

One & Other Project

My name is Trine Thielen and I'm conducting this interview on behalf of the Wellcome Trust on behalf of Antony Gormley's One & Other project. Today is the 9th of October 2009 and the time is twenty to nine. Could you please give me your name, age and where you are from?

My name is Carole Miles I'm 49 and I'm from Northamptonshire.

And how are you today?

I'm very well thank you, really excited.

Why are you excited?

Because it's a bit unusual to be in Trafalgar square to have come sort of on the motorway via all the road works coming from St. Thomas' hospital where we parked with all of our kit and getting here way too early, getting absolutely soaked with water and thinking what's going to be like now it's beautiful out in the square and just something very special.

And what will you be doing on the plinth?

Because I'm a visual artist I thought I should make something that was visual and because I'm not very confident about myself I thought if I've got something to be inside as opposed to it just being me I would feel a lot more comfortable and also it would help me in. It would give me some time to think about some of the things that I've been doing and thinking about over the last year. I'm just about to start a project called *Invisible Threads* and I'm working with a group called *Back to Books*, They raise money from awards for all, the community fund and Corby Borough Council and we are going to be working with people ... there's an online writing course and a fantastic writer called Kathy Page who's doing that. People will be investigating family histories and then using them as a starting point for making art works and at the end of the project next March we are having an installation in some cottages in Firming Woods in Northamptonshire and the artwork will be in and around the building, hanging in and around washing lines. In my research a lot of the women have been connected with working with textiles so I thought that would be a good thing to actually work with and in my own practice I've been working with digitally manipulated images and the technology now has come so far that you can print an image on almost anything so I thought Trafalgar ... I thought about my mum's family. There were lots of people who were in the Royal Navy and in the Merchant Navy they came from Birmingham, went to South Africa, came back from South Africa to London. We went to Australia so there's been quite a bit of travelling about and water has always played a big part in that and I think that water and the ocean is a place where people ... and there's this thing that's much bigger than you and you have to learn how to cross it and life's a bit like that so some of my former work I have had people with boats on their heads and lighthouses on their heads thinking very much

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about the internal mechanisms of people and now I'm looking much more at history and how it affects you and how we are all tied together by invisible threads and so I thought, "Well what a good way to launch that particular project by making a ship." So I've got three sails which have digital images that I've made specifically for this which have various family members on pieces of personal memorabilia and my dad has made me the sort of framework so in a way it's a nice sort of connection between us and when we were younger we lived near London and came through London all the time. We had family who live in Finchley so it's always been a very special place and I was born here. I was born at St. Bart's hospital so, again, to come back and to do something which is sort of *performancy* and also talking about my mum's grandma who was 'Carry Holland' and this is her ship. She was kind of quite a larger than life character. I never met her but I feel like I have met her and thought a lot about her, you know, my mum is a great one for sitting around the dinner table telling stories, passing on information and I think that those stories that time ... people are so busy working they don't really have that time to spend with each other and yet when they realise and actually sit down and have a meal, talk to somebody, your children in particular then your experience of family is so much richer and so we might be very rich in terms of stuff but we are not very rich in terms of how we fill our time with each other and relationships tend to fragment much more easily.

So this has given me the opportunity to think about what family means to me and all of those people, the people that I haven't met, the people who won't have met me because they'll be here after me. We are all just little pinpoints in time and we all knit together and somehow sort of create this really diverse image and I suppose this is what appeals to me about the project. You are taking people from all over, it's a draw, it's a lottery, you don't know who's going to turn up, you don't know what they are going to do and I have to say I was very cynical to start with because I was thinking, "Well actually, that's not very interesting but the more I watched the more I kind of think about the original conception of somebody standing in that space and just being still" and it's very difficult for people to be still and be observed, you know, maybe that was what was intended but other people have used it for other things so I think that's very generous on the part of the artist whose original idea this was, Antony Gormley, and I do feel that a lot of his work is ... he uses himself as the raw material for his art but he's also like an every man figure and he connects with people and that generosity of spirit is quite rare in today's world so even though we haven't met, you know, and we probably never will, it's very nice to feel that kind of connection and I was talking to the production team earlier and again I was a bit cynical I thought, "Oh well, you know, very famous artists." I don't know that he would be bothered about watching but apparently he's been down a lot and has been watching people online so that does make you feel that you are part of something but now do I belong to Antony Gormley? Am I his artwork? Could he sell me? These are the sort of.... It makes you think about a lot of things. The other thing it makes you think about is what a technical and difficult business being a sculptor is. When you look at people from different angles you are getting all sorts of foreshortenings

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happening, people look very different to what they might see themselves in the mirror. From across the square, you know, you get one view from on top of the square and you get another view. How do you ever kind of resolve all of those issues when you've got to make something that's three-dimensional and satisfying so many people? It's a brave job to be doing... anything else?

I'm just listening. It's fascinating that you ... what gave you the idea as well to sort of pair... use history as a subject for your artwork? Where has that come from?

Well I suppose that the *Who Do You Think You Are* programme has got everybody thinking about where do you come from and because you know we do have family in different countries and I didn't really know very much further than the end of my own nose really and I very much regret that I didn't talk to my aunt Florence more. She lived just to ... she almost lived to a hundred and she very much believed in family. She was a single lady but she kept in touch with everybody, she wrote letters to people. I've got letters that she wrote to my mum all throughout their married life and she was a one off you know and she really wanted people to know about her forebears and so I regret that I didn't I was too young to ask her those questions but there are still people that I've managed to find. So I started looking online, I've had a lot of help from people, there was also someone who contacted me and they said, "I think we have your family's bible, would you like a copy?" And I said, "How do you know it belongs to my family? She said, "Well the people on the fly leaf are the people that you've got in your tree." So I said, "Oh, I would love to see that and the fly leaf was actually detached from the book and it was written by hand and it was a lady called Emma Margaret (?) who became Emma Miles and she wrote down the dates of birth and the times of death of her children... she had eleven or twelve children she had two sets of twins and another single son. They died just shortly after being born and then she had a daughter who lived until she was twelve and she was carried off by an illness and the last century is, you know ... the Emma Florence's name and Emma her mother has written, "She was the sunshine of our home" and I just thought that was like a voice coming through time and I was curious to know who she was and I was curious to know how did people who were working in an agricultural background manage to have a business? Who were they connected to? How did that come about? So when you start you start asking lots of questions and it's not about, "I want money" or "I want to find somebody famous" it's just sort of like, "Oh I wonder where they live" and so other things that we will be doing is going and having a look at these places and I've always loved history and trying to put myself into history trying to imagine what it was like and you know we are so far away from it now it's very difficult to actually imagine that and so having started thinking about it and spent such a lot of time, you know, *noodling* around on the internet I thought I'm someone who likes to kind of use what I learn to inform my practice and to try to help my living doing that. So I thought oh project about family history that would be interesting that would mean I could spend more time doing more investigations and see where it takes me and see what I end up doing and, you know, I've been thinking

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a lot about using film and so, again, going and visiting these places, you know, the technology now is so good that you can magpie around, you can pick up bits and pieces, you can take photographs, you can take videos, you can edit them at home, you can do what you like with them. So on the one hand it takes it away from the hand and the eye of the artist but it also brings it back to artists which I have always loved, using new things and also it's a way of using colour in a way that you can't in any other fashion and you can have fun, you know, and life is a long thing and you want to always be learning and expanding and feeling connected to the rest of the world.

And so what would a typical sort of ... you say you are a visual artist, what would a typical one of your artworks, one of your installations, what would it look like?

Well at the moment I'm working collaboratively with another artist called Joe Deckham and we spent the last three years making a project which was called Fingerprints on the pew and it was inspired by a church that was built in 1968 which was just down the road from where we have our studios. We were invited by the vicar, at the time they were saying, "It's our 40th anniversary would you like to have an exhibition you think, an exhibition in the church hall don't you think so?" But oh we'd like to go and have a look at the inside of the building so he gave us the keys and let us roam around and it was a beautiful day, you get very wide blue skies in Northamptonshire and you are walking through this council estate which was built as a new town in the '60s and you find this very angular church which looks quite a bit grey and a bit austere from the outside and you think, "How did that get here? Who commissioned that and why?" And then inside they have this beautiful stained glass window they say that it kind of reflects praying hands but we always thought that it was a bit like concord and there's lots of colour. It's an abstract piece but lots of colour and the light floods through it and it falls on you and we thought, "Actually we could make a project about this, we could do something quite exciting" and the great thing about working with Joe is that together we think we have an idea and we think how can we make that possible and we start off in a small way we are quite frugal. We make a little go a long way and so we were engaging with the community, getting them to re-interpret their space and look at it differently. We hosted a dinner party where Joe created the inside of the church using ribbons and we printed a tablecloth, we printed all of the china, we invited guests to come and talk about space because once again Corby has been regenerated, it's changing and we thought it would be a good moment for people to come and join us and everyone move around with every ... of course it's a very small thing in a small place but it had a big impact and on that we were able to get some more funding and we started being able to make our own work. So we made a portable sculpture which we called *Intense* and we can take it anywhere we like and we can put it up wherever we want to. We were in *York Minster* a few weeks ago. Again it was a very temporary thing, it was an evening and it was a long way to go and you think, "Why are you doing it?" And then you think, "Actually it's a great opportunity to play in a space. Time to go."



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Yes unfortunately [?] we ran out of time, but thank you.