics write about society and write about change making but nothing ever gets done. So these two need to be more cohesive and so I try to serve as a role model for showing what my research can actually impact at a larger scale.

**Dan Dissinger:** Were you like surprised that like your art had such a Your project had such resonated so much when, when you had it out there?

**Ally Zlatar:** Yes and no. I realized that part of it was like, it's my own experiences and I [00:10:00] thought that that would be very subjective, but in the sense that people saw their own struggles being shared, and that's one of the great things about art.

It's both for people with that lived and experience seeing their struggles communicated, but then also people who don't have that same experience. So the loved ones, the medical practitioners that don't understand that. What people are actually going through, they get to see it and broaden their understanding and really have a more deeper and more authentic sense of what it's actually like.

Because either the media is putting out stereotypical representations, there's very limited, um, accurate voices and diversity. So that's why I really try to focus on sharing that within the eating disorder and mental health discussions. I also forgot to mention that part of what I do is, um, this body of mind, which is the second campaign that I started two years ago.

And as my family comes from former Yugoslavia and being displaced, it's focusing on migrant experiences of wellbeing and how can displacement [00:11:00] impact identity. So very similar method of using creative arts to help edify their experiences and using art as a catalyst for changemaking. So yeah, I

**Dan Dissinger:** do too much.

No, well, I think that's the nature of academia I've found. Like we, we do too much, right? Because we, I guess like we want, we have that will, that need to engage. And I think a lot now with so much technology or not even tech, I'm not even going to put it on technology, I think maybe like, uh, we're seeing so much mixing and like, and like multi modality and in academia, that's just like, Oh, I can like, bring this in and like, this could be academic, you know?

**Ally Zlatar:** I love that. Yeah. It's just being able to embrace intersectionality because no longer, sorry, no longer is just philosophy doing philosophy. Instead it's, um, art and psychology working together or math and music, like so many different ways [00:12:00] to bridge these gaps.

**Dan Dissinger:** Yeah. Yeah. I'm, I'm curious, like you said something really interesting about your, you know, how your project is trying to push against some of the stereotypes that are out there in the media when it comes to, you know, eating disorders and kind of putting and trying to, I guess, like correct that I'm curious, like what were some of the stereotypes or some of the things that you were trying to push against that you feel like, you know, Yeah.

Traditional or, you know, popular media gets wrong and how maybe even like even more on that. Yeah. Yeah,

**Ally Zlatar:** I mean, where do I begin like France, but, um, just to really just, uh, hit the point home often when you have eating disorders and body image, it's always focused on, um, a young white Caucasian female.

She's either only eating carrots.

And that's one of the very, um, first images you think of when you think of an eating [00:13:00] disorder or the other end of the spectrum, where you see someone who's, um, too large and they're having this lack of control around food. And so they're just seen as overindulging. Now it's both very extreme ends of the spectrum, both focus on physical body and not that mind body dualism of what's normal.

I'm going to share a little bit about what's being experienced, and then also what's from outsider perspectives. So there's very, very big gaps and everywhere in between. Focusing on age and eating disorders, even pregnancy and eating disorders, um, different intersectionalities of disability. So how can someone with bipolar eating disorders or, um.

Um, and then, of course, somebody in a wheelchair be affected by eating disorder. And then, of course, gender and ethnicity, because we have very little queer and male voices in these conversations around eating disorders, and, um, especially within coloured communities, there's a, oh, I believe it's 66 percent of, [00:14:00] uh, most communities don't actually get treatment unless they're Caucasian, and that's, again, one of the things that we're trying to address and show that, look, everybody eats.

Everybody has a struggle with food because there's no normal way to eat food. So how can we all be able to have a healthier and better relationship with it?

**Dan Dissinger:** No, I I'm reminded of the first time I even heard that, um, a man can have an eating disorder was when I heard that the lead singer to this band in the nineties, silver chair.

He had to stop performing because he had an eating disorder, and we were like very, it was interesting because we were all confused, I'm like, I've never heard of that before, and he was suffering, like, on his own, because it's like, he was kind of like, no one's going to believe me, or, and it was very sad to kind of hear something like that, and like, now, Well, as you're [00:15:00] talking, I'm like thinking like, yeah, we think of so many things in such a binary and like such like extremes and though these types of things are crossed, like inside all these different spectrums of identity.

**Ally Zlatar:** Absolutely. And, um, especially now with social media and like bodies being on display all the time, it makes these things a lot worse. But then also, people have, I would say, normal, average, healthy BMI bodies, and yet still have a disordered relationship with food. Some people eat a lot of food before an exam, and some people won't eat any food at all.

Some people only like eating certain types of food, whereas other people just want a bit of everything. And even just these small behavioral patterns is not normal. And so there's no normal way to have a healthy relationship with food. And then also exercise is another big thing, especially with the rise of healthy body, healthy eating, um, orthorexia becomes prominent, especially in [00:16:00] the fitness industry.

So men and women trying to have pure cleansed bodies at maximum peak performance. And then that's another form of disordered eating that doesn't get talked about. So yeah, there's way too much. It's way too common. And yet it's not being talked about.

**Dan Dissinger:** Yeah. I mean, personally, I know I have like a, you know, this, and sometimes I don't know something like an odd relationship with like accepting, you know, my body is okay, right?

Like that, like there's nothing wrong with me. Right? And I think it comes from sometimes even seeing, even on social media on the TV, on TV or whatever, the way men's bodies are supposed to be like big and muscular or extremely cut

or anything. And I'm like, That's going to be an impossibility, like, but you feel it and you, you actually, like, I am like, really take it internalize it.

Yeah. And it's, it's painful because you don't think that like, you know, I [00:17:00] have, you know, you go and you try something on. And it's fine, but I don't see that, right? Like I don't see it, but someone else has to constantly tell you. But it's interesting to kind of think of how much of that can be part of your, of the conversation you're having in your art, where it's not always the extreme.

There are these like gradations of it and different, like different experiences of it because we're all walking around or. In the, in the world with a body, you know, depending on mobility and accessibility and stuff like that, like, but. That we have them. So it's really interesting to kind of have to, you know, come to terms with that instead of it.

Just like you said, the stereotype that you see, like that one stereotype on the media. Yeah,

**Ally Zlatar:** absolutely. I mean, thank you honestly, for being so vulnerable and open, especially when I have these conversations, males are the ones that just shy away and don't want to talk about it, but it's. [00:18:00]

**Dan Dissinger:** But it's true.

Like, you know, I see we, if you go to a gym or you're doing whatever, like you see, like, and I've been a person that doesn't like overdo it because I'm like, okay, I'm going to get an end. Just like it's time to get in shape. Right? Then when in actuality, it's just like, I have to reset my brain and constantly relearn that like exercises for my health, like my longevity, not.

Really anything else and whatever else is extra, but you gotta like, you know, from high school on, like we just worked out to kind of look a certain way, but now it's just like, how do you, how do I reset that? Right? Absolutely. I'm curious, like, you know, I looked at some of the work on your website and I was really.

It really blown away by the choice of the, and we're going to have the, the link in the show notes so that everyone can look at the, this as well. But the choice on the medium [00:19:00] as well, like how the, the paintings, I'm not going to say, I don't know. I want to say not muted, but like very like visceral and color.

palette choice, right? It was very like impactful. It wasn't like it almost wasn't, I don't know how to explain it. Like very like direct brushstrokes and color. And, um, but not Extremely vibrant, but not muted. I don't know how to explain it. Like, can you go through like the process of how you chose to kind of create these images?

**Ally Zlatar:** Yeah, for sure. I mean, I just, I love hearing the way that people like interpret my art because this is, it's so interesting, but, um, for me, I guess most of my art and my writing comes from a place of autoethnographic studies. So myself as both the researcher and the subject, um. Through this insider perspective, what I try to do is look at my experiences and my stories in a way to help [00:20:00] others understand and even for me to just process and unravel them.

So a lot of my works tend to be memory scapes. So creating memories that are, um, almost like you said, like a visceral experience. experience, but not an accurate experience, so there's either small fragments of things that I remember, like maybe being in a grocery store or crying in a washroom, whatever it is.

I just. create more of that feeling of that moment that happened. And, um, another thing is that it's, they're very, um, uh, detailed and very small. So they're about four by six inches. Um, yeah. So most of the time you see these artworks and they're massive, but for me, Especially when we're talking about eating disorders, mental health, there's some sort of sensitivity and intimacy that I want to create.

So people have to come towards the paintings to really get a better understanding of what's going on. So I think that's both experiential in a gallery, but then also in real life, because you [00:21:00] need to have that intimate and safe space for people to want to engage and take that time to really look at it and analyze it more.

**Dan Dissinger:** So what, can you speak a little more on the choice of the size, just a little more, because like, I find that so interesting because as a writer and as a poet, like sometimes like my poems will be large, right? Like they'll be long, and I'm like reading them out loud or reading to myself going through them and I'm like, wow, this, I just like this is a really interesting sprawling space, but then like I'll maybe write something that's very small.

And I have, and I also have someone who's been on Nancy Stolman, amazing flash fiction writer. There's an episode coming up for her as well, because her book is also an audiobook now. Uh, but, and she did a whole exercise about

turning a story into flash fiction and smaller flash fiction, smaller flash, flash fiction on the, on the show.

And, [00:22:00] but that choice to continue to like shrink something, but then to kind of also like, I don't know. Um Turn the volume up on like like you said like the intimacy or like the the just everything happening in it Well, how did you come to that choice? So four by six, like, how does that happen? Did you try different sizes out?

**Ally Zlatar:** I think for me, um, art school just made everything very large and very big. And I'm like, no, I don't like that. I like being involved in almost like intimate with the artwork and being able to like oversee it, focus on these small details and moments, have that close connection with both the canvas, but then also those.

I realized that, um, when it comes to like that size and scale, it works best for me because that's also like the person that I am. I'm not a big flashy person. I'm not somebody that goes out into the world and wants to share all my experiences. [00:23:00] Instead, I really want to have That, um, but like also my paintings tend to be very dark and very vulnerable in the sense that you'll see, this is a trigger warning, but you'll see me binging and purging, or you'll see me, um, with suicidal, like ideation.

And so these topics aren't ones that should be at a large scale. And especially for myself, the way that I want to process and reflect on them is these small glimpses to really just, um. illustrate and even lead to different points that can be expanded wider. And that's why I think art is that tool that can help broaden perspectives and to start as that catalyst for change.

**Dan Dissinger:** That that's really powerful. So do you have a process that you go through as an artist to kind of.

After you maybe paint or create something to kind of, um, reflect out of [00:24:00] it, you know, like, cause sometimes like I, I know as a writer, sometimes I'm in a poem and then I leave the poem and I have to either go outside or something because like, I've, it's taken me like a lot out of me to kind of create what I just did.

Um, do you have a process that like kind of to kind of move out of it and shift? Do you like your energy out of your, out of your created creation space?

**Ally Zlatar:** So I would say yes and no to that. For me, I'm like somebody that's like, especially with my research being focused on analyzing me, living my daily life and just overanalyzing all of my daily activities.

And I'm so used to this process of constant engagement. So when I'm creating the art is just, I think a stop in that cycle for me. But then like, yes, I get a break from it. But then I move on to the next thing that's relating, whether it be calorie counting, overexercise, um, struggles, my family dealing with, um, [00:25:00] assault and trauma, like whatever it may be, it's these things that I go through cycles.

And so processing it doesn't end. with the artwork creation, but it's, I think the manifestation, public engagement. And then, um, I think reflection on it. And then how can I build on those ideas and cycle?

**Dan Dissinger:** I'm going to like get even more nerdy about this just because I'm so interested. Oh yes, let's do it.

Like in routine, uh, because like, I'm just getting back into my writing routine. I had like literally. Abandoned writing for, I think almost a few years, like where I wasn't consistently writing anything. I think my job took over my entire life and now I'm kind of just like re. Re exploring my creative output again.

Um, how do you keep those two spaces? I know like, they're not separate, but they, but you kind of have to as well, to kind of be in, like, to [00:26:00] create art. And then you have academia, academia, academic life. How do you? Do you have a set routine or do you, is there, how do you find time to do all of it? Do you have that?

Oh God,

**Ally Zlatar:** you're not going to, I was going to say, you're not going to like the answer. And, um, so it's not healthy, but I love what I do. I'm so passionate about it and it consumes all of my time. So I will like power through essays, like marketing student stuff and, um, be on like zoom calls till like 11 o'clock at night.

scheduling events and working months in advance, but then within those breaks and working so far ahead, I'm able to just power through and get like five artworks done in a week. And then it's just like a cycle of like when the timing's right and I get through all these different waves. It's when. I kind of put the other waves into place.

So when school and teaching is low, then I focus on [00:27:00] the art and activism and then constantly switch, which is has, which has been working out so far because both of them take a long process to actually manifest and get through semesters. So it's, it's, it's been not healthy because work life balance should be a thing, but

**Dan Dissinger:** Yeah, it's something I've talked about with a lot of people where, where we've been a few years out from our dissertation, um, some of my, uh, the people I did my dissertation with, you know, shout out to Megan Nolan and Regina Duthley and, um, uh, Melissa Rampelli and everybody that I've had on from St.

John's, Tara, Bradway, Daniel Lee, that like we, we talk about how like, They prepared us to do our dissertation. They did a great job. And everyone at St. John's is amazing. But I think it's like that missing element of being like, when you're doing your work, when you're teaching, like how do you balance your life?

And I think it's a hard thing. And I've had people tell me to do better and, you know, to, to work on that. But [00:28:00] it's hard to, it's hard because you get very involved. I think with teaching, they teach, good teachers are just, like you said, totally dedicated to just being in that space.

**Ally Zlatar:** Oh, absolutely. I get some emails on like Sunday evenings and I'm like, uh, I hate that you're a wonderful student and I want to help you.

But um, yeah, I think also just another thing about academia is that I was told before doing a PhD, you better love what you do and the topic that you choose because you're going to be spending a long time on this and potentially the rest of your life on it. So I think I took that too seriously. And I think People should realize that yes, like you should love what you do, but also you need to love yourself in that process.

So it's about finding that balance wherever that may be. Someone tell me where it is.

**Dan Dissinger:** When I find it, I'll let you know. Oh, thank you. Thank you. Um, I would love to hear more about this other project you're talking about with the [00:29:00] identity displacement, um, kind of more, I guess it's in kind of more embedded in like your, uh, experiences of your family and stuff like how is that, um, manifesting in what you do and, um, is it taking on a different, um, is it, is it look different?

Is it take on a different process? Like how are you approaching that space versus like what you've been doing?

**Ally Zlatar:** Yeah, I mean, first off, like my approach has always been insider perspectives and having the people without lived and experience be the forefront of these conversations. And in terms of migrant identity, displacement, um, my family, like I said, they, um, Migrated end up in Canada, growing up in a culture where they didn't know the language, they didn't have that same education and there was a lack of access to even just like fundamental health care because they didn't know where to go or how to access it.

Growing up in that situation, you realize that [00:30:00] It's such a struggle, both escaping and leaving your home and your identity, but then also how can you form and adopt, but also, um, find yourself within that process. So, I think that, um, looking at the flea, sorry, the theme of fluidity a bit more, and looking at, Um, how identities are evolving within cultural contexts is there's a little bit more focus on behavioral countermapping.

So looking at places, not just memory and space, but a sense of being in it. Um, in terms of outputs, I think this one is where it differs a little bit more. In terms of the work that I do with the serving artists, it's looking more at helping people find art as a way to explore their mental health experiences.

Um, whereas in this body of mine, it's really supposed to be a way to help people through access barriers. So I work with refugee organizations. I work [00:31:00] with, um, several local organizations within my, uh, city. And I really focus on saying that there's alternatives. So just because you may struggle with Um, you know, you don't have to have a language barrier or having the right, um, education.

You don't have 10 grand to spend on trying to get into med school. But you can explore your experiences through art. And having either digital art, music, dance, whatever it may be, it's a way for you to be involved in these conversations and not let these barriers be hindering you and your way to get involved.

And I think that helps create opportunities and helps break these systemic barriers in place.

**Dan Dissinger:** So what's the response been, like, have you been doing that work and has there been response, um, to that work? And I'm curious, like what it's been. Yeah.

**Ally Zlatar:** I mean, it's been, I think, impactful, but slower. People are very willing to embrace mental health conversations because we all struggle with it.[00:32:00]

But in terms of, um, this body of mine and migration, it's a very topical issue and people are very polarized on it. And so I think there's been A bit of not backlash, but it's been a bit slower to adopt because it's, um, it's either hot or cold. I also think that, um, I've been trying to push this one a lot more in terms of policy and policy reform.

So having people with, um. lived in experiences, either create artworks, make a publication and share it to members of Parliament and sharing it to Westminster and Hollyrod, which is the Scottish Parliament and getting it in their faces. So not looking at the statistics and looking at, um, the laws and policies, but actually looking at the people directly who it's affecting.

And we lose that with those figures and numbers.

**Dan Dissinger:** Oh man, I almost, I was just thinking of, you [00:33:00] know, the type of You know, blockages and, and walls that are put up by policymakers and politicians and, and just. Governments when it comes to, you know, the, the, in a way, like the, the will of like the majority of people like you, I mean, here I am in the United States and it is politically a mess and artists are just like, you know.

Trying to, in a lot of ways, build bridges and communicate messages and just, like, find the empathy and the humanity in things, and it's just like, I mean, I once heard, I don't know where I heard it, but I took it with me for, like, a very long time in my life, like, once something reads, once something begins.

Reaches politics and reaches the political space. It's already been like ruined in many ways, because like you, you're now talking about, you know, ideologies and you're talking about, you know, parties and [00:34:00] blah, blah, blah, whatever. And it's like, well, what is the role of the artist in these moments? You know, and I mean, yeah,

**Ally Zlatar:** it's hard because I've been in these spaces having these conversations of, um, very high up officials, but they either look at it.

It's like, how much is this going to cost me? No, this is too hard to actually put into place. And there's a lack of empathy and like that lack of humanity. Their focus is honestly just to stay in power and just to create that facade of, look, I'm

trying to make change, but I'm one person. But at the same time, all these people, especially artists are very grassroots.

It's in their efforts to change making and policy is one of those that is very hard to change and even tying it back to eating disorders and medical treatment. Medical practitioners are very similar. They grow up and they go in this, um, very strict medical training to be like, look, um, you see a diagnosis, you have your treatment plan and then you follow it based on these [00:35:00] symptoms.

It's, it's not working. So many people are either going back and relapsing with mental health conditions like eating disorders. One in five eating disorders are fatal and I believe it's like one in ten people actually suffer from an eating disorder and yet there's only 10 beds in a hospital. And so you realize that it's, it's not being addressed.

and medical practitioners aren't changing either because that's what they're doing and that's what they've been doing. And so there's this lack of willingness to change, lack of willingness to embrace those individual perspectives. So that's why I'm trying to shove the art in everyone's faces basically.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow. So how do you turn that into like all of your amazing activism and just methodology in your own art, in your own work and really like Courageously just like taking those leaps and risks like how do you bring that into classroom pedagogy and like curriculum right like it's [00:36:00] um, it's always that thing right like I'm always like going, am I walking the walk of my talk when I'm in the classroom and am I doing that right.

So how do you. How do you turn that into curriculum for your students, especially when it comes to research methodologies or what they're doing, you know, in your class? And do they, I guess, let me just stay with how do you do that? How do you make that shift or how do you bring that in?

**Ally Zlatar:** I think there's a balance between, um, following the curriculum, making sure they understand the diversity, but then also sharing your work.

I don't want it to be too overpowering saying, look, this is my work. This is the only way, but it's a way. And students love seeing what you're doing beyond the classroom and they realize that you're a human and that you're actually involved and they love that. But I also try to focus on using my experience as an example.

So what can they do? What do you like doing within your research? Do you like, um, writing poems about veganism? Do you like looking at, [00:37:00] um, arms conflicts within different geographic regions? Whatever it is, I want to work one on one to help them focus on it. For me, I'm always a proponent for practice based, um, research, because I think that's the best way that they get to engage in society and use their work and their research to actually make a difference.

It's not just about polling people and getting questionnaires, but it's actually about listening to these voices and how can we use these voices to actually impact and make that change.

**Dan Dissinger:** What kind of stuff does your, do your students do? Or are there some, are there really like surprising projects or work that your students create that you're just like, wow, I couldn't even write an assignment that would create something like that.

**Ally Zlatar:** Yeah, I mean, I love the openness. The way that my university works is that arts research methodologies is for like pretty much any humanity students that want to do it. So I get a range of. Archaeology, to philosophy, to film students. [00:38:00] And so each one of them kind of explores a project within their own field.

And I've, I've gotten some really interesting ones. So looking at ethical issues within conflict archaeology, looking at morality within, um, international conflict, even things like, um, IP laws. And I didn't realize I'd be very interested in IP laws, but looking at the way students are analyzing it and are passionate about it.

I'm like, Oh, my goodness. Why aren't we talking about IP laws? It's like, I love it because they're interested in what they're doing. They have that dedication and they want to explore it. And I think helping foster that is so important. And so if I'm able to give them suggestions on which way to go about it, all the better.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow. So something that I'm always thinking about net, well, more recently than, than not is like the role of like the humanities and the arts and humanities play in like a student's college education. Right. Especially when like [00:39:00] in a school like where I work or just in general, I think a lot of universities and bigger universities in the United States and kind of how money definitely goes towards the schools that.

Develop that, create money, right? Like the business school, the architecture school, the, uh, medical school, the medical school, like the, you know, um, all sorts of, you know, science and math and stuff like that. I mean, I know, I know at USC we have the cinema schools, very famous. So that's like one thing, but I would say like.

One thing is always like, what role do the arts and humanities play? And do you feel like it's, it's not, it's not given and maybe like it's not given enough of a thought that like it's, it's so much more important than like what people give it?

**Ally Zlatar:** Absolutely. I think for me, especially, um, so many of my buildings that I've been taught in are either, um, lights falling out of the ceiling.

There's no heating. Um, [00:40:00] there's rats. And this is the art school that you're paying more money than most of the business students. So I always was told, don't go into art school. It's a waste of time and waste of money, especially, you know, unless you want to go into arts academia, because that's the only way to do it.

I found that, um, I think there was this lack of connect between arts and industry and arts and potential so looking at not just commercialization of art and selling your art, but arts and public engagement arts and alternative therapies arts and, um, even just arts and education, like looking at all these different sectors.

I think art school as a whole, whether it be design, philosophy, um, even like writing, all these ones need to look more at industry and real life to actually be more impactful. And if not, it's just going to be another academic discipline that leads students nowhere.

**Dan Dissinger:** I [00:41:00] mean, it's so funny. We're talking about this.

And, and behind me, as everyone will see in the screenshot and the website is the, it's a Diego Rivera mural from the Detroit Institute of Art. And so many times, like people ask, like, well, what is that background? What is that background? And it's an unbelievable, huge mural about, you know, working people and just like the plight of the working class and so much more.

Right. And people see that and they know it's important, but then like, If it comes to the idea of arts and humanities in higher ed, it's just like, that's not as important. We it's weird. I think the public and people like they love art. But they don't understand its role in the major discourse on like how we live together, you know?

Oh,

**Ally Zlatar:** absolutely. They don't, I don't think there's a large appreciation both for the artist's time, the effort, the materials. There's a lack of [00:42:00] funding, lack of societal support and saying, yes, we need to pay artists. Yes, we need to have inclusive spaces for artists to practice. And I think also just. a lack of dialogue of really looking at the potential of art and I, I don't have the answers to fix it, but I think it's just by listening to podcasts like this and being able to open your mind and really explore the potentials of all these different, amazing, creative voices and the way that we're able to impact.

**Dan Dissinger:** Okay. So. I've been asking this question to a lot of people, um, in some, in my episodes as we wind down, and that's like, what are you excited about when it comes to what's coming up for you? Like, what's exciting in the future of, like, either your art or your career, or things that you're just like, I can't wait for this, or

**Ally Zlatar:** Um, sleep?

No. Um But, um, yeah, but no, on a more serious [00:43:00] note, I think, um, I'm exploring art and poetry a bit. So I have a first publication about that. So it's called the monsters are alive. So looking at the lived and experiences of mental health, both through art and poetry. Um, I also have a couple exhibitions coming up.

So I'll keep those a little bit of a secret, but, um, if you guys check out my socials or the websites, you'll be able to see more information. Otherwise I'm excited for the summer and just taking a break from teaching and getting ready for the next semester.

**Dan Dissinger:** Well, that's amazing. Well, I mean, seriously, congratulations on, I mean, anything that has to do with any sort of book or publishing, I'm.

I am so excited when I hear that for people because it's such an uphill battle, but to see that it's a collaboration between art and poetry, I love that. Um, and just, um, thank you. I mean, I am, this has been such a, a deep episode and I'm [00:44:00] just want to thank you for. You know, all the work you're doing all the all of the courageous type of like kind of stuff you put out there for people and just for being there for your students for them to be able to do what they do.

It's not easy. And I feel like how you've approached it is, um, truly in line, in my, my opinion, kind of also like I feel like the The one of the many spirits of

this podcast with the late bell hooks and everything she's done in teaching to transgress in this idea of fully embodied ideas and fully invited education and how that's extremely imperative for like, especially in the humanities.

So really just want to acknowledge that thank you so much for everything that you've put out here.

**Ally Zlatar:** Thank you so much for even wanting me be on this podcast and share the work that I'm doing and Oh God, I'll, I'll keep it short, but, um, yes, please just, I, I, I definitely am a proponent for arts in our daily lives.

So just being able to put that in [00:45:00] more, both authentically and vulnerably and yeah, I'll end it there.

**Dan Dissinger:** So what, can you let people know, um, how they can follow you and, you know, your social media and stuff like that? Cause we'll put it in the show notes, but I would, you know, how can people like actually like.

Really see kind of what you get in touch. Yeah.

**Ally Zlatar:** Yeah. Um, my Instagram has a little bit more of the activism. So Ali's later My website has a little bit about the art in the portfolio so you get to see some those images and then the starving artist website has that activism and being able to See those public engagements and more about the arts research side of things.

So go on a internet wormhole and good luck.

**Dan Dissinger:** It's really amazing. I encourage everyone to kind of look, you know, to look at Allie's work. It's really amazing and it's, um, inspiring and it's just very impactful. So really, I think, take a look at it, engage it. And, um, thank you so much for being on this episode.

I'm really, it was been a really great conversation. Thank [00:46:00] you. Oh, great. Thank you. Thank you. And everyone, please leave your comments for this episode. Please follow Writing Remix, um, on Instagram and Twitter at writingremix, at writingremixpod. I always get that wrong. So follow at writingremixpod. And, um, we'll be, you know, can't wait for another episode.

And so everyone, thank you so much.