



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST – SERIES 7 EPISODE 8 (Nov 2025)

Lae Oldmeadow
The Garden at NERAM

In Conversation with guest curator Professor Pedram Khosronejad

Pedram:

My first question is, could you tell me about your artistic background? If you had some teachers or training in a school of art and collaboration with other artists?

Lae:

Well, I'm an outsider artist, which means I haven't been in any of the institutions, haven't had any art training. Only the first year of high school I did art and it was my best subject. But because I'm dyslexic, I had to do a manual training course and it didn't include art. Ah, so I've always wanted to be an artist, even from a young age, because I was always collecting things on the way home from school and treating them as special objects. Anyway, so when I left school, I started in a four year apprenticeship as an upholsterer. I was sixteen, probably was 1972 or three or something like that. That was in Emerald in central Queensland. So it was a four year apprenticeship. And two of those years I had to go to Brisbane to the college for like two months. So it was a good training. So 1977, when I finished my apprenticeship, I started my own business as an upholsterer on the Gold Coast.

Pedram:

Yeah. On the Gold Coast?

Lae:

Yeah. Southport. And when I was twenty one, I moved down from Emerald and set up this business on the Gold Coast from a house, a flat I rented. And from there I decided to buy a house. So I bought my first house at Main Beach on the Gold Coast in Southport. And I used to work in the garage sewing. And I used to take my work around to all the interior decorators on the Gold Coast, And they all started giving me work. I was so busy I had to start employing people.

Pedram:

So just going back to this period. What was the main stream of your craft?

Lae:

It was re upholstery and soft furniture. Soft furniture.

Pedram:

Yeah. Like what?

Lae:

Well, I'd have these frame makers make the frames to my designs and I'd upholster them. The very first exhibition I ever had was of my furniture. And I used to use textile artists from Sydney. They used to paint the fabrics. I was all unique, one-off things. And I'd use their textiles to upholster this furniture I designed. I had an exhibition. I must have been about twenty. In my twenties. I had an exhibition of my furniture.

Pedram:

Do you remember the year? Which year it was?

Lae:

It probably was around the nineteen eighties. Then, um, this Italian company found me, and they set up a company on the Gold Coast, and they used to import all the classic pieces, and they import the furniture uncovered. They were just covered in their slip covers, in their calico covers, and then their clients would choose their fabric and then I'd upholster them. So I got to learn how all the Italian furniture was made. That was a good learning. Yeah, I was really busy. I never advertised my business or anything. I had my own showroom and factory out the back in Southport.

Pedram:

So during this period, did you collaborate with a special artist or designer or someone in your field of making Furniture or inspired by someone.

Lae:

I was inspired by the Memphis. There was in Italy, there was this company called Memphis, and they did all this furniture.

Pedram:

I know them, yeah, yeah,

Lae:

It was a little it was offbeat. Like, just because a chair has four legs doesn't mean each leg has to look the same.

Pedram:

So rather than special artists, you were inspired by a school of design. We can say. Yeah, the Memphis were the best for you to be inspired by, and that was very inspirational.

Lae:

When I was Upholstering nineteen years. And then there was a financial crash as well, where a lot of clients owed me a lot of money. So I decided instead of having an overdraft, I would close the business up and travel overseas.

Pedram:

Yeah. When was that?

Lae:

That was in 1991. Wow. And I arrived in London on my thirty fifth birthday. After closing my business down. Yes. It was a good break, actually. Could have kept working, but I wasn't getting enough satisfaction.

Pedram:

It was good time. Good time, good move. Yeah.

Lae:

Yeah, it was a nice push. Yes. Yeah. So I sold my property. Sold so I could travel without having to worry about money.

Pedram:

Amazing. So where did you go first?

Lae:

I had six months in London, and then I travelled Europe on a Eurail pass. And while I was in London, I met a Greek Australian girl who wanted to go to this village in Greece where her father was born, and she didn't want to go by herself. So I said, yeah, I'll go with you. So we ended up in this little village called Galaxidi on the Sea of Corinth on mainland Greece. And there I just fell in love with the whole place. And then I met a Swiss architect who was building a spiritual centre owned by this beautiful old Greek philosopher who had retired from universities. And she was setting up this centre outside the village of

Galaxidi, overlooking the sea and up to Delphi. And beautiful. So I ended up living there for four and a half years. So I did the upholstery for the centre after it was built. And then I met her while I was living there. I also met a Swiss retired teacher of haute couture clothing.

Pedram:

Yes. Fashion designing?

Lae:

Yeah. So I worked with her for four years. but she also rented a house for 27 years on Sifnos, which is an island in the Cycladic group. So we used to go there for our summers and it was off the grid, no electricity. So we used to use this old pedal sewing machine to make clothing and everything, but it was just another world for me. It was lovely. So I learnt a lot from Rosemary, and we used to go to Athens and buy our textiles and sew these, all this clothing up and all her guests from all around the world, who used to stay in her guesthouse in Galaxidi, used to buy our clothes.

Pedram:

Wow. So you were like her assistant of haute couture or her designer or multifunction job you had?

Lae

Yeah, we just worked together. She'd make up the patterns and I cut them out, sewed them up, and she'd show me made different techniques, so I've always been sewing. Since I was sixteen. You know, being an upholsterer, I've always known how to sew. So that was just another technique I learned. So when I came back to Australia, this was when I decided to become an artist. And how that happened was I arrived back in 1996, actually, when I was turning forty, and I went and lived in Byron Bay. And on the way to the beach, I just saw this leaf on the ground and I picked it up and it was a coastal banksia leaf. And for the very first time, I saw how beautiful a leaf could look with its patterns and everything. So every time I went to the beach, I'd come back with pockets of leaves. And, um, then I started sewing them onto canvas. And that's how my art practice began, by sewing leaves onto canvas. And then from there I went to other natural fibres, like the hoop pine bark and the bangalow palm fronds and the palm fibres. Anything in nature that's quite fibrous out of the environment will last for a long time.

Pedram:

All right. Wow. Very interesting and inspiring. So when you left the Greece. And why?

Lae:

Because my relationship with the architect from Switzerland ended.

Pedram:

Oh, okay. So it was life story, not something professional. No. Yeah. Okay, so what happened after working with Swiss designer and haute couturier?

Lae:

Well, I came back to Byron Bay and I was thought, well, I know how to sew, so I started appliqué. Textiles and making cushions and different objects and selling them in interior design places on the Gold Coast for...

Pedram:

Find yourself back in Australia. Environmental design apparently. So when you return to Australia, when was that?

Lae: That was in 1996. 1996.

Pedram:

And directly you went to Byron Bay? Yeah. Why?

Lae:

I didn't want to live on the Gold Coast. Yes. Because I didn't like the environment there. I moved to the northern rivers, Byron Bay, then Broken Head. And then I bought an old farmhouse at Tyagarah. And that's how I met Robert Bleakley, too.

Pedram:

Oh, right. Oh, right down there.

Lae:

So. And he inspired me as well in my art.

Pedram:

He was probably that powerhouse for your next thirty years of creations.

Lae:

Yeah. He introduced me to overseas clients of his and, and they bought my art as well. So it just grew and grew. So I just spent my whole time in the studio, basically. Yes. Creating art. See, I use my upholstery techniques. Those nineteen years of upholstery. That was my training into the art world, which makes my work a little bit more unique. Yes. Because I know how to upholster. So I'm actually upholstering these canvases.

Pedram:

Exactly. Because you have so many years of experience of working on that. Yeah. Craft and art, its own techniques and requirements. And then you introduce your new version of art creating on that, which makes it quite complex technique and sophisticated, I can say more than complex, very sophisticated minimalism.

Lae:

So that was my training. So years in Greece was my training as well. And I came back as when I found my way.

Pedram:

How did you develop your distinctive artistic language and personal approach to sculptural work?

Lae:

Yeah. Well, it all stems from the natural world, really. It's my whole process of my art was to venerate, to reveal the beauty in nature. And to some I'm interested in the unseen as well. And the atavism. I had one show called The Atavism, which is when in nature, when primordial gets revealed again. Do you understand what I'm saying? And so I'm interested in the micro and the Mycelium. That's all hidden, really. So my art practice is sort of trying to reveal that.

Pedram:

So you use one word in the beginning and you pass very fast. Veneration, am I correct?

Lae:

Yeah, yeah. Which means to reveal the beauty or to honour something.

Pedram:

So the veneration, it has a weight of sacredness. Yeah. Not religious, but sacredness and piety.

Lae:

Yeah. Well, I want to reveal the natural beauty.

Pedram:

So how can we consider that you are like a mediator between nature and audiences through your work? That you invite them to venerate through your sculptural work to find the beauty and sacredness of nature.

Lae:

Yeah, because that was my message I wanted to reveal in my work.

Pedram:

So what is your message?

Lae:

That's how I came to this art form. Was seeing the beauty in nature. Yeah. Consciously noticing.

Pedram:

So what do you mean? Beauty in nature? Because you know better than me. There are different levels of beauty in nature. So which part of beauty in nature you want to reveal through your work?

Lae:

Yeah, it's the whole thing, really. It's like. It's because I collect. Part of the art form is collecting nature's discarded materials. I'm spending quite a bit of time in nature, of course. Well, I realize that we're one with nature, and this is the whole thing of my art form, is to reveal that beauty that once I just took it for granted and I really didn't look deeply into it. But when you look at a single leaf and notice how its markings are all different on every leaf, but they're all from the same tree. So the metaphor for that, we're all individuals, we're all that. We're all the same. We're all connected. The oneness with.

Pedram:

So there is I feel there is something spiritual in what you are telling me.

Lae:

Spirituality for me is that we're not separate from anything. Everything relies on something else to survive. So that is spirituality for me, is seeing that we're all one and there's no separation. See, where I find in the religious world there's separation because one religion thinks their way is the right way. You know what I mean? Through religions. Where I see spirituality, life as seeing everything as one. We're not separate from any living thing in the whole universe, really.

Pedram:

Can I, as a metaphor, say probably you are a pilgrim in the nature and environment, and during this pilgrimage you collect the offerings that environment and nature propose to you.

Lae:

Yeah. And then I bring those materials back to the studio and create art from them. So every time I'm using these materials, I'm learning from them how nature has the intelligence that's in nature, in a leaf or in a seed or anything I use.

Pedram:

When you walk to nature, you don't know what you will collect. You just you are open to receive whatsoever Mother Nature offer to you.

Lae:

Yeah, because the hoop pine work I do using the bark. Well, I never I recognised how amazingly intelligent the bark is because it doesn't deteriorate. The wood underneath does, but the bark doesn't. So I'm learning all this stuff about nature, which is which I love, and I love watching things grow. That's why I'm a gardener as well. It's all about connecting. And because I think the natural world is waiting for humans to connect to it in a deeper way. I grew up where we feared nature. You chop trees down because they're too close to the house or something. I want to live in nature, close to it. I just want to expose and venerate and honour that.

Pedram:

Once you collect them from Mother Nature, Lae, how you shape your design and forms. I remember your beautiful opening exhibition at Roxy Gallery. And it was impressive to see different organic shapes that are between creatures and nature. They are. They have their own identity without connecting to a special I say religion or thinking or philosophy. So how you create your shapes and objects or sculptures, designs where they are coming from?

Lae:

Yes. Good question. Well, I'll revert back to the hoop pine bark and yeah, because I have to go out and collect that. And it has to be from a dead tree. It's a tree that's fallen by the storm or the wind or hit by lightning or something, and it has to lay on the ground for at least six months before I can get the bark off. All the microorganisms and the bugs and the beetles get underneath the bark and start eating the timber away. So. And then the bark is just left as a hoop around the tree. Yeah. And then you can just peel it off. And to me that was a wondrous thing as well. So I'd bring back these sheets of bark and then working out what to do with it. So I started cutting them out in like scales, and then I'd sewed them on the machine. So it takes a while to cut the bark out just with a pair of scissors. And I layer upon layer by sewing so they end up looking like scales. And in those forms I didn't do a drawing or anything. I just sat at the machine and just got as much movement into the work as possible by just sewing the scales.

Pedram:

So you follow the natural shape of things?

Lae:

Yeah, a lot of times I've heard this from other artists too. When they finish a work and they stand back and they say to themselves, did I really do that? And it's quite a bit of surrendering or letting go and let the material tell you what it wants to do. Not trying to control the work is a good lesson for me because my training is an upholsterer. I had to control everything. I stretched the fabric and all this sort of thing. Where in the art I want to be freer and let the material tell you what it wants to do. So it's a bit of a journey, but it's great when you can. When you finish a piece and you say to yourself, did I really do that? And it's actually connecting to another energy and that's what I like. And so I guess that's a little bit of a spiritual.. So we want to control all the time where this was a lesson for me anyway, to try and let go of control.

Pedram:

Yes. Beautiful. So, Lae, can you a little bit tell us about your upcoming exhibition at Neram. What's the main topic and how you came to this? What's your artistic statement for this exhibition?

Lae:

Yeah, well, the title is called The Garden, and one artist that really inspired me was Hieronymus Bosch and his paintings, his oil paintings at the Prado in Madrid. And I heard this from other artists, too. It's one

painting, The Garden of Earthly Delight, and it's the only painting that I've ever stood in front of for ages. And studied it because there's so much happening in it. And that was a big inspiration for me. Well, it looked so contemporary as well. And here was done in 1400 and something. And there was another painting called Saint John the Baptist. And that painting inspired me to do this exhibition in Armidale called The Garden.

Pedram:

So John the Baptist, who is the artist?

Lae:

Hieronymus Bosch as well.

Pedram:

Oh, yeah. Okay. By him again? And do you like that Saint John the Baptist for a special reason, or in general, you like John the Baptist concept in religion as a human or only the painting inspired you?

Lae:

Well, it was the plants around John the Baptist. He was lying on the ground with a sheep. And it was the flora around him that inspired me. The garden... created this piece with twisted vines and these bird like lizards. They're like lizards with wings. It's a little. Well, it was kind of a bit of surrealism as well.

Pedram:

So when did you begin the concept of this exhibition? Do you have any date in mind?

Lae:

It would have been probably almost two decades ago. And now I've done well. I will do ten totems to go either side of the side walls, heading down to the piece, which is called the garden at the end wall.

Pedram:

So these tree like totems will be like an avenue leading you to the garden. Like a signs. Like a temple, I imagine. Am I correct that both sides when you go in these tournaments, guiding you to the end of garden?

Lae:

Yeah.

Pedram:

Yes. Okay. So can you tell us what are the techniques that you are using to make the the garden? The garden? Yeah. Is it a special relationship between the concept and the material that you selected because you said its two decade project and during two decades, probably you as an artist change a little bit. It's very long trajectory for one project is not exceptional, I say, but is long trajectory. And I'm very interested to know how you follow the work.

Lae:

The garden is in my collection. Yes, I've had it almost two decades and it was... I wasn't even living on this property then. I was living in Currumbin and it's like a twisted vine on the wall with these flower pods, with these birds eating the nectar out of the pods of the flowers. And it's all done with palm fibre. And glued and sewn onto canvas, and then it's padded. So it's a 3D sculpture thing, but it hangs on a wall and all the totems are done in the palm fibre as well with the sisal thread.

Pedram:

So it's all connected with just the two types of fibres, really?

Lae: Yeah. And each totem has different name or different topic elements in the garden. Well, they're all totems of contemplation. Each totem. I felt like they're all so different. But I want people to contemplate on each one and see what they get out of them.

So what meaning they have for each individual viewer?

Totems of contemplation. So to create that sacred space as well in this garden. That was my idea.

Pedram:

Oh, right. And again, you use the word of sacredness. So what is your hope when visitors, individuals come to your garden exhibition? Well, is it a place of veneration? Is it a different thing to different people?

Lae:

But for me, I just want to create an atmosphere that can feel a little bit that of sacredness.

Pedram:

And is it something that also you elaborate, like awareness to the nature, environment and what humans are doing to the Mother Nature?

Lae:

Could be. And also I'm creating a discarded material that and giving it another life. There's a resurrection as well from something that, if it's left in nature, will decompose and go back into the soil. You know the cycle of life. But I've taken these materials out of nature and giving them another life.

Pedram:

So can we say it's very interesting what you say. So can we imagine that your works, especially garden project, is entirely recyclable? Back to nature?

Lae:

Yeah, when I first started the art, it can all go back to nature. In the end, it would decompose because it's non-toxic. So it's entirely back to nature, one hundred percent. All these works will last for a long time. They'll last longer than us. It's like any fibre in nature. Like clothing. Anything can last a very long time. So there's many artists that have always inspired me. First were the First Nations people and First Nation people from all around the world. I love their art and I've always studied their art and such, and it all comes from a sacred place, and the environmental artist Andy Goldsworthy was a big inspiration for me too. He's the same age as me, and I first saw his work in the British Museum in London in the Egyptian exhibit galleries, and it blew me away. How he pinned leaves together and had this built sand up into a snake-like shape all around the exhibits. It would have been around 1991, I'd say. '92. Yeah. And I've always kept a close eye on what Andy's been doing over the years. And, yeah, I love his work. And then, um, Hieronymus Bosch, of course. And I used to love. I still do. Rose. Rosalie Gascoigne's work. And she was a she always collected discarded materials, too. That had a big inspiration on me too, and how she and she never had any really art training. But she did train in ikebana, the school of one of the Japanese schools, into ikebana, and their emphasis was on form and line and not so much colour.

Pedram:

Sure. So she was a big inspiration as well. You mentioned something very interesting now that I want to wanted, it was in my mind to ask, where is the place of colour in your works?

Lae:

Well, I do use a colour. I usually hide it, so it's quite hidden. You'll only see a glimpse of it. So I wanted that element of surprise because most of my works are very earthy and browns and natural earth colours because of the materials I use. But I often will paint the canvas first in the blue and then sew over it. But

there's occasionally where you'll see a glimpse of blue, and it just adds that little discovery thing of excitement. For me, anyway, it's ultramarine blue, so I find that quite a healing colour as well.

Pedram:

So you like to have the colour, but you like to have it in very minimalism way. Hidden, not dominant way. So you only get glimpses of it. Why blue? Why that special blue? Is it significance of something special in matter of symbol or nature or sacredness?

Lae:

I think it's a healing colour. And I think it really works with the natural fibres I use.

Pedram:

Yeah. You said a little bit how you showed this on that form shape. But if from A to Z, you want to explain to me what's the process of your makings? Can you tell me a little bit, elaborate this part to the process with the hoop pine works?

Lae:

I often do a drawing on the canvas first, and then I trace those shapes, and then I cut the hoop pine out in those shapes. And then so. And then I sew it all on to the canvas. Once I get those shapes by. And a lot of times I cover the stitching with sisal twine, which is a wall-to-wall carpet of sisal that I've been unravelling for a long time. So that was the second-hand sisal wall to wall carpet that was given to me about thirty years ago, and I've now unravelled the whole house of this sisal carpet, and it's a fantastic material. And so I'm almost at the last of it now. So once it's gone, I'll have to find another sisal.

Pedram:

Yes, to dismantle it for your work. So the majority of sculptural works of yours in the garden exhibition, they follow this technique that you just told us?

Lae:

Yeah. It's also a lot of sisal sewing over palm fibre. So I get this texture, which I love, and this form which that sewing gives me, because in some parts I might get organic cotton from an old futon mattress. So I'm recycling all the materials and using them, which is pleasing because I sew on a sewing little sewing machine, a Bernina. It's an old metal sewing machine that students in schools were given to so they could learn to sew. But it's a tough little sewing machine and I like it very much. And I'm off the grid, so it's all done with solar power.

Pedram:

Lae, last question probably, how do you find collaboration between you as an artist and someone like me as a curator? Do you think, is it important that this is something that should happen?

Lae:

Well, I like it. It's only enriching one's life, really, isn't it? You learn from everything. Like, I learn a lot from you. And that's what it's about for me. And it's vice versa. I'm sure you learn massively, because...

Pedram:

Yeah, exactly. Understand how the mind of an artist and creativity works, especially you, that you dedicated yourself for such a long time to the nature and environment. And as a collector, as you said, you're collecting all the time from nature and producing something by nature, for nature. And also there is a type of awareness now in your work which is such a beauty, three dimensional sculptural work, I think, of course, work with you is really a privilege for me to understand that in such, you know, environment we

are living in twenty first century. You are disconnected for connecting. You are disconnected from many things of, let's say, modern living to back to the major and the main connection to the Mother Nature and nourishing from that physically, mentally and spiritually. For me, it's really interesting, this collaboration, and it's about, I think, two years we are following our conversations. Your studio visit, your exhibition at Grafton Regional Gallery. And I think this collaboration is nourishing both sides.

Lae:

Yeah, well, that's what it's about for me. And it was lovely when we first met you. I mean, you got it. What I was doing straight away, you were interested.

Pedram:

And because as a curator also, our gaze is trained to understand things immediately and the differences. And what is different? This art is different. This technique of execution is different. So therefore, the artist statement and vision to the world is different. Of course. Yeah. You are, you're very different and your vision is different. And production of the artwork is different. It's very thin line between being a craft person and contemporary artist, I think. And you beautifully show how a contemporary artist you are by using and having that deep knowledge of craft.

Lae:

Yeah, you got it. And this is what you are saying at my age now, like I'm seventy next year and I can honestly say my work is well crafted. It is in the type of work I do, it is really crafted.

Pedram:

But whoever look at your work understand? Wow. There is big understanding of craft making. And when you explain since young age you learned work in the industry of furniture making. So and then you transfer it step by step, make it yourself and balance it with your artistic creativity. Yeah. And I think garden exhibition is one of the masterpiece results of that twenty years, as you said, observation and artist and working on such a beautiful project like.

Lae:

Yeah. Yeah. Thanks.