

One & Other Project

My name is Josh Black. We are here for the One & Other project in association with Wellcome Trust on the 4th of October 2009, can I ask you to state your name, age and where you are from please?

My name is Rebecca Batholomew Sweeney I am 29 years of age and I'm from central London.

How are you feeling this morning Rebecca?

Tired and nervous and excited, sort of.

How did you hear about the One & Other project?

I think, [I'm] not sure, I think I saw it on the news. But I think, I also saw people talking about it on Facebook and being an Antony Gormley fan and interested in anything artistic, I looked into it and got very excited and applied.

What is it about Antony Gormley's work that appeals?

I very much like the public, ephemeral public elements of it; he's someone that I studied as part of my work studying in Fine Arts and I've always enjoyed his social aspects and the fact that he includes himself in the work. As well it's one of my favourite aspects of it, I like the fact that he uses himself as his model for a lot of his earlier statues and things like and it kind of emanates, is that right?, he emanates. A lot of the stuff I did earlier in my work so I became very interested and stayed interested because of the nature of his work.

When you found out that you won a place on the plinth how did you react and what has the thought process been since then?

I was very shocked [chuckles]. I couldn't really quite believe what I was seeing; panic, wondering why I applied and, but very excited and wanting to very much do something with my time rather than just wasting this opportunity. I definitely wanted to take advantage of it and get back to, I suppose, what I consider my artistic side because I hadn't really touched that since leaving university. My life took a slightly different root and it's something that I very much miss I really enjoyed, kind of, this opportunity to embrace that again.

Why did your life take a different turn?

Because it's very hard to get the job you want out of university, as every university student knows. I was quite lucky, I studied photography at Derby Uni and then, almost since I came out of uni, I managed to get a job as a photographer's agent's assistant which kind of kept me involved, but pulled me away from the artistic side. And from there, I just got kind of swept along and jobbing and then I got very heavily pregnant and married [chuckles]. And so things kind of didn't take that root but, obviously, you know, I still keep my hands-on. I have my camera, I still play. My baby bump has been an inspiration for some of the pictures that I have taken. But yes, it's my life [which] doesn't lend itself to embrace that side of things anymore.

If you could possibly develop that time line, flesh it out a little bit for us, so you were a photographer's assistant, agency assistant.

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I worked for a photography agency.

Yes.

And training to be an assistant, unfortunately when the recession hit it was advertising based so advertising was probably one of the first things that gets hit and so I was made redundant from there and then I just needed to get jobs so I went into, I went into, customer services for about 6 months and then I got married and marriages are very potent and it made me pregnant [chuckles] and from there, unfortunately, again I was made redundant from my role there and being pregnant it was very difficult to get another job so I decided to take the luxurious choice and enjoy my pregnancy and that brings us to now really.

How old is the product of your first pregnancy?

[Chuckles] My first pregnancy is still brewing yes, he's due within the next 2 weeks. He won't be any later than that because it would have to be induced if I don't go into labour naturally in the next 2 weeks. So I am 38 weeks pregnant, quite scary in itself, but the plinth has been a nice distraction from the pain and fear of labour that awaits [chuckles].

Do you know that he is a boy?

Yes, yes he is a boy I had to find out because I was so convinced that I was having a girl. I told everyone I knew that it would a girl. My catch phrase was that it was going to be a girl or a gay because that was the way it was going to be so I'm quite glad I found out because I would have made a bit of a fool out of myself because, obviously it turned out to be a boy in Murphy's law style.

How did you react when you did find out?

[Pause] I wouldn't say I was disappointed. I think I was, because I had really wanted a girl because my life itself is quite female orientated. I don't have any brothers or anything like that so not really the best person [to be] understanding boys and men so it would have been a lot easier for me to bring up a girl. So I think the challenges that faced me for having a boy were a bit daunting so that was the problem in my initial reaction but within a week I was, I kind of got my head around it. I had a plan for the future I knew I was going to approach raising my potentially feminist little boys so [chuckles] so yes I think once I got my plans in action I was very excited.

You did say that you'd hoped for a girl or a gay.

Yes [chuckles].

What happens if your male child turns out to be heterosexual?

Oh I don't know, the disappointment would be overwhelming, but I'm sure as a family we could come to terms with it and embrace his heterosexual lifestyle [chuckles].

How have you prepared for the impending arrival?

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Well I've to do quite a lot actually. I was, I was diagnosed with gestational diabetes about 4 weeks ago which means I have had to change my entire diet which you have to do when you get pregnant anyway but it went excessive at this point because I had to give up everything sweet including fruit and all carbohydrates had to be cut right down which was very frustrating to say the least. I had already reverted to a healthy life style. I'd given up caffeine and anything like that and the only thing I've been craving is sweet things so that was really frustrating. I had also *polyhydramnios* which means I'm carrying too much water which was directly related to the gestational diabetes as well. So that made me [at] high risk of premature labour so by giving up everything that I needed to give up, that was causing the adverse reaction with the extra water. I managed to bring the water down which has made my pregnancy a little safer, but I'm still high risk. So yes, so there's a lot of foodie preparation and for the baby, getting bags packed and ready for that. I haven't decorated the nursery yet. I'm trying to put that out of my mind at the moment because he will live in my room for the first 6 months until it is safer to move him into his own room. I've got 6 months to deal with that. I've got so much else going on right now, but this last bit as I say has been [a] really nice distraction of panicking of what happens in 2 weeks, just panicking about the plinth instead [chuckles].

What are you hoping to do when you are on the plinth?

Up on the plinth I shall be a version of naked. I'll be in a naked suit not actually naked because I was worried about being cold and as I'm about to be a parent I should be a bit more responsible. I thought I should be a bit more responsible than that and I've also got my unborn child painted on my tummy sticking out in the middle of the naked suit and all of this is to do - my words have gone 'baby brain', when you get this pregnant everything wipes from your brain, you can't remember words - it's almost like an acknowledgement to the Alison Lapper statue that was there before because I'm about the same amount of pregnant as she was and I really admire that statue. I wanted to acknowledge the similarities and kind of embrace that as well as that I decided to draw attention to a baby's charity obviously. Since becoming pregnant it's the only thing I can think of. My mind is a little bit on one track now and so I am raising money for Tommy the baby's charity in aid of the 17 babies that die every day in the UK [due to] still birth. I thought that was very prominent, I mean throughout your pregnancy you have little stages when you panic about certain things such as miscarrying early on and then you have to have a test for Down's syndrome that becomes very prominent. Towards the end of my pregnancy obviously still birth is something that plays on my mind so I decided you know it would be nice to draw awareness of the fact you know these 17 babies die every single day and there's not really very much that medicine knows why this happens and so raising a bit of awareness for the research of that. I thought [that] would be quite a nice additional thing to do as well as spending my time, what I consider artistically, while I'm up there and so alongside that to kind of honour these 17 babies that have died, I took inspiration from Antony Gormley's *Field* and the first time I came across Antony Gormley's *Field* it was actually through a good friend of mine, Judith, who made the little men that Antony Gormley makes to sit on her mother's grave because she was leaving the area. She wouldn't be able to go back and so she called them watchers as they sat on the grave and watched over her mum when she wasn't there so I've always known them as watchers and I thought it would be nice to create a watcher

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for each of the 17 babies while I'm up there to represent them and the fact they you know that they've passed on and the heartbreak from the parents left behind. So yes, I'll also be letting go of lots and lots of balloons depending on how many my husband blows them up for me. He's outside doing that but I'll be, I'll be letting a lot off when I'm up there and then after I've made my little watchers because I'm a bit worried I won't have anything to do and I just want to be doodling, I'll do [?] more balloons and trying to get as many off as I can and each of those balloons have an envelope attached with a little bit of information where the balloons come from, why I'm doing it and it has a little gift inside and a plea for people to, perhaps, show their support by logging on to my sponsorship page and throw a little bit of money in Tommy's direction.

You did touch on the awful subject which is playing on your mind, of stillbirth [both say the last 2 words simultaneously], would it be possible for you to discuss with us on a more personal level?

Yes sure I mean, I don't, I don't have any personal experience of still birth - touch wood - and thank god - but I just feel it's, you know, when I was thinking about what was very prominent to me at the moment because you know I wanted to do something pregnancy related with the fact that I'm very obviously pregnant. I just feel, I mean, I spend a lot of time on pregnancy and birth forums with a lot of women and it is just devastating how many women go through that. You know, it's one of those things you spend your pregnancy doing everything you can and at the last minute everything is just snatched away from you and there is nothing you can do to help it and there's no answer as to why and, I mean, there are many more things that happen all the time. I just feel there's probably less awareness about, you know, how many babies die in the UK every year and why.

And how do those fears play on your mind?

It's definitely something I've panicked about and I do wonder if I'm jinxing myself by kind of being so prominent just before I'm getting to that birth point but you know I think there are so many fears when you are pregnant that you know you can either let them overwhelm you or you can keep them in context and I think I'm very much a context person and I deal with things as and when they arise so, yes, I'll be fine [chuckles].

Can I ask what it was about Alison Lapper, why the statue appeals to you so much?

Yes.

And whether that has changed since you became pregnant?

[Pause] I think, yes, I think it has become more prominent since I've become pregnant. I mean, I loved the statue when it first arrived and, you know, it really stood out as a very strong, empowered feminist sign of, you know, of overcoming adversity but also feminism. In general this, this, and the fact that it was so controversial as well kind of emphasised all of those elements and I just loved that. I think we do lack a lot of kind of female role models in the statues and stuff around London because

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there's just so much and you've got maybe Joan of Arc in Marble Arch and that's about it with strong females. I think there's Florence Nightingale there as well. But, yes, I thought it was really good to have something that was, that stood out as such, an empowered monument and the fact it was very controversial, I think, just spoke wonders about the people looking on. I don't think it really said anything about the statue itself. It said so much about the people commenting on it and I quite often get into arguments with people about why it was wonderful. You know, it frustrated me that people thought it was kind of wrong, if you like, to be publicly displayed and I just, it infuriated me that people are so narrow minded over it and it made me love it even more and since I've got pregnant yes it has, I hadn't really considered it but it has taken on you know a novel aspect. I suppose, I can relate more with her and you know I'd say overcoming adversity even with her disability. Had she not had the disability there is still, you know, big challenges that pregnancy brings on its own that she had to deal with. You know, I suppose I didn't really embrace that as much until I was in the [same] situation.

How do you think your family reacted to you going up on the plinth?

[Chuckles] Everyone is very supportive. I don't think a lot of people know exactly what I'm doing so that might be a question I'd better ask after they've seen what I've done. But no, my family are very supportive. They are quite used to me making an exhibition of myself and yes I mean some of them will be here today, some will be watching online. I think in general I don't think anyone will be telling me off, yes.

How are they used to you making an exhibitionist of yourself?

Well at university when I was doing photography most of my work was based on self-portraiture and in quite a lot of that I was naked for some of my images. So although they may have been shocking at the time, I think they quite got used to me being in the centre of the picture and standing out as it were [chuckles].

How, what reaction are you expecting from today?

From, like, the crowd or people in general? General reactions, I don't know I've not considered it. I think I'm too nervous generally about what's going to happen and I think if I started considering what people are going to say or do it would just make my nerves explode. So whatever reactions people have as long as, I suppose, they get the point or they get a point, art is subjective in itself so you can't expect everyone to take away from that exactly what it is you intend without handing out like little written bios for everybody to know exactly what you are saying. So I suppose the only kind of reactions that I'm hoping that I get [will be] some donations towards my charity and that for me would be kind of outspoken enough to show that I've made a bit of an impact.

Is there anything else you'd like to say about your hour or about yourself?

No I'd like to say that I think this is a marvellous idea and Antony Gormley is a genius [chuckles].



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Brilliant, well good luck, thank you very much indeed.

Thank you, thank you.

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