

## Transcript

### Terence Wilde in conversation with Naomi Woddis

#### The Two of Us Podcast 2020

Naomi: My guest today is artist Terence Wilde and this is quite exciting for me because quite often I've got some loose connection or, um, closer connection with my guests and I don't know Terence but I know Terence's work from Instagram and his website, so we're just going to dive in Terence and this is going to be a journey for us both. Now I've called you an artist and I know with my own journey when I could say I was an artist or a photographer or a writer it was a big thing for me and I don't think that's unusual, people claiming that title so can you remember when you first started saying 'you know what I am an artist and I can let the world know'?

Terence: It was probably not that long ago, maybe five years ago because I've never been comfortable with that title, artist because I just used to think of myself as someone who painted and drew and then, because I've had some mental health problems I wanted to start expressing my mental health problems visually in my work and that is when I started to think of myself as an artist because I often thought that artists were people that made lots of money and have lots of shows and do work that's impersonal. I've never quite been like that; I've always done my work as a form of, like a healing tool, and to help me survive as a person and then there was an extra complication was, was I an outsider artist and I'm not sure I'm an outsider artist because I've had art training so I'm an outsider because I'm also a gay man and I'm an outsider from society. So, I grew up in the sixties so I consider that there wasn't gay liberation it was just happening along from the sixties and seventies so I'm an artist, an outsider from the perspective of being in a minority group and that I'm an artist that happens to have mental health problems, not a mental health artist so I like to be an outsider within outsider art so to speak.

Naomi: that's a really wonderful description and I think it's a really valuable description because I think that thing of, you know this perceived idea of an artist someone has to have like their names in lights

Terence: yes

Naomi: or their bank balance is something that makes the, you know, the bank manager sing with joy and it's so far away from creating work and I remember years ago, and I've told other people this or I don't know if I mentioned it on the podcast before, the artist Louise Bourgeois who I really like and, I remember going to see, there was like a retrospective of her work at the Tate a few years ago, some years ago, and because she was never part of the arts scene or seen as part of the arts scene until much later in life, she just carried on and made her art and then she was discovered in her seventies. There was something really unsullied about her process because she wasn't doing it for commission, she wasn't doing it for other people's bank balances, she was making it and so when I walked round that whole exhibition, I could see these life-long themes she'd had the freedom to explore. So, I suppose with you, because you say you went to art college but that didn't seem to bring out,

in the same way, your inner artist, and the urge to, sort of, put yourself in the world as an artist and be able to find that until you equated and tied that that with your mental health story. So the art has helped you have your own narrative around mental health but the mental health has helped you embrace the artist within you. Would you say this was true?

Terence: yeah, yeah totally, its like, bad experiences and being bullied or being, having prejudice against you in some way; I just used to see it as something that happened to me. Then you go through a process of, what happens to you actually makes you who you really are and makes you authentic and it's quite important to me to put authentic narratives in my work so there's lots of different narratives but my childhood experiences were completely negative and it's taken me a long time to get over them but I never used to also ... sorry I'm going off course a bit but I never used to...

Naomi: no, no, that's fine

Terence: no, okay, I

Naomi: carry on going off course

Terence: alright, okay I

Naomi: off course is on course

Terence: I'm well off-course now then

Naomi: (laughs)

Terence: I trained as a textile designer so it's about surface and colour and pattern and things that distract people and bring happiness to people but actually real life things that happen to artists are the things that move people when they look at them so I always – I've never been particularly trendy when I was at art school I thought I wasn't cool enough because I wore tank tops and I was a bit, from a quite protected background, a very shy person and – so then I worked in mental health and alongside mental health I still did my own work and then I met Jennifer from the Jennifer Lauren Gallery who encouraged me to start working in black and white because I did dabble in black and white but not as a main thing and black and white is to do with balance and simplicity in a way, so that, you can't hide much when something is black and white. You can hide things in the detail but it's like a clearer statement than something that's very decorative and colourful although my stuff is, it's pretty decorative but it's also got words in it and texts from poems and lines from other people's, that other people have said, like quotes and the artist, that influenced me the most is actually Kate Bush who is a singer. So, some people don't see her as an artist but Kate Bush is 100% authentic. She doesn't tend to listen to what's going on around her, she does what she wants to do and it generally like pisses people off especially the record company who want to make money out of people. So, I like that sort of persona as an influence in what I'm trying to do

Naomi: I think with Kate Bush because I was a sixties baby as well, and the thing about Kate Bush I remember her because she was so innovative you know she was

a dancer and her live performances were far ahead of their time and everything she did was very much an artist approach of just like experimentation, breaking rules and then, you know, we didn't hear from her for years.

Terence: yeah

Naomi: because she didn't want to be heard from for years

Terence: laughs

Naomi: and I think she's got a lot of integrity she's also got I think, people like you, who are absolutely loyal to her

Terence: yeah

Naomi: who can see the brilliance in her and that, she's not being sort of pushed around so I'm thinking about, you know like you say with your textile design, you know, that textiles are lovely and elegant and bright and colourful and then your art now, which is sort of intricate and is mostly monotone and you're working with texture and depth. Do you think any of your experience though, working in textiles has influenced the work you do now because in terms of shape and composition or is it an influence because you said I want it to be nothing like this, it's a different chapter?

Terence: it's always been an influence, I always like furnishing fabrics, and repeats and designs on cloth and I thought that's what I loved, that's where I thought I wanted to go but I had one of my first like mental health breakdowns was in the middle of my degree course so, it was only up to about age twenty when I sort of fell out of love with those sorts of – I still do those sorts of things but I do them for bread and butter money and I sell them quite cheaply but art college had an influence on me, in that it represented everything that I didn't want to have to do with. I know that sounds negative but it's like, I don't want to go to social gatherings or if I go, I go the day after everyone's already been because I like to be quite private about stuff but, and, that's the paradox about my work is that I share stuff that's really personal but I'm an incredibly private person.

Naomi: and it's that thing about this paradox that your work is very private but you've made it public

Terence: yes

Naomi: but you yourself are introverted it seems it's like - 'oh, it's a bit too much' you know like a real proper – I know that's saying a proper introvert - a real introvert is like - I'm okay, I like to process my emotions on my own. I don't want to do this in public, it feels like someone has torn off my skin. You know

Terence: it does feel like, it feels like you burn in the public but it gets so ... again the Jennifer Lauren Gallery has helped me because Jennifer has asked me to do talks, like the talk we're doing now, and I'm getting better at it, I'm not so afraid of it because someone like Jennifer actually believes in someone like me. The trouble with talking publicly is that I always get upset in the middle of it, calm myself down and carry on and I think that's absolutely fine. So, I am a bit of a contradiction and

sometimes I do want to be in the limelight and talk about stuff but only if it's going to be of importance to helping other people. So, I wouldn't want someone that was eight years old to be bullied and not have someone to talk about it to. So, if they happen, or their parents or their auntie was at, like, an art show and they read something about someone that's overcome child abuse, then that is what I want to get across. It's a very difficult thing to talk about but I owe it to myself as well and I owe it to someone else going through things, similar

Naomi: so that thing about, you know, like you said, difficult to talk about, and it sounds like it's easier to express it through your work

Terence: yes

Naomi: but even when you make your work, if you're sort of looking at a painful history, how do you manage, with your work, and feel okay about it and you don't feel that the process itself doesn't ignite trauma or some sort of disturbance or is it very freeing to do it?

Terence: it is very freeing to do it but it's also from the experience of sharing stuff in my own private therapy. So, some therapies you haven't put a voice to some of the things you're going through. So, if you do visual – I used to bring visual art with me that I'd drawn the week before and we'd discuss it and it helps like, desensitise, that sort of thing. So, it's just because now I've been doing it for many years it's part of who I am and it's the main part of my practice and it's a way of coming to terms with myself and accepting myself for all the things I haven't been able to collect together.

Naomi: and in terms of this self-acceptance, do you have, this is a horrible question, I don't mean it horribly, it's just because I'm nosy

Terence: okay (laughs)

Naomi: do you have like a process? I know, often when I talk to writers, they don't. There's often this fantasy that if somebody's a writer they get up at six o'clock, have a cold shower and then write for four hours. Some of them do but some of them are like, oh no, I just write when I can. I've got three kids; I just have to sit on the edge of the sofa and do it when there's time. There's different sort of narratives around art – there isn't the idea that an artist has to get up every morning and have their sketch book out but, I'm wondering, do you have a sketch book that you sort of play with ideas or do you just start with the work and the work leads you?

Terence: that's developed over the years as well because, you see, I do sketchbooks and I do a lot of stuff while I'm watching the telly or listening to music. So, I've got like a backlog of images and ideas that I can use but I am quite disciplined and I have dedicated quite a lot of my time to my work so I have a weekly practice and I try to have a daily practice but I usually start a drawing with a word or I might be playing particular music or I might be thinking of an animal or a bird or a chair. I've recently done a lot of things with chairs so I might just – and I randomly will put an object or a face on a piece of paper and I will work around it. So, I won't have any ideas where I'm going with it until I'm about half way through it and then it's spaces to fill in but, I think it's quite random and it's quite eclectic and, like when I'm

at coffee shops, I do notes for future works or it could be – I've done a drawing and there's someone that's half coming off the page which is quite a lot of what I do so the next picture might have to be what happened to the other half of that person in the next picture. So, they're like little travel logs but I don't often know where they're coming from until I'm doing them and then I unplug all my phones and I just play music and I see where I'm going to go and then I might take two weeks on a picture, off and on, because I also work part-time so that interrupts my own work but has to be done.

Naomi: it sounds like it's a really intuitive process and I like the idea that there's telly or there's music and how else you engage with it – you create like an atmosphere. I'm wondering – two things have come to mind, because I'm thinking of you being at college and I'm thinking of the textile design and like, you working to a brief and I'm thinking about growing up and growing up in the sixties and having to – at what point did you realise having a space you could let your mind wander, let your artist wander – when did that become so important and, I guess, when did you discover it was a real life-saver for you?

Terence: hmmm, there's been several occasions when I felt it actually was a life-saver but I didn't overthink it, I just thought keep busy and you'll be fine and you don't have to take extra tablets or have half a bottle of gin and stuff but then I got a bit more – because – the older you get the more experience you have of yourself. So, I guess in my mid-forties, which is over ten years ago, I started to piece things together - and my work's quite tight and it's quite detailed but, within that, there's like little bits of life force and little bits of fluidity. It's like loose things that are then contained within a picture. I've had to contain them because I've had to contain myself but I've only let myself be freer and looser probably in the last ten years – allowed myself to be like that and not influenced by what people exactly think of me. The looseness comes from not giving a damn what people think of me and I don't give a toss about following trends because trends are trends and they're going to be here and then they're going to go. So, I don't look too much at contemporary art, I'd rather look at older art because the artists I tend to like are female surrealists who have this alchemy in their work and can turn – they're obviously talking about lots of different things that are quite dark at times but it's still viewable. So, my work is still viewable although there might be something quite nasty going on. And there's a sense of that it's actually happened, it's not still happening.

Naomi: you know what you say about that female surrealist, and I think about Kate Bush again. You know, even though she's not a surrealist but, you know, a surrealist about changing meaning and

Terence: yeah

Naomi: just like and, you know when we think of surrealism, often we're very embedded in a sort of male narrative so, I'm wondering – this is a question that has just come to me as we're chatting about – do you address gender in your work? Consciously or

Terence: yes

Naomi: okay great. In what way?

Terence: I didn't do it consciously and I keep having thoughts about where this is going so, can I just say something about - that I've always been quite ashamed about being a feminine man and the place that I started to feel okay about it was in my work but it's taken so long like, to realise that and I think - well I wish the penny had dropped like twenty years ago but, you realise things when you're ready to accept them and so I haven't 100% accepted it but I am really drawn to female artists and female singers and, in your mid-twenties you think oh, that's nice but it actually means a different thing to me now. I'm quite drawn to things like that and it is quite - Leonora Carrington is probably the biggest influence visually in my work and Dorothea Tanning and the other ones I can't pronounce, all those sorts of people.

Naomi: so. I'm wondering about, you know, your past and your personal past and then the past of the time you live in - how much that influences your work? You know, you're looking at these artists who lived before our generation because you find them more inspiring and do you think there's something about resisting, or rewriting even, your, not just your personal history but the cultural history?

Terence: I think there's a combination of all those things because I often go back to the past for references to do with how I would have felt because, at the time, I blocked out how I felt. So, the sixties and seventies I thought I'd wiped out of my mind as my way of coping but they're my references for what I want to do with my work and work that was before that so, the work of the surrealists looked and feels completely different to that. So, it's a bit like - so you know the word saudade which is like a longing for something else that's either past or you keep wanting it - there is a sense of that in my work that I'm sort of embracing because I do have a lot of sadness in me but if I embrace it properly then I can do something with it and make - I don't know, I want to leave something behind even if I leave something behind that really helps someone else or someone like me when I was eight years old - might recognise what I'm trying to do. But there wasn't a lot of references for the sixties because I didn't really - I wasn't that impressed with the art in the sixties. I like the sort of fabrics and the decorative stuff but I don't think it was a great cultural period for the art that went before it or the art that came after it.

Naomi: it seems like what you're saying is about your own journey and also, looking at the art, it's about this thing, about emotional authenticity and if you want to pass something on, its to somebody else who might be young and vulnerable and feel that there isn't a way out, saying there is a way out, look I'm here and I'm here being me. You don't have to be somebody else in order to survive. I think that seems like a really profound message with your work and with you as a person.

Terence: also, you can't be someone else to survive. You could survive immediate trauma but you can only really survive if you are true to who you are. That's what I find quite hard in the art world because I don't think it's 100% authentic. I can't say what I really want to say there but - there's a lot of kudos and I'm not interested in kudos.



Naomi: yes, there is kudos, there's money and yes, I totally agree with you, it's not a world which really encourages authenticity at all costs

Terence: (laughs). And you have to play the game as well, you have to appear to be 'such and such' but I think, no I'm going to be me and if I don't, you know, if someone wanted to buy a picture off me and I didn't like them, I'd question whether I was going to sell it to them. Whereas I wouldn't have been like that years ago but, it's okay, it's not cantankerous, it's not difficult, it's just being who you are. And if they take offence then I'm sorry for that but, actually, I'm not selling that to you.

Naomi: exactly. That's absolutely – I think, I love that, I love that

Terence: (laughs). It's taken a long time to get to that and there's still a lot of work to do but that's where I'm headed and it makes me happier so

Naomi: I love that, I absolutely love that and it's like, I think that's like the definition of being an outsider artist really. It's like – you know what, I don't want to be an insider artist. I don't want to be like – oh yes, please buy my work whoever you are and how great you are, oh yes, oh yes, tugging your forelock – it's like – no way! You think I'm cantankerous, well think that!

Terence: yeah. Oh, you're one of our new artists I think oh, that doesn't sit well with me. The Jennifer Lauren Gallery is completely the opposite of that. The way I'm supported with them and, you know, and just encouraged so much so, I don't need lots of people to believe in me but it's really great to have one person that does. You don't have double hands full of friends, you only need very, I think you only need very few people. So, I lead quite an isolated existence but my friends are also authentic so that's enough for me.

Naomi: oh yeah, that's, that's a beautiful answer and I just, I agree, I love that answer. I just, I agree

Terence: oh, thank you

Naomi: but, we're at the end of the show and I've got one more question and I always ask people - a word to respond to in whatever way but some people have been sneakily getting two words, they just do it intuitively and you're one of those people. You can have both words or you can have the first or the second word. What would you like?

Terence: I'll have two words please.

Naomi: oh great. The two words are forgiveness and recovery.

Terence: Holy. Love.

Naomi: ooh. That's really fantastic. So, love has been the thing then and, like you talk about the Jennifer Lauren Gallery. That seems to be a relationship where the foundation of it is love.

Terence: it's something I didn't expect to happen but it's (pause) that's, like if I could have a third word, I'd describe my relationship with the Jennifer Lauren Gallery as a gift.

Naomi: that's beautiful. It's the perfect point to end on. That's really

Terence: thank you

Naomi: I feel like I've had a tour of your life

Terence: laughs

Naomi: and I feel like, you know, we didn't know each other before and we've had this incredible journey and you've been really generous and it's been absolutely wonderful Terence. I've enjoyed every second of it

Terence: thank you, I've loved talking to you and it only seems we've been talking for five minutes.

Naomi: exactly