

One & Other Project

My name is Paula Testa. I'm conducting this interview on behalf of the Wellcome Trust for the One & Other project by Antony Gormley in Trafalgar Square. The date is 14th of September 2009 and the time is 9.10 pm. Please could you tell me your name, your age and where you are from?

My name is Ann Jordan. I'm aged 68 and I'm from Swansea in South Wales.

And have you travelled to London especially today for your hour on the plinth?

I have, yes, I'm staying overnight as there aren't any trains back until 5 o'clock in the morning so I got a bed for the night.

And has arriving at the square and seeing the plinth in action been how you'd imagined it would be?

Yes, yes.

And how are you feeling about going up on the plinth?

Very excited, a little bit anxious. Well, just hope it goes all right I hope that I'm not going to let the side down. I hope that I'm going to show people a little bit about myself and what I'm trying to portray.

And would you tell us what it is you are trying to portray and what you hope to be showing about yourself?

What I want to do, I intend to do, is to do a piece of performance art and I want to commemorate all those people unknown who have not got statues erected in their names. It's because of them and their actions and their lives that this country is what it is today and we are who we are and consequently they affect the future. So I'm going to almost do a metamorphosis in that I'm going to start off as a living statue and then I'm going to knit myself into a cocoon with Welsh mountain wool that has been hand spun and obviously I am hand-knitting it and this refers back to a burial act in 1667 that said that all bodies had to be buried in a wall blanker unless they died from the plague so it's utilising that but the cocoon is also like a second skin and in some ways it's autobiographical as well for me. But then I'll knit myself, as I say, into the cocoon and then I will emerge and that is the future and the future of our next generation.

And would you mind telling us in what way it is autobiographical?

It's autobiographical because my life has changed a lot over the last 8, 9 years. I was widowed, I started a new career. I used to be a midwife beforehand and I've always been interested in art so I decided urggghh I want I degree, I want to go to arts school so I've been to arts school. I've done a BA and now I'm doing an MA.

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And how have you found it going back to studying?

Fantastic, I love being a student and I just ... I am quite passionate about art of every sort.

And is it something you have always been passionate about?

I've always been interested in it yes, yes. I mean I did my nurse training here in London and, yes, I went to the National Gallery and I went to Tate Britain, well, it wasn't Tate Britain in those days it was just the Tate Gallery. Yes I have been interested in art but never had the chance to do it or the courage.

And what is your experience of going back to studying and getting more involved in the art world?

Very, very positive. I've got lots of new friends, especially young people and I'm also involved in running an art gallery where we support emerging artists. We are all volunteers. It's hard work but it's great fun as well, yes.

And what kind of art do you like? Are you a practising artist as well?

Yes I'm a practising artist. I am quite a contemporary artist despite my age I think I surprise quite a lot of people. I think my family think I'm mad, but there you go, but I am quite eclectic. Since I've been doing my MA I've started doing some performance art as well as installations and things like that.

And are you able to describe what it is about being a practising artist that you enjoy, what you get out of it?

It's just... for me I think it's been an opportunity to rediscover something that I didn't know about myself, you know, I am able to now devote time and develop my practise and my ideas and yes it's been great, I really love it.

And where did your interest in art begin? Do you remember?

We drew at school. I did a drawing competition that I remember once but I'm not particularly good at drawing but I think ... what I did to what I do now is all my life experiences because I can think laterally and I'm not frightened to tackle any subjects.

And are you pleased that you managed to do this later? Are you happy with the way it has impacted on you?

Yes, yes. I probably wouldn't have had the time to devote to it earlier on and I think when I was a young girl being an artist was not considered a career but more a past time.

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And what hopes and ambitions with the art now being for the future?

I just want to give something back to the art world. They've given me a lot in the last 7, 8 years and I probably ... you know, my work doesn't really sell because it's not that type of work but as long as it gives pleasure to people, as long that as maybe I can interact with people, make them think a little bit or make them empathise with what I've been doing so, for me, that is important. It's the connection, connecting with people.

And how does what you are doing now compare to what you were doing before when you were a midwife?

Well there are certain strands that have happened in my work in that I'm still ... it's about caring for people and caring for individuals and there were quiet instants of wrapping which probably goes back to the idea of when I did my nurse training and spent an awful lot of time bandaging people and learning how to make bandages and to do specific bandages. I mean it's changed completely now. I mean I appreciate that but so all these sorts of things ... I'm very interested in the human body and so that has been a thread throughout my work.

What's the impact you'd like to have by going up on the plinth this evening and doing what you are doing?

That is ... wow, that is a very big question. Oh, one thing I would like it to do is to ... some people to realise that there is a lot of art going on out there and also it's a sort of, for me, it's a precursor of an event, a publicly regarded event, I'm going to be doing next year up on the black mountain in the Brecon Beacons in which I'm going to spin 12 miles which is the length of a coffin route that goes over the mountain and it's then going to be knitted into a circular blanket which is based on a child's pattern for a shawl and it's going to line a Bronze Age funeral [?] as I say right on the top of the mountain and it's going to be up there for a month. It's quite a remote place but it's going to be called Cwtch. Cwtch is a Welsh word and it means sort of protection, love, the feeling of warmth and comfort and this is what I am going to be celebrating up there.

And where did you get the idea from to do this?

Well a few years ago I was staying ... we had a field trip and we were staying in a youth hostel, this is on my BA course, and I found this scrap bit of information that said there was this funeral route that went over the mountain. Nobody seemed to know about it and then I sort of met somebody who knew somebody who thought they knew somebody who knew about it and it was a local historian who happened to also be a walker with the Brecon Beacons Park Authority and he, "Oh yes, I know about it" he said. And then I started celebrating this route by doing lots of site specific pieces of work with found sheep's wool and my material is just sheep's wool and

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fleece because I don't take anything into the environment that isn't already there or that it has come from the environment because I am very conscious about that and it is a national park. So I started doing that and then I started looking at some of the archaeology and the Cairns. They are enormous these funeral Cairns. The one I'm working on in the internal diameter is at least 22 foot in diameter so they are really big ones so they are about, as I say, 1200, 1300 years. So they are amazing structures and they are amazing monuments and I wanted to commemorate because what happened with the funeral route was the young men, the young farmers, had to leave the farms. This is about the 1820s because farming was so repressed, what we call the Rebecca Riots, there was the tall gates where the ... what they had to pay was going up and there was starvation and they walked these 12 miles and they went to work in the mines on the other side in a place called [?]. A lot of them were killed in the mines and their bodies were brought back up and at the top of the mountain they had a church service and it was handed over to the families and taken up to Cland [?] for burial. So that and, say, we've got sheep, blankets, women knitting because women, the farmer's wife's used to carry their farm produce over the mountain to another place called Burnham [?]. There was a market and as they walked they used to knit so all these things are tied together to produce this work but it's a celebration about birth, life, death and re-birth so... a big project.

And when you say that you are commemorating the people that were unknown, [?] were these farmers?

No, I think it's very much for the whole of the nation, not just for where I'm from, yes the whole of the nation.

And will you go on and start performing, so to speak, or will you talk about anything that you are doing about your work?

I'm just going to do the performance. I'm not going to talk, it's up to the people to interpret how they may and they can read about it on the website, can't they?

And we spoke about the impact that you'll have. What would you like to take away from the experience for yourself?

I just think it's so exciting. I just think it's ... I just feel it's been a great pleasure to take part, to have been chosen. I know it's by computer by random but even still to be have been chosen to take part because Antony Gormley is an artist whose work I know well and I admire his use of the human body and the way ... and in some ways my work ... he's a sort of conceptual artist who had some influence because the way he has wrapped his body up for all these various things so, you know, I hope that he likes it.

And it sounds like your work can relate to it quite a lot ...

Yes, he's one of the artists that I hope I can relate to yes, yes.

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You've spoken about the gallery that you work at. Is that how you spend your time or do you work on other things as well?

I ... no I'm ... well, I thought my family are nearby but obviously yes, it's called the Elysium Gallery and there are sort of three directors and I'm one of them and we show emerging artists so it's very eclectic and contemporary art [?] based installations, paintings, drawings so yes, it's good.

And it's all on a voluntary basis?

It's all on a voluntary basis, yes, it's in Swansea. We've been going in these premises now just over two years and we hoped to be able to continue because it's very much needed down there. There is nothing for emerging artists, you know, you are suddenly ... you leave university and unless you are sort of well established, a lot of the galleries don't look at you so it's a platform for them and it's great.

And what other things are important to you in your life at the moment?

Well my family obviously and keeping well, keeping going because I have a lot of energy and just living life to the full I think.

What was your family's reactions that you are doing this?

You are mad ... no they, I think probably maybe secretly they are a little bit proud but they are not artists, my two sons, so yes. No they are rooting for me.

And are there people here with you tonight?

Yes, yes, yes.

Who have you got down here?

I've got Gemma whose going to film it and there's one of my colleagues who is doing the MA he's coming down as well and there's a couple of other people who live here in London, yes.

What's the MA in?

It's in fine art and it's called Contemporary Dialogues and we actually interact with those who are doing MAs in Photography and Visual Communication so we are a mixture, so it's great.

And who would you say you are doing this for?

I suppose at the end of the day I'm doing it for myself really maybe that's being a little bit conceited, selfish, but yes I'm not doing it to seek fame or anything I just want to be part of it yes, I want to be part of it.

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And what has your experience of the project been like, being involved in the project, what does it mean for you?

Well it's been great because I actually heard about the project a long time ago because when ... one module on my MA we had to do about public art and the environment and I actually chose to talk about Trafalgar Square because I had known it when I was working up here in London and so I do know who all the other plinthers are on the other ... the permanent plinthers and I do know about that. It's the major's... what's the word I want when you are commissioning, yes, commissioning people to do it and all about the other people who've been chosen before and this was before Antony Gormley was chosen and so I, I knew who the shortlisted artists were so I gave a presentation about their work and everything else and I think because when the opportunity came to apply he was chosen I thought I've got to go for it.

What does it mean to you now to be someone in a Gormley's project on the plinth in Trafalgar square?

Fantastic yes, fantastic, yes, I'm looking forward to it.

Finally, I don't know if you remember what words you might have put about yourself on your website profile if you do would you mind telling us why you put those 3 words?

I put passionate about art and it is my passion, it gets me out of bed in the morning, you know, it's great I just love it because I think it's so eclectic these days and it's so art for everybody. It's not just for, you know, the art inverted establishment, you know. It's for everybody and I think this has been very democratic and it's great.

Wonderful. Well have a wonderful hour.

Thank you very much indeed.

I hope it goes all right.

Thank you.