

One & Other Project

My name is Paula Testa and 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 the 13th of October 2009 and the time is 9.45 am. Please could you tell me your name, your age and where you are from?

Yeah my name is Dickie Beau, I'm 31 and I live in London but I'm originally from the East Midlands.

And how are you feeling about going on the plinth this morning?

I'm a bit ambivalent, yes, because the look that I'm in is potentially an eye catcher so I don't know whether that might provoke a bit of a reaction, you know, so I'm ambivalent but I'm looking forward to it really, it's a nice opportunity, you know.

And would you describe to me what it is you are wearing and what you intend to do for the hour?

Yes, well I'm wearing a nude suit underneath a fur coat and the look ... it broadly evokes the blond bomb shell, particularly Marilyn Monroe and the idea really is hopefully from a distance I will look like a naked woman on the plinth and when you get closer you'll see that I've got a clown face and that I'm wearing a zip up body stocking and that I'm not, that I'm a man so yes, I've been reading a lot of Judith Butler lately and kind of I'm a bit obsessed with the idea of gender as a construction and I thought I'd embody that if possible.

And why have you chosen to do this on the plinth today?

Well gender and identity are things that I look at in my work as a performance artist so I just thought it would be interesting. Normally I do constructed narratives and here I'm going to be up there for an hour with no ... I haven't planned anything except the look so it's kind of also for a personal kind of experiential thing, you know, so to see whether I do anything or whether I just stand there or whether I'm a living statue or whether I feel kind of inspired to move, you know, and just see what it feels like, yes.

And what is it about that subject or that topic that has interested you?

It's to do with gender identity. I think it's to do with my sexuality because from a very early age I was aware that I didn't ... that I remember watching Madonna's Material Girl video at the age of about four and thinking, "Oh there's been some great cosmic error because I should be the one up there in the pink dress surrounded by lots of men" but I was aware that that was basically wrong as far as my upbringing goes and the kind of place that, the town ... I came from a steel town from a kind of working

One & Other Project

class background and so I thought when I was six years old and saw that video maybe I'm a woman trapped in a man's body because we would get the news of the world every Sunday and, you know, there'd be these occasional sensationalist stories about a transsexual worker at their local job centre or whatever. And I thought maybe that's me, you know, but as I grew older and hit puberty I realised that it wasn't that I wanted to get out of my body, you know, into another body but that I identified sexually as you know not being mainstream. And so yes, that's the beginning of it because later I don't have an issue with my gender, I actually ... I've been reading Judith Butler and everything. I can't think that the whole idea of gender is, you know, is fake and so yes that's why, that personal history.

And is it a theme that you regularly use in your work? Is it just one of many things that you include in your performances?

It's one of ... it's in the mix; there's other stuff as well I'm interested in. I'm interested in addiction and addictive processes and the way in which society is kind of ... basically the society operates almost your average dysfunctional family and the government doesn't govern really by making long term plans but lurches instead from crisis to crisis like a drunk and if you go on every corner there's a pub and if you go into a café everything you see is processed food, white flour or sugar, it's an industry of addiction that we are sort of trapped in. Consumerism is an addictive process, there are all sorts of people with eating disorders and our prison system is completely corrupt you know. In Brixton prison I've heard that C wing is the drug free ring, so basically in the rest of the prison everyone is on drugs and who's bringing the drugs in? Probably the guards and so what you have is a system which commands no kind of respect whatsoever from the people who are imprisoned by it, you know, because there are no rules, you know. It's a fallacy but there are rules and bars and so I kind of ... I'm interested in that as well, you know, because nobody is actually really talking about that kind of thing, especially the government because actually those prisoners are kept quite, you know, they are not ... as long as they are not awake then it's easy so yes what's kind of beneath the service is what interests me, it's not so far [?] we can't all see it we just scratch a tiny bit.

What's the impact that you'd like to have today by doing this?

I don't know really, I think that it would be nice if ... it would be interesting if heterosexual men who identify with being heterosexual men came closer to what they might be intrigued by the sight of what they thought was a naked woman and then kind of you know maybe thought a bit more broadly about what it is that they objectify because at the end of the day really increasingly what we want our women to be apparently is closer and closer to children, we are not allowed to have any hair, hair is pretty much banned we ... the paedophile is society's biggest monster but at the same time it's not really that far away from the editor of *The Sun* you know, I know that's a woman as well you know but so yes.

One & Other Project

And are you viewing this as one of your many performances or is there a difference because it's on the plinth? What's that opportunity of doing it up there?

Yes, I think there's a difference because it's not really a performance for me it's more like an installation of which I'm like the object so it's really completely different. Normally I work with constructed text and have some kind of dramatic art I do a little theatrical vignette and now in this case I'm not doing anything.

And what would you personally like to gain from the experience?

I have no idea of anything specific I'd like to gain from the experience but I'm interested to see what it brings up for me.

And what's your take on the project as a whole? Have you watched much of it and what have you thought of what you've seen or is it a bit of a one off thing?

Yes, no I've been following it kind of casually and I notice that lots of people are here to jump into particular causes it seems and I've been most interested and liked Lady Godiva I thought she was really interesting and very brave so things that challenge really the way we think and operate the things that come out of the shadows to the status quo and say, you know, "Wake up." It seems to me that people have taken the opportunity to do that on the plinth. I've been a bit bored by ... like today the guy with the wellie and the farmer when it's in particular a single issue. I think that that could be a little bit boring but he's probably a really interesting man to have chosen to champion that cause but it just looks a bit dreary, you know, oh somebody has got a placard on the plinth you know.

And we spoke a little bit about your work and outside of work I wonder what other things are important to you?

Well lots of things are important to me, I suppose. I'm starting to, as I grow a bit older, to value my relationships a bit more and the time required to nurture them, keep them strong, so and in general I kind of am quite voracious about consuming all sorts of cultural stimuli, you know, so I'm interested in film and theatre and art and anything that people are producing that's not necessarily about making money or about ego recognition you know.

Well, wonderful, thanks for your time today, so we'll leave it there, thanks very much, have a great hour.

Thanks.