

CCA DERRY~ LONDONDERRY

The following is a transcript of artist/worker [Priya Mistry](#) answering questions about her residency [THE LABBODY WORKSHOP: TOOLS, FOLDS, ROLLS & FRAMES](#) at CCA Derry~Londonderry and her practice posed by CCA staff members Catherine Hemelryk, Fiona Allan, Mel Bradley and Jak McGarrigle.

What is your favourite colour?

My favourite colour is actually turquoise next to fuschia pink, but if I have to choose one it's turquoise. It's the very greeny-blue rich colour that's between the sea and the sky.

What is your favourite pop song?

This changes over time, but what I can say is that if I need something to initiate movement in me ... like at the moment Lizzo is definitely up there. Missy Elliot is consistently fabulous. One of the songs I've been going back to to help pick up speed as of late is *Level Up* by Ciara. It's pretty badass! And while I've been in Derry, I've been doing my vogue classes which are great, and I realise what I ought to have done with the CCA staff is made sure we did the vogue class together, and when I realised we should it was too late! So from that, there is now a new track that's usually bustling on in the background which the teacher played last night called *Vogue* by Full Crate. That's in my headspace at the moment. But for more cool down or contemplation music which could be less 'pop' is by Greentea Peng. Anything electronic and glitchy I just love. That's maybe not a concrete answer on pop, but there you go.

What is your favourite book?

I don't have one favourite book. At the moment I'm reading Octavia Butler. If we were in a sort of desert island situation, let's do that. Okay, so you think Marvel has it figured for superheroes, but really what you want is the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, basically all the *vedas*, which are the main texts in the Hindu faith.

The characters are real superheroes that are multi-armed, multi-pronged, multi-weaponised, superpowered figures. They're non-binary, they're female, they're male, they're single, they're multiple. I see Marvel doing a fraction of what the vedas do. So I would say that the original superhero template is from here. So if I had to be stuck with a book to read on a desert island, it would definitely be the *vedas* because they're just endless. Otherwise I'd say picture books, really. I really like graphic novels, like for example Audrey Niffenegger's novels I've spent a lot of time with.

When did you first experience 'art'?

I'm going to guess when I was in the womb, and there was music playing outside. Music and sound are always – I think for everybody – like this first meeting with a culture outside the womb. Outside the body, the mother or the carriage. If you can hear it you can feel it. I feel very closely connected to beat and off-beat. I think about that a lot, when I'm travelling. Everything has a rhythm or an anti-rhythm, or a lack of it in a space. Maybe that doesn't make sense. This connects to the book question – I'm not a practicing Hindu but I have studied Hinduism and what I find quite cool about a particular strand of explanation about the beginnings of the world is that Hindus believe that the world was started with a sound. That sound was *aum*. You often see it spelt *om* but it's a different sound that's pronounced through different parts of the body. It's like when you hear a chime or a singing bowl. So yeah, I think my first experience of art was some sound of beating in the womb.

When does process begin?

I think the process is constant. One of the things that artists do is observe things. We maybe observe things and we pick up things and build palettes, and translate what we observe to present somehow or transform with. The process is always humming underneath. Even when I'm on a day off, like say I'm reading a book that I'm enjoying, and the front part of my brain is engaging with the book meanwhile the background brain is busy organising these other things. I'll be part way through reading and I'll have to stop and see that something has popped out of the back brain machine that I need to deal with before I can carry on reading.

Is transit part of the process?

Yes. I love travelling, I think everyone I know knows that about me. I love being on trains, and I feel like even when I was going to college when I was younger and getting two buses to get there; this time on the bus was really important. There's a part of me that would be quite happy to just do a residency on a train, and I'm just constantly in transit, and figuring out how that would work. The landscape changing, seeing the environment change, the buildings and architecture change, all of this happening as you're traversing through the land. I think it's important to not ignore it and be doing something else. There's something about the brain that I've been thinking about for a long time, and I continue to think about, which is how the brain files things away; memories, things you notice in passing. When you're on a train you're clocking stops, you're taking in landscape, you're shifting. You have time to shift. People fly to Australia and get this crazy jetlag, and they've missed everything in between. It's like they're trying to catch up before even getting to where they are going. But when you do the whole journey you're doing all the days and the nights and the skies and the trees and the mountains and the shifts. You shift and change with that. Because you need to, and you have to. Your body senses it and the movement. It's like if you've been on a train or boat for days, you come off and your body is trying to readjust to what the balance is. The process is always like plates that are moving along with the things I'm thinking about. Travel is process, I think it's live process. There's also something that's really opened up in going somewhere else; you could be somebody else. There's that thing of first meeting people and finding yourself in a space, and wandering around a city where nobody knows you. There's an anonymity that comes with that.

What was your first impression of Derry?

My first impression was the 40 minutes of coastline leading up to Derry. The sun was shining as I was on that stretch. That is a beautiful way to come into a place; not on an aeroplane. You cannot buy that. Or no, you can, it's something like £13. But I got to see the edges of the land and what people are living with. What is ticking as the rhythm at the back of everyone's day. What makes the city pulse, or what makes the people go in a place. Like the weather here is obviously hugely important and very much connected to the sea. It's an integral part of everybody's day; what the weather is doing. That moment of clouds and wind and air and everything else. It doesn't just go past, it moves through everyone's body I think. It's really gorgeous, and it's gorgeous that the people aren't miserable with it. It ties in with the proximity to the sea and a water source. Like in Glasgow, it's more the docks that occupy that edge on the water

rather than people living there. That's huge, because the light that you get from living by a water source that's so vast is really important. I could go on about the sea for a very long time. I often say that if I'm standing at open water, like at the sea, looking at it is like an expansion of my headspace. There's something about having a blank space like a gallery that enables a version of that as well. It's different, but physical space is really important, like vacant physical space. It's full of atmosphere and potential there, as opposed to whatever is behind you that's really busy and full. You can draw things out of that and put it in the gallery, or draw it out of yourself. It is enormously beautiful to be here, and one of my big impressions is these gradients that are in Derry. I'm from Leicester, and Leicester is extremely flat. Derry is this really sumptuous, deep picture with so much going on. You get to see so much of the city at one time from any given vantage point; whether you're up high looking down, or you're in amongst it craning your neck to look up. There's a mountainous quality to it. There's something super gorgeous about that, and how you feel held by the land. Like you're inside it, but you can also see it. I think it's a really beautiful place, and the people are very beautiful; I don't say that lightly. Especially with Covid I'm really missing people, because the people are the place and the culture. So there's a bit of me that's sad that I don't get to see the city bustle by. While I've been here, it's been like looking through a really small window. What I'd normally do when I arrive somewhere is just go and hang out to people watch and place watch, and absorb. Normally I'd wander around without a map and trust my instincts and hope I don't end up somewhere I shouldn't be. There's definitely been less of that here, because without the people and their movement it's not the same. You can find some amazing little cavern somewhere, but you've got to be able to follow the people to find it if you don't know a place. I know we can check things online, but discovery is really important. I think that speaks to being on residency and I didn't come here with a preconceived idea of what I'd be doing. Maybe I'm at a point in my practice where I've done enough to feel confident in making that decision. Like if you come into a space with a set of ideas and plans, you're not going to discover anything new. You're not going to make connections if you've already decided on what you're going to experience or what could happen. Like, what it feels like to roll around on paper.

Do you have any rituals for coming to a new place?

Yes, rituals are a really big thing for me right now. There's rituals that you practice that you formalise and share with everyone. One thing I've been doing in CCA and I take with me everywhere is the parking space. Before I come into

the gallery I try and park things outside that I don't want to bring in with me because I suppose there's a lot that's going on in life, and head, and practice. If I bring those things into here I can't get on. I have to make the decision to leave that outside. So the parking space is just some paper on which I write things that I want to leave behind and I can add to that through the day. Throughout the day there's usually a shopping list item I need to add. I must remember to go get some lemon. That is ritual, but I guess it also speaks to the training that I would have gotten in the disciplines I've studied. But there's a difference, and the difference is that normally you'd be asked that when you get to the studio you're going to work on something performative either in a group or individually. You leave everything else at the door. That's what they say. So that when you come in, you're purely focused on the work. That's to say that then nothing gets in the way of your professionalism, it's not about you it's about the work. That's quite a hard line. That sort of discipline is really useful and productive, but it also doesn't acknowledge that we're humans, and in not doing that, it creates problems for wellbeing. It makes us see each other as being two dimensional. Which is interesting when you think about dance, and dance as a discipline and a practice. Often dance we're just thought of as bodies, and you hear choreographers say 'I've got this material or movement, now I need bodies'.

What is tool?

What is a tool, is the body just a tool? Is it an entity for use. For me it's acknowledging the personal things that are going on with you, and playing somewhere, respecting them, saying 'I hear you, we aren't going to go get the lemon right now but we'll come back to it'. Also that you're not going to forget, but you've given it a place. Sometimes it's about accepting that you need to go get the lemon first so that you can fully be in the space. There's a time and a place for getting the lemon, and it's not when I come in here. Unless I need it for the work. Otherwise I set time aside to get it, and maybe discover some other things that I'd like to bring in. Like the clementines.

If you were a spice or herb, what would you be?

In terms of literal spices, I think at the moment my key spice ... that's hard. I love garlic, but do we count that as spice? Maybe not, because it has to be dried. I am quite strongly drawn to cardamom, and some clove. Both are quite warming. You might have seen me wielding a flask, and in the morning I like to make chai and that's a ritual. When I do that, I'm not doing anything else. It's like

a percolation, and it's very important to me that in the morning you're not just leaping into something else. It's a real slowing. Otherwise, I have a busy brain and when I wake up that's the moment when I've got potential for things to be clear and not overcrowded. So if I get really involved with something then I know I can focus on it and think 'think is the moment of percolation on the day to come'. I don't have to specifically think about anything So that's me on herbs. Otherwise I love garlic in everything.

Do you get homesick?

I don't know. I miss people. I think it's to do with familiarity. Like when you don't have to explain yourself. But actually what's unique to being here – compared with other residencies – is the warmth of the welcome that I've had here. I say that sincerely. You've all been awesome. There's a thoughtfulness. You're always asking after me as a person first. That's what I've noticed. That makes me crave less after something else. A lot of things have happened while I've been on residency here but the thing that keeps me feeling safe and grounded is knowing that you are the people I have around me. And that's massive.

Are safe space and experimentation exclusive of each other or can they exist together?

Yeah, totally. Yeah they totally can exist together. I think what I was talking about before with the parking spaces and leaving things at the door but acknowledging how you're feeling. It's about not just throwing yourself into a room. Like it might look as though that's what I do, but I don't. There has to be other things around that. I think you've seen some of the little mantras that I have up on the walls, like 'do less' or 'it's okay if it's crap' – that's a hot one right now for me. These are like the permissions that you enable yourself to just do whatever without all the expectation lying underneath. Like what I don't need when I'm in experimentation is people asking me what the meaning is of what I'm doing, or why I'm doing it, or what the value is. They are important questions, and they will be asked at a certain point. But actually I don't have the answers when I'm still in a state of exploration and experimentation. As soon as everything has to be justified you stop wanting to take risks, because you always feel like you have to answer for something that you're doing rather than going with it. Artists are adults, and we know what we're doing. That's what's important; to trust in a practitioner to just do what they do. But also to support them in doing what they do. We all need edges, hence the rituals are really

important at the start of the day. The tea, maybe doing some yoga, sitting down and setting your intentions for the day. I always set an intention for the day with a word that I want to bring into the day, and into my practice and my interactions. That's really helpful. That's also where the parking space is also important. Going for lunch, or going for a walk. So yeah, they're not exclusive but they do require thought. It's okay to get things wrong. There isn't a wrong answer. But I think the most important thing is just to not carry on down the road that's not working for you. Even before you start, what you say is that you're going to take a pit stop every so often and ask how it's going. Do we want to keep doing this? Do we want to change tack? And not being afraid to say to Catherine 'you know that thing I came into the space with, I've decided now it's just going to be all about bananas'. And for Catherine to reply 'okay, yeah, sure. Fine'. To trust what I've said about bananas that it's fine. It's just what I need to do.

How do you go about finding your place in a new space?

Maybe I've already spoken a little bit about that, like in terms of Derry it's normally just walking around and people watching. For the work space of the gallery, I just spend a bit of time with it. It's like getting to know something and someone. Feeling its edges and its walls. So I always have a chair that's where I put my coat and things. That's where I park what I come in with and go out with. I always get changed – which is another ritual – that I'm in work clothes, in work mode. Maybe I do a bit of listening to the space. Mostly you just kind of roll around together. Normally I have a corner where if I want to read, I have that. I've not done that at CCA actually, but that's important. Or let other influences come in, and for a sort of melange to happen while I'm here. It's by impulse and observation. There's an impulse to do certain things. Maybe I just really want to stand in a particular spot, and while I'm here I see the window and how things are coming in and out of that frame; cars, people walking. I'll be sure something has moved in another room. That's something that's kept happening to me and I've maybe mentioned, is that every time I've come in there's been something that's moved in Gallery 3. I was always sure something had moved. I'll wait for something to fall. Things are moving even when they're not.

Hammer and nail or needle and thread?

For acts of slowing, needle and thread. Like sewing slows my brain down. I like having a hammer and nail, but I don't necessarily want them to interact with each other.

If the world were a body, what body part would you be?

I guess I'd be the sea. I'd probably be the sea that brushes up against the coast of somewhere like India. It'd be a big body of water that meets with sands and rocks, different terrains. Exotic and a bit reminiscent of the spice trade. What goes through those waters. I really like that shape of India. There's so many things about that shape that are great.

What is body?

Well I mean, I'm exploring this constantly, the question of 'what is body'. Body is something that holds things. Like a vessel. It's impulse and patterns and intuition. It's weight and texture and mass. It takes up space. It seems to be what holds things together somehow. It may have components, or maybe is a single component of one thing. I've been thinking a lot about the body as a vessel; holding experiences, holding patterns, holding trauma. Thinking about the materials in the space, and having an aging body as a woman is a very particular experience. How working with other bodies and the materials to me is like re-exploring my own body every time. How there are certain things that my own body can do, or the space that it takes up, or something that it can perform. How the energy that it has is different now from before; the flexibility and the strength, and where that strength is. The longevity of it. Also, the more that you work with something and the more you repeat it, the more amenable and pliable your body becomes familiar. It's muscle memory. It takes something on board. The physical materials in a space do that too. Like metal is a good example, and what had to be done to the metal for it to take on that shape. It had to be kept over a duration of time in this shape for it to be able to sustain it. If I work long enough with a plank of wood there will be a bit that's really soft, where it meets my shoulder, or where I move it or make contact with it. It might not look like it, but I know that there's a part that becomes more pliable. It's reshaping around my body. I'm working it in the same way as someone would do working with the materials in a workshop with tools. It's the familiarity; you get to know the properties and the limitations of a material. If it's rough or it's smooth. You get to know what happens with it in relation to your own body. If I'm working with something where the balance point is between me and that

thing, or me and the roller skates or me and the overall edges of the space, or the paper. All these kinds of things I've been wondering about. There's a lot of unpredictable potential in stuff. The more you repeat something, the more you might be able to get your body and the body of the thing you're working with to do that same thing. I'm working with materials like the paper, and the paper is changing all the time. It doesn't lose its integrity, but it changes. Sometimes with it changing, I can do something with it that I couldn't do before. Maybe it becomes more interesting now it has more curves and lines and rifts. That also speaks of my body and the things that I can do, that I couldn't do before.

What is tool?

I wonder a lot about the etymology of these questions. I guess in performance a tool may also be like a device. Maybe a tool is something that's available to you. Something that might help you shape or alter something else. The word 'tool' also speaks of productivity, and I spend a lot of time thinking about not having a product or having a fixed end point. Not producing, just doing. Being. There's no reason why tools can't do that.

Does process have a texture? What texture would it be?

I guess it would be folds and creases.

Is there anything you would have done differently in your time here?

No, not really. Why would I? It's more about if I had another four weeks, what would I do next?

Do I have any favourite process moments?

Probably in the first week and the first days when everything is new. It's like finding a new friend who you really like. It's like falling in love with all the potentials of something. Nothing is set, you don't have to set anything. The first week is the hot favourite week. It's not always like that; sometimes you walk into a gallery space and you're unsure. Also the moments where you find a connection, and you're like 'ah, yes! This is it.'

Traversing between different disciplines – what lessons do you bring from each discipline?

Maybe I have partly started to answer that question when I was talking about coming into a space and how that works, but I think ... I think all disciplines have a discipline about them! They have these rules, and what's great about coming from different disciplines is those varied rules. I pick and choose, and I create new rules. By rules, I don't really go hard and fast unless that's useful to me. It allows you to not be overtly pre-decided, even about form or material or format. Everything is quite possible. Which can also be problematic, because then you have to find a way of reducing that. For me, reducing it is like – for example Fiona asked me in the second week what the title of the residency was, which I probably couldn't have answered just as I got here or before I'd been here for a few days. So it's nice to title something a few days in. I called it *THE LABBODY WORKSHOP* because it plays with 'laboratory' and 'workshop' and exploring and workshopping something. Moulding something to make it pliable. Changing it and mixing stuff up. *TOOLS, FOLDS, ROLLS & FRAMES* came into it because there was a lot of that happening with my body and also with the materials as well. I guess I'd bring many approaches to things from my background and the different training I've had. Like film – film's been really important while I've been here. I've been looking at French New Wave. This is also my job – to keep learning. I always thought that if degrees were free I'd get one after the other. But I'm able to do that in my practice. I speak about my practice as like doing a PhD without the writing. It's an excuse to read stuff and explore stuff, and a chance to be in practice with things. So the French New Wave moves away from all those rules that have been set in film and in Hollywood where everything becomes formalised; narratives, what an audience needs to understand. French New Wave directors say 'we're not doing any of that' and that opened up a whole new set of potentials. And for me in the space, that's also been about the movement of the camera. Sometimes it's not about objects moving, or even me moving, it's about the camera's movement. Sometimes it's something moving through the frame and passing through what you'd call a locked off or stationary camera. There's this potential of a camera moving at the same time that something is moving in the space. What's interesting about here, and what makes it clean and useful to do all of that in here is that it's a very controlled space. Whereas if you go outside, there are so many other things moving. There are so many other elements. There's clouds, and there's weather, and there's the shift in light. All of these things you can't control. People, buses, whatever. You can't say you don't want that there, you have to work with it. There's something about being in a space like that that allows you

to construct, arrange and choreograph objects and bodies and movements by choice. You pull focus into it.

What is your favourite memory to take away with you from Derry?

This is a hard one. I will answer this in a couple of weeks. It's not over yet!

When does it end?

It doesn't really. From a more 'practice' point of view, or a professional point of view, this relationship with the CCA and you guys has only just begun. I've been doing the schools workshop with Laura, we'll have the Round Table recording. We're in a dialogue now, about practice and space and people.

What are you taking away with you?

Again, I think I'll answer that in a couple of weeks.