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MBS ([00:00](#)):

A young woman stands one hand on the top of her chair, the other, holding a bouquet of leaves. She stares directly into the lens of the camera. It's not clear what she's thinking. She's wearing a long dark dress, long sleeves and a white collar that covers her neck. It's old fashioned. It's colonial. A simple crucifix hangs from her neck. She's an indigenous Australian, an Aboriginal, and behind her is a landscape that's lush. Although wait, it's actually a tapestry of a landscape and the picture is blue. The blue, you might know if you've ever seen crockery with the Willow pattern, Spode China. This is a piece of art and it's called, A Gaze Still Dark (a black portrait of intimacy). And this is Danie Mellor's grandmother.



MBS ([00:58](#)):

Welcome to Two Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Now, Danie Mellor, the grandson of the woman in this picture is also the creator of this image. And by the way, if you do want to see this image, so not just relying on my tempted at description, do check out the YouTube video of this conversation because we'll actually get to show you the pieces of art that we talk about in it.

MBS ([01:29](#)):

So Danie's a brilliant Australian artist and his work stirs questions and really provocations about this intersection between colonial and contemporary and historic cultures. His work can be found all over the world in museums such as a National Gallery of Canada. So that's cool, as a Canadian and Australian. The British Museum, the National Museum of Scotland, and also in Canberra's own national gallery of Australia, which is where I saw A Gaze Still Dark and thought, man, I need to speak to this person, his work is extraordinary. Now the cultural intersections in Danny's art is also to be found in his story. His maternal side of the family is Aboriginal Scottish and on his father's side ... Well, they were from California originally and they found a home in Australia as sugar cane farmers, but not just sugar cane farmers.

Danie ([02:23](#)):

My great grandfather was the Arkansas kid. That was his stage name in California, rode in Bill Cody's show. But in Australia was very well known for being a great sort of a horse rider. So there's this really kind of rich, I guess family heritage, but also cultural and historical heritage that Australia has.

MBS ([02:46](#)):

Danie was born in Queensland in Australia, but he wasn't given the chance to put down roots there.



Danie ([02:51](#)):

Growing up there, I spent some time in that Northern Queensland, but then we moved around quite a lot. So growing up, we lived in different parts of Australia. We lived overseas as well, particularly Scotland. And over time, I guess part of that growing up and experiencing life led me to becoming, I guess, very interested in art and art practice. I wasn't sure if that was actually a possibility to forge a career as an artist. And in fact, I was told on many occasions that, well, no, it's not.

MBS ([03:31](#)):

In fact, he didn't become an artist immediately and instead he went into academia. And I think you'll actually hear some of this, his joy of the lucidity of discussing ideas and subtleties in our conversation. But after 18 years, the core to commit full time to his art became demanding, it became insistent.

Danie ([03:51](#)):

It just became too busy in the sense that there were opportunities that were opening up, some great sort of projects I wanted to work on so I took actually a year without pay to begin with, after dropping back to part-time for a few years, I then sort of stepped back without pay. And after six to nine months of being away, I realized actually things are getting even busier so I need to make a call and I did.

MBS ([04:16](#)):

After I first saw Danie's art in the national gallery here in Canberra honestly, I geeked out on it a bit. I mean, he's best known for this style of work that *A Gaze Still Dark* embodies, this old photography made large, and reimagined, and recolored, and reframed in a way that makes the relationship between country and colony more apparent and more contemporary and more pressing. But he's actually worked at many different scales and formats, small and intimate, and also enormous. Both two dimensional and three dimensional sculptural things



that stand alone and other pieces of art that work in relationship to where they're installed. So I was really curious as somebody who tries to be a creator and a maker himself, how he decides really what game to play and what shape his ideas should have.

Danie ([05:04](#)):

I actually began working at art school mostly with imagery. So much of that background, if you like very, very early career development work was imagery based. So print making a lot of drawing, work on paper, some painting, but you're right. I then moved into three dimensional or sculptural forms and in a way that was running parallel to the image making that I was doing. So at different points in my career, there have been things which became perhaps more publicly known and there would be almost like a sine wave where things sort of almost poked head above the surface and then there's some sort of traction around that.

Danie ([05:50](#)):

But then other things that I'm working on as well, sort of come up into that public gaze and there's a different sort of conversation around the work. So the narrative be back of that and what's at the core in terms of, I guess you could call conceptual threads and framework is, as you've said in the very beginning as a real focus, if you like on those histories in Australia, around colonial settler and let's be very upfront about that colonial invasion of Australia and in a sense how that relates to indigenous or first nations experience and what happened to the landscape and to people. And so in some sense, it's a very human story. But as an artist, I find that my touchstone, if you like his landscape. And how to explore all those really complex, incredible layers of human experience, human story, and all the different cultural spaces that open up with different awareness around human presence and connection and relationship to space.



MBS ([07:02](#)):

Well, that leads me to ask this question and I'm going to stumble a bit about it because I haven't quite figured out in my own head, but I guess I'm curious to know or if you even think about who your audience is, do you make art for your own sense of exploring and articulating some of these themes or do you have an audience in mind? Because I've seen your work in institutions and institutions, often holders of a colonial heritage and a reinforcement of the status quo is they can be. So I guess I'm struggling to know how to articulate this, but who do you make art for? How does your relationship with, and your success in institutions play with that? Because in some ways it feels like a key message that I see in your work is this disruption of this comfort of a colonial history.

Danie ([08:06](#)):

Sure. And that's a really interesting way to open up another insight into what and how and why artists do things. And in some ways for an art practice, if you like to have any sense of longevity, it sounds selfish, but the artist almost needs to create work for themselves. So they kind of need to be internally curious about something or a series of events or history, or even themselves. I mean, there are artists who focus particularly on the nature of identity and all of these strands of research if you like, even if they're deeply personal are valid in terms of art making. And so in some ways my target audience is not necessarily the first thing I think about even though I'm very aware that the work when it leaves the studio will be offered to an audience and people will see it.

Danie ([09:07](#)):

And so you're right. Yes, there are institutional audiences or museum audiences and those sort of, if you like conflicted histories and the presence of a different kinds of work, which is both colonial and contemporary and this incredible mix, I think part of the beauty of that, it's almost a paradox, but part of the beauty of that is that in fact, you can go to a gallery, an institution and experience that



sense of history and understand some of the ways that things have been weighted or seen in the past, but also how conversations change over time. This has been perhaps slow, but really important in the sense that first nations indigenous art has entered into a very particular kind of conversation with institutional environments and allows a different kind of reading and perception around the absolute validity of indigenous knowledge, indigenous systems of cultural interaction with space and country.

Danie ([10:14](#)):

And also the fact that first nations art or Aboriginal art has a really valid part to play in contemporaneous visual language. So up until 70s or perhaps even 80s, I think there was a real perception that in fact, all Aboriginal art was ethnographic. It is almost like a cultural glass ceiling. It was shown in museums and it was spoken about in terms that weren't, let's say related to a discourse around contemporary visual culture or contemporary visual art.

Danie ([10:49](#)):

And so when that began to break down a little, there were some really interesting movements. And this happened in quite a lot of different countries where there are first nations populations where less classical forms of work that began to be made by urban indigenous artists, found their way into galleries and began to gather traction. And I think this is where there's a real breakdown in terms of perception around what Aboriginal artists were actually able to create work about and use and with, so the mediums changed. So there was a real amazing outpouring of photography, of painting, of drawing, of performance, of moving image works, which engaged critically with all of those contemporary mediums, but also dovetailed and began to move very sort of steadily, and I would say determinedly into the center of theoretical and philosophical discussions around contemporary art.



MBS ([11:51](#)):

It feels like this might be a nice segue to ask you what you've chosen to read for us?

Danie ([11:56](#)):

Certainly. And what I've chosen to read from today is Susan's Sontag's book and I'll hold that up on photography.

MBS ([12:04](#)):

Oh, beautiful.

Danie ([12:05](#)):

And it's been a really interesting touchstone for me because I haven't always shown photographs, I've always taken photographs in the field as a kind of a notebook or a sketchbook. And with digital it's just so easy now to capture, bring back and it's almost like a preserved memory that you refer back to. And so I do feel as an artist, who's come to photography, it's opened up her a really amazing sort of world of understanding theoretical perspectives around imagery. And interestingly enough, I wrote my PhD or one of the areas of focus in my research for the PhD was photography, late colonial photography.

Danie ([12:48](#)):

So I encountered a really different language and ways of looking at images and I found Susan Sontag's work has been a little bit of an anchoring point really for me. And in some ways, as I explained to you, it's quite analog the first papers or the draft of this was 1971, which I've always found sort of quite prescient because that's the year I was born and I was thinking, "Well, this is kind of interesting. I'm reading a text from that year I was born and growing up in the 70s was such a great time." It was very analog. And so when I read Sontag's words, it's almost like taking me back to those formative years of my life and kind of understanding how someone was trying to contextualize and talk about



it. And so what I might do is just jump straight in and read. And so I'll begin now. And this particular book I think it's one of the third reprint so I'm reading from page 147,

Danie ([13:54](#)):

"Less and less does the work of art depend on being a unique object, an original made by an individual artist. Much of painting today, aspires to the qualities of reproducible objects. Finally, photographs have become so much the leading visual experience that we now have works of art, which are produced in order to be photographed. In much of conceptual art in Christo's packaging of the landscape in the earthworks of Walter De Maria and Robert Smithson [inaudible 00:14:26] he did the spiral jetty in Utah. The artist's work is known principally by the photographic report of it in galleries and museums. Sometimes the size is such that it can only be known in a photograph or from an airplane. The photograph is not even ostensibly meant to lead us back to an original experience. It was on the basis of this presumed truth between photography and painting that photography was grudgingly at first, then enthusiastically acknowledged as a fine art.

Danie ([14:56](#)):

But the very question of whether photography is, or is not an art is essentially a misleading one. Although photography generates work, that can be called art, it requires subjectivity. It can lie. It can give aesthetic pleasure. Photography is not to begin with an art form like language, it is a medium in which works of art among other things are made. Out of language, one can make scientific discourse, bureaucratic memorandum, love letters, grocery lists, and [inaudible 00:15:26] Paris. Out of photography, one can make passport pictures, whether photographs, pornographic pictures, X-rays, wedding pictures, and Archie's Paris. Photography is not an art like say painting and poetry, although the activities of some photographers could form to the traditional notion of a finer art. The activity of exceptionally talented individuals producing discrete objects



that have value in themselves from the beginning. Photography has also lent itself to that notion of art, which says that art is obsolete.

Danie ([15:58](#)):

The power of photography and its centrality in present aesthetic concerns is that it confirms both ideas of art, but the way in which photography renders art is obsolete is in the long run, stronger. Painting and photography are not two potentially competitive systems for producing and reproducing images, which simply had to arrive at a proper division of territory to be reconciled.

Photography is an enterprise of another order. Photography, they're not an art form in itself, has the peculiar capacity to turn all of its subjects into works of art. The traditional finance are elitist. Their characteristic form is a single work produced by an individual. They imply a hierarchy of subject matter in which some subjects are considered important, profound, noble and others, unimportant trivial base. The media are democratic. They weaken the role of the specialized producer or term by using procedures based on chance or mechanical techniques, which anyone can learn and by being corporate or collaborative efforts, they regard the whole world is material.

Danie ([17:08](#)):

The traditional finance rely on the distinction between authentic and fake between original and copy, between good taste and bad taste the media blur if they do not abolish outright these distinctions. The finance assume that certain experiences or subjects have a meaning. The media are essentially content less. This is the truth behind Marshall McLuen celebrated remark about the message being the medium itself. Their characteristic tone is ironic or deadpan or paradistic. It is inevitable that more and more art will be designed to end as photographs, a modernist would have to rewrite Peter's dictum that all art aspires to the condition of music. Now, all art aspires to the condition of photography."



MBS ([17:52](#)):

That's wonderful.

Danie ([17:58](#)):

There are some fairly, I always found there was some profound passages in Sontag's writing and what was sort of extraordinary and what actually led that book to be criticized quite heavily was the fact that it wasn't footnoted. So there was no bibliography and the bibliography or "bibliography" was a sequence several pages of quotes from people she considered important and sort of delivered snippets if you like at wisdom around looking, seeing, and photographing.

MBS ([18:31](#)):

That's so interesting because there's something I'm grasping here, Danie, but there's something about insisting on a bibliography is also like insisting on a truthfulness. That is part of the very conversation she's having around the slipperiness and the ubiquity of what photography is?

Danie ([18:49](#)):

That's right. Yeah. And bibliography academically anyway, tend to imply that an endorsement in some ways in the sense that it shows you've done research or that sort of thing. And so there's a validity in that structure. But as you were saying, I quite like the way Sontag, in a sense muses her way through some really deep thinking and consideration around images and her insights as someone who's very observant about the world around her.

MBS ([19:25](#)):

Danie, how does what Sontag is writing about and speaking to about the way all art aspires to be photography. And I found another one of her quotes, which was to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed, which I thought



was similarly powerful. How does that mediate your relationship with using photography at the heart of your work?

Danie ([19:56](#)):

Yeah. Let me just touch on that first question you had about everything becoming a photograph. To be honest, still working my way through that one. Questions in an artist's life I promise you are unresolved and works in progress. And there was a that sort of great quote that you had and also the question. Well, what I found with photography in the sense that yes, it is a capture Sontag also makes a really quite close analogy with hunting and safari hunting and how guns and weapons were sort of swapped out for highly technical cameras. So you would still be hunting and the vernacular language of photography is the same as hunting where you're shooting and taking a picture and capturing something. And so there's this whole sort of dynamic thing of searching and looking and finding and discovering.

Danie ([21:02](#)):

And some of those early photographers would kind of use that same analogy when if you're walking in the streets of Paris or those early days capturing and hunting. And there's these sorts of wonderful analogies that come up in terms of the way we can talk about it now particularly with that flood of Instagram images, with flood of digital images where there's just saturation, even Sontag was making the point in the early 70s about there being a flood and a saturation of imagery.

MBS ([21:40](#)):

He had no idea what 50 years later looks like where our whole life is. Like here's my Instagram feed and this is my life.



Danie ([21:49](#)):

It's incredible, isn't it? So that was quite sort of, it was very, soothsayers almost to be writing that at the time when there was an explosion of if you like analog photography. But you and I would be familiar with that where you either sent off in the early days roles of film, or you went to the one hour photo kiosk and you'd come back. Usually was it one hour you'd come back in 90 minutes sort of thing. But it's always, yeah, you'll come back then. But there's this whole sort of transformation and to be part of that, to be growing up in the 70s, as in a very analog sort of way in terms to have gone through those four decades, five decades of transformation, it's been absolutely remarkable.

Danie ([22:34](#)):

So in terms of my work, I have always been really fascinated with photography and for its power. And I think that relates to the image. I've always seen older photographs that relied on capturing light very directly with chemicals and those sorts of things to be almost time traveling objects. And I love thinking or posing the thinking around light being captured by a chemical on paper and then traveling through time. So you're looking at ... It's very poetic analogy. It probably breaks down somewhere, but you're looking at light that has been captured and comes to you from the past. And so for me, the archive has always held a kind of a specialness. And in some ways that relates to my own experience as a child growing up, seeing our archival pictures of our family. And we have pictures of my Aboriginal grandmas that go back to 1908.

Danie ([23:38](#)):

So my great, great grandmother was, I guess you would say an avid cart to visitor. So she would have portraits done in the studio and so we have this as a kind of an image memory, but it was made real by the fact that my great-grandmother was alive into my teenage years. So there was a living connection through these beautiful photographs. So I think if my great, great grandmother who sort of got these portraits done had been alive today, she



would be sort of an Instagram star. She was very much into taking selfie star or something. I mean, she was a beautiful woman so the portraits that we have are really wonderfully sort of evocative and to look back and to think about their lives is really poignant.

Danie ([24:29](#)):

So I think in some ways the power around the imagery is preserved because there aren't that many. I mean, there's quite a lot considering that they came from that time or quite a number rather, but in the sense that it's not a flood and so there's impact and power and I think that's the same for a lot of family photographs that come from that particular era. There's a real sense of looking back and there's a certain emotional tug. There's like a poignancy about the act of looking. And some tag writes about that actually, the photograph she points out very importantly, is a way of almost stopping the March of mortality or the March of life. It freezes a life and stops if you like that sense of death or dying. So the photograph is very emblematic in that sense. So looking back, we kind of see life in a way sustained through an image.

Danie ([25:24](#)):

It's a very strange sort of experience because we are spectating, and we are sort of almost in a way, looking at someone particularly with older photographs who has passed away. And so I approach those sorts of images with absolute reverence because they're people who live, they're people who experience things we share in some ways, the emotion and the things that they went through in very different forms. And in the case of first nations women, Aboriginal women less brutally because I mean that time of transformation would've been, I find it difficult to even think about how much turmoil and how people were actually kept things together as they did because effectively, literally the whole life was changed and land and country was taken away. And so that sense of tens of thousands of years of connection within two or three



generations is disrupted often violently. And so the photographs themselves tell a very poignant, very powerful sort of story.

MBS ([26:41](#)):

What I love about talking with you is your art is infused with scholarship, with ideas and there's this kind of dance you have around appropriation and it's like how old photography photos, like the photo of your grandmother is an appropriation in some ways and how you've re-appropriated that and you are known for how you used a blue and white color from Spode tableware and re appropriating that as a way of showing how the colonial gaze is used to manage the weirdness of the orient. And I kind of want to geek out with you around that and learn from you around that. But actually I want to ask a more foundational question, which is when I encounter your work, I have this ... And this is part of why I admire it so much is this mixture of thought and play and emotion. And I experience you as a very thoughtful and idea led, man, I'm curious to know how you work to bring in the play and the emotion in your work as well.

Danie ([28:04](#)):

Sure. And that is a fundamental question actually. And yes, it's true that while my work has a very important relationship with material, as you say, the thinking, but also the imagining and also how to approach historical issues that are a very knotty, K-N-O-T-T-Y and ongoing and still very live in the sense that colonial settlement and colonial invasion is not that far back in our past. And so in some ways, there's all these different ways of thinking about landscape and perhaps to go back to that touchstone of landscape, where much of that thinking arises from the experience of people within that space, whether it's a historical space or a cultural space. And so in some ways, and to revisit an even earlier question around how which materials or mediums use in some ways, the idea determines that. So it may be that something translates best as a three dimensional work. Something actually needs to be put down as a series of



images. In other ways, perhaps as a combination of the two with installation work particularly.

Danie ([29:38](#)):

And so in some ways, what I'm trying to do actually is reflect upon all those complex layers initially in, I guess in my own heritage, my own family ancestry, but then in a sense to look more broadly in a fairly transpersonal sort of way at those complex layers being reflected in the history of the spaces around me. So in some sense, there's an internet connection with that history of Australia, but if you like, it's kind of transportable. So you can look then begin to think about that model or that framework of understanding and looking at different knowledge systems and how that actually has a conversation and dialogue much more broadly with those things in the world.

Danie ([30:24](#)):

So by focusing on, let's say the local, you actually open up to the macro, which is the much larger. And I guess in that sense, that's part of the power of sort of drilling down and focusing on one or two really important things that you find personally interesting as an artist, because you kind of need something to, you need fuel, you need curiosity, you need motivation, and those sorts of things to continue that over time. And in that sense, it opens up broader conversation. I've been continually amazed how things move beautifully in cycles, where there's a cycle of inwardness and introspection, which turns into a different kind of cycle of sharing and much more sort of public facing if you like interaction with the world around you.

Danie ([31:15](#)):

And these things happen over time and it's quite fascinating to watch that not just in my career, but in the careers of colleagues and artists around me. And so you begin to see that mirror actually in everyone's life, that's sort of the way it works. And so thinking about my work and where it's been and how it has sort



of progressed, it's been very interesting. You brought up blue, the blue palette earlier and that was such an important part of my early career work to think about what was important historically here, what was the impacts on the ecology and people, but how then could I relate this in some ways to a global sort of question, perhaps dialogue or historical sort of thing that unfolded over time.

Danie ([32:07](#)):

And at the time, as I said, I was very interested in printmaking and so when I was introduced to blue and white Spode that the transfer wear on fine bone China through my wife who is from Yorkshire and is very familiar with those sorts of things. And so it was like, "Oh, wow." So actually the designs on blue and white are printed or transferred from a handing grave copper plate. And because I was involved, as I said with printmaking at the time as sort of the thing that I was looking at and focusing on, I was really quite excited about the possibilities of exploring that through images, but also relating it very strongly to those ideas of that blue and white being, perhaps one of the first sort of international languages that people engaged and understood in some sort of way.

Danie ([33:04](#)):

So my intent with those earlier works by referencing that engraving from the dinnerware and the fine bone in China was to talk about this idea, the play on transfer wear, which was the transfer of ideas, the transfer of culture. And very interestingly, I found out a few years after I'd begun working with those images that in fact, in the 1770s, that was when Spode, Josiah Spode perfected and began to work in a very dedicated way with transfer wear was the same time that Australia was being colonized. So there was this amazing kind of serendipity and dovetail with these conceptual frameworks I was working with, but also the very real kind of things that Josiah Spode was battling with materials and trying to get things to production.



Danie ([33:55](#)):

And I would actually visit this boat factory when I was in England. I visited the engraves quite a few times and I did a swap with the heading graver because I wanted some copper plates script engraved onto copper plates that I was printing from. And so I gave him one of my prints and it was really wonderful sort of connection. And we bought a lot of Spode over the years as a way of supporting raising gravis because it was just so important. Sadly, Spode [inaudible 00:34:25] went bust some years ago because-

MBS ([34:27](#)):

We were reading about that. Yeah.

Danie ([34:28](#)):

Yeah, and the market just wasn't there and sadly the factory did end up closing with some of their plates preserved in Spode museum. There was, I think roughly when I was there, the engraver head engraver, Trevor, his name was, he took me down to this basement, which was a storage area for 200 years worth of copper plates. And these just amazing, amazing sort of archive of images that engraves would refer back to and sort of develop new things and almost learn from. And I think from memory and what I heard there was an enormous sort of portion over half of those plates actually found their way to scrap, to try and pay off debt. And it just paid me because they were like a national treasure.

Danie ([35:17](#)):

I've heard of similar things happening with different factories, I guess under certain circumstances, there's just a consideration of how do we resolve this financial issue and things pay the price and become affected in some way. Anyway, that being said that early career focus on blue and white, I talked about it as being sort of a transformation of landscape here. Introduction of that kind of color and palette and it really began a kind of conversation that was important at that time, which gradually changed over time. So there was a



transformation in the way I made images perhaps more recently, I'm now looking at painting much more in tandem and in conversation with photography, jumping back to Sontag where she talks about photography and painting, I guess, sharing a language, but not necessarily competing in that space, if you like of fine art.

Danie ([36:12](#)):

I really enjoy the relationship because I work from and reference imagery that I'd photographed from archival images. And so for me, there's a real osmosis, if you like between the two and historically I feel that they really support themselves in my work and conceptually there's a narrative which unfolds over time and so images come to life in really what I find to be really exciting ways. And it's something which is, I can see stretching ahead for the next few years. And I don't know, what's coming, but I'm very excited.

MBS ([36:46](#)):

Well, how do you decide what to stop doing as you are? I mean, is there a decision on that? I'm just thinking about you are known one of the reasons you're you are celebrated is this way that you've used blue and white as a way of throwing a new way of seeing landscape and seeing history. And there's a way that your success, one success an artist as we can generally can become your gilded cage because there's one way that you could say, look, the way that I continue to build my legacy, grow, my success is continue to play with this moment of where a blue and white coloring meets archival photograph meets disruption of iconography of Australia. And you've just spoken about this sense of this evolving sense of your work and how it keeps changing. I'm curious to know how you find the courage almost to say this work feels complete, I'm onto the next thing.



Danie ([37:57](#)):

Sure. And you've touched on again, a really fundamental question for artists. And in some ways it's not always a question that artists will face because there are practitioners who have a very particular focus and stay with that. And there will be sort of variations, if you like variations on a theme, but generally speaking, there's this real engagement, there's a lifelong almost like focus or passion with that, which sort of kind of defines their practice or what it is they might bring to exhibition.

Danie ([38:36](#)):

And you mentioned that thing of the gilded cage and yes, you can have success, but I do understand that there maybe pitfalls to that in the sense that perhaps you feel that you can't break out or you want a change and that shift is too difficult. In some ways, I had that hesitation when I began to think about things other if you like than the exact form of that early career work and even moving into different sort of color ranges of blue, which doesn't sound, thinking about it and talking about it sounds well, come on, it's just a color, but in ways you have a real sort of invest time-

MBS ([39:21](#)):

You've created a brand around that specific color and that specific expression of it.

Danie ([39:27](#)):

Yes. And the way your work then gets written about is in reference to. And so what I began to think, well actually there are these conversations I want to have with other mediums and in other ways, so the core of the work in that sense, the research around it didn't really change, but what did change was the way that in a way that idea grew outwards and it's for one of a better way, putting it's manifestation in form. And so with photography that gave me a real opportunity to start working with a different medium in different ways, but to



tone the actual works themselves blue. And so there was a transition into a new medium, but with very recognizable anchors, which I felt conceptually connected all of the things that I've been doing for many, many years. And I felt had a real foundational strength.

Danie ([40:23](#)):

And so when I actually moved from visible light photography to infrared, I found that the infrared was actually much more receptive as a file and as an image to receive in some ways the toning of that blue. And so for me, there was a great conversation that opened up then, which was not just in relation to the palette of blue, but also the way infrared, the invisible to our eyes could then begin to talk about invisible histories or untold stories. So there was this really powerful symbology and there was a piece that I have mentioned to you, which was land story, which is a really sweeping 13 meter nine panel photographic work. In some ways that is toned blue, but it has as a really strong connection with that history of photography, but also the language around talking symbolically about the idea of hidden presence or ancestral presence and stories within the landscape and the rainforest, which can then be sort of teased out using that symbology of invisible light made visible.

Danie ([41:37](#)):

And so there are these really interesting sorts of tangents that I began to uncover with photography without in a sense, moving away or abandoning some of those really important core elements of research that had been very curious and interested about for many, many years. And that extended then into painting. And I was quite interested to explore how the archival photograph could be represented in painting. And part of that, if those old wet photographic processes, photographers would tone their images with CPR. And so the paintings I began to work with were quite CPR toned. There was a definite, if you like, look back, it's almost like a nostalgic color and it takes you to a different place. It's almost historical by default.



Danie ([42:25](#)):

And with those paintings, I found there was a different power in that vocabulary and a very subtle one as well, but it related it very strongly to those early interests that I had in photography. So in some ways there's this cyclical sweep through that I'm finding in my work that sort of traces some of those really early thinking that moves through a whole range of material development and in a way, keeps moving in ways that are essentially located if you like to that core of research, but have their own way of experimenting and unfolding. There's a degree of innovation if you like in the way that ideas then express themselves in material form. And for me that tends to come down to imagery.

MBS ([43:13](#)):

Love this. It reminds me of the idea of the [inaudible 00:43:16] state, this kind of layers of maps where you can sort of see the history of the other maps through the current map. And it feels like as you describe how your art continues to grow and evolve, it's like located in the same core themes that engage you, but there's a new layer or a new way of seeing it, which also probably feels like a little bit like your art in terms of it invites us back through layers of time and back to a presence that we might not easily see, but you're encouraging us to see through your work.

Danie ([43:54](#)):

That's a really good observation. And that's precisely what I'm trying to bring in. In some ways to try and encapsulate everything into one image is almost impossible and would lead to a very sort of jumbled dialogue between, painting if you like, an audience. So in some ways I see exhibitions, individual works are like words or sentences, exhibitions of like chapters. And so over time you begin to realize, wow, this is kind of like writing a book and it's almost like an unfolding draft that gets shown publicly. So you have control over quality and sort of what gets included in exhibitions. What is really interesting is that you don't have control over how it's received. And that's part of the beauty of showing a work



and offering it to audiences is the, I guess the range of interpretation and reading and what meaning it has for people. That's part of the power I think of art and the artist surrenders control once it leaves the studio in some senses and it's turned over.

Danie ([45:09](#)):

And as I said, offered, and people receive it according to their own sensibilities in the way they see the world. And it's a very exciting sort of process. Sometimes it can be a little nerve wracking because in a sense you are offering, it's a private offering because you've worked on it alone, essentially, showing some people getting some feedback, which can be really it's very interesting and that's part of the reasons that I enjoy being an artist and you can offer the conversations that you hope are really interesting through your work to audiences who then respond in unique and special in significant ways.

MBS ([46:01](#)):

Where you describe the words, the paragraphs, the writing the book makes me think of Dickens and how he wrote his novels on a subscription basis so he'd put out a chapter. Pump it out there, wait for responses, kind of go, okay, this is influencing a little bit what the next chapter looks like. And the story unfolds in part driven by the artist, but also in dialogue with the audience and how the audience is seeing and responding to the work.

Danie ([46:29](#)):

That's almost like the ultimate feedback loop, isn't it?

MBS ([46:32](#)):

That's right.

Danie ([46:34](#)):

And commercially and conceptually driven.



MBS ([46:37](#)):

That's right. Exactly.

Danie ([46:38](#)):

Yeah. Fascinating. That's really quite amazing.

MBS ([46:41](#)):

And this has been such a wonderful conversation. I'm wondering as a final question, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me?

Danie ([46:56](#)):

We've covered a lot of ground.

MBS ([46:58](#)):

We have.

Danie ([46:59](#)):

In some ways, going back to you it was so fantastic the way that you came to my work and really pleased that we could circle back and connect and have this conversation as well. Perhaps just touching on one last work that came to mind when you sort of came back with the observation about writing and literature, was a piece that I made for my most recent exhibition, which was called the dialectic gaze. And that was in fact, picture shelves with a sequence of crowded hang photographs from the archive and from my own that were almost assembled like a library of pictures. And I found it really an important piece to make, because in a sense brought together such a wide range of conversations and dialogue.



Danie ([47:53](#)):

And in some ways it sort of brought home to me as well how important it is that we look at history that we kind of try and understand it, and that we reassemble present a range, compose ideas in a way which is hopefully really interesting and hopefully sparks curiosity. And so, in the sense that, was there anything left unsaid? Not especially. I think we've sort of delved into some really important subject areas. And if anything, it's kind of like I'm at this point now, and I'm sure that you have felt this too in your art work where there's been a certain resolution around creating or making and thinking and publishing or exhibition where the next few years ahead are going to be really quite interesting terms of how ideas develop, how work then progresses and how is it that you can build on some of those really important questions that formed part of the early research, which is kind of ongoing now and increase the depth, increase the breadth.

Danie ([49:01](#)):

And in some ways, bring to exhibition a new way of looking, a new way of talking about both history, culture, human experience, and what it means then to respond through art.

MBS ([49:22](#)):

Nine panels, huge, the same blue we remember from A Gaze Still Dark, but now the landscape is real, or at least it seems real. I mean, it's not a tapestry, that's for sure, but the color and the light make it unsettling and fleeting. I'm not totally sure if I can trust my eyes and my feet, my sense of direction. Even my sense of time, is this now or is it ancient or is it both? This picture, land story reminds me of another one of my favorite Australian artists, Fred Williams. Williams also has a way of capturing something that is both essential about the Australian landscape and is also unreal about it. Williams uses streaks and doves of colors, hinting it both kind of what's there, you can kind of see trees and bush



and the shape of the bark, but also the complexity and the beauty that I can't normally see when I'm there.

MBS ([50:23](#)):

I know I'm kind of getting swept up in kind of art appreciation here, you're like, "Michael, what are you talking about?" But this is what I most love about the art that I most love. And it shakes me out of a stupor. It rattles me a little, and it makes me realize, even if it's just a little, even if it's just briefly what I might be missing and it really, and this is the heart of it. It caused me to be an active participant in my own life and in my own world. You could tell that I love this conversation. I know in part, because I asked fewer questions than I normally do. I think I was swept up in listening to Danie talk about his art and his world and his work and how he thinks about how he shows up to the world.

MBS ([51:09](#)):

If there are two other interviews that you might be interested, that hinted something similar, I would suggest M.I.A Bird song, that interview, which was relatively recent was called the sacred and the mundane. And that's certainly those are two words that you might apply to Danie's work. And then the other is Mason Curry. He's actually best known for writing about the patterns and the disciplines and the routines of artists, writers, and kind of artists as well. And that interview is called fragile and fleeting perhaps also to adjectives that can be applied to Danny Miller's work. If you'd like more of Danie, and I hope you'd would, he's got a website, Danie Mellor. I'll spell it for you, because he spells Danie in a slightly unusual way. D-A-N-I-E M-E-L-L-O-R.com. And of course there's a link to that in the notes. And Danie's represented by Tolarno Galleries that is in Melbourne Australia.

MBS ([52:04](#)):

Thank you for listening. Thank you for giving the show some love, reviews, passing them on. This is actually the way we grow best is when you listen to an



episode and go, "I should send this to whoever." You'll actually see there's a link in the notes that is the best link to send people. It's a pod link because when you send that to them, it actually gives them the choice of whatever platform they want to subscribe in. So if you're going to reference the episode, send them the pod link. I'll just finish by saying you're awesome and you're doing great.