

One & Other Project

My name is Michelle Owoo and I'm carrying out this interview on behalf of the Wellcome Trust for the One & Other project. The date today is the 28th of September 2009 and the time is now 4.35 p.m. Could you tell me your name, your age and where you come from?

Sure. My name is Kirstin Broome. I'm 34. I'm from San Diego California.

How are you feeling?

Excited. A little bit overwhelmed to be here so I'm very excited.

When did you move over from the States?

Oh I moved here about 3 and half years ago.

What prompted you to move?

Oh I met a British man in San Diego and I fell in love and the economy got really bad in the States and we an executive decision to move here.

Can you tell me what you brought along with you today?

Yes I've brought a very interesting sculpture; it's of a devil seedpod. It's actually a very large seedpod in nature, they think it evolved to attach onto the fur of extinct animals like woolly mammals and so on and so forth, it's native to the Americas to the US I believe. In the South I believe it's an interesting seed pot that we hope would bring attention to the Millennium Seabed Project, which is run by the Royal Botanic gardens, Kew. We are about ready to celebrate a milestone which is conserving and banking 10% of the world's wild plant species which is a really, really great accomplishment and then we are hoping to build on that and set another really ambitious ten years' goal which is 25%.

How long have you been working at Kew?

Almost six months, yes, so not very long at all.

Can you tell me a bit more about how this sculpture came about and who's made it?

Sure, the artist's name is Tony Gibbes and he works with Kew in the Millennium Seed Bank on and off he has a really good understanding of the importance of the work that's done by the Millennium Seed Bank and I think you can really see that in his sculptures. They are very inspiring and impressive; they make you question what is that? You know, what am I looking at and why is that important? And I think that's really an important activity to do with the seed bank is to get people asking those questions, you know. Why do you have a seed bank? What are you doing? Why is this important? And there are just a range of answers to that but I think the most pressing is that you know we are in a time of crises, global warming is a fact. We are losing plant species at an incredibly fast rate and once a species is gone, it is gone for ever. There are shocking facts like I think it's 80% of the world's food comes from just eight species of plant so you can imagine losing one or two of those but those aren't at risk plants. At risks plants are the wild plants in nature, the ones in jungles, the ones in areas that are at risk for logging or other sort of activities that people do

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to survive. So the threats on the plants, you know, we can't try and solve the problem by telling people to stop doing these activities. What we need to do is educate people about what's going on, conserve the seeds species work with different areas to develop sustainable use of plants and plant regions and... I think part of my attraction to the Millennium Seed Bank because actually there's a human face and you can see what the result is of this work it's not a doom's day volt it's not purely about let's save seeds because we want to save this thing, you know, plants are the basis for life they provide food, oxygen, medicine you know pretty much everything you wear and everything that's around you comes in some way from plants so I guess is that enough for you?

When did you first hear about the One & Other project?

One of the great things about moving to London is the just the scope of museums and activities and I've always really been taken by Antony Gormley's work and so, you know, I tend to focus in on articles that might mention things that he's involved with. And I remember reading about the fourth plinth project when you actually voted on the different artists and I voted for Antony Gormley. I did because I selfishly wanted to have the chance to do it. I didn't think that I would ever be lucky enough to be selected but I just thought it was a fabulous project or the meerkats but that was my second vote so yes, that's kind of how I heard about the project from its inception.

Did you think about doing something other than talking about seeds?

Sure, I did but I didn't quite have that sort of creative like this is exactly what I want to do. I knew I wanted to do something and having recently joined Kew in their fundraising department as a major gift fundraiser so doing something that brings awareness of Kew and the Millennium Seed Bank was just, this is an opportunity I couldn't pass up to promote it and hopefully a couple more people will learn about what we do.

When did you find out that you had a place on the plinth?

A month ago, five weeks ago. So I mean there was a pretty good breathing time to it. I think that long, yes.

And when was the sculpture made?

Oh that was made separately from an exhibit we had at Kew promoting the Millennium Seed Bank so it was very fortuitous that exhibition came down last week and so the sculpture was made available and actually Paul Smith the head of the MSB suggested to using the sculpture and we were able to make it happen.

How do you raise awareness with people and let people know about the MSB? Because Kew, they might think it's a botanical garden?

Yes, it's a pretty garden with trees and flowers and glass houses which it is. I think part of our challenge is getting more people to know about the work that's behind Kew. I mean there's two hundred and fifty years of scientific discovery in research, there are over eight million in plant specimens in our herbarium and that's where people actually go to get a definitive identification of new plant species. So much

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going on behind the scenes at Kew. One thing that I really was interested in when I got to Kew, and something I didn't know about, is all the work that they do in how to actually germinate seeds and germinate them in different situations and that's very important because if you have certain food crops or you know sustainable farming plants that you need that you like people to use that would be a benefit for people to use if you can't get the seed to germinate. It just doesn't happen and Kew is very open with this technology, they don't charge people to learn how you do it we discover something like how to germinate a seed that might be really challenging to germinate but produces, you know, a very beneficial plant. We share that information, they actually go out and train people how to do these things as part of the Millennium Seed Bank project is teaching people in different areas actually partnering with different locations and different countries and training them how to do seed collection each country that we partner with or each area that we partner with also has a seed bank on site so they keep a portion of the seeds and then we keep a portion of the seeds in the Millennium Seed Bank but outside of the UK we don't actually own those seeds. They still remain owned by their country of origins so yes, it's really, I think, a special project and I think it has a huge effect on the health and wellbeing of people around the world.

Were you working fundraising before joining Kew?

Yes I was with the NSPCC before Kew and before that I worked at a fairly small but important UK helpline called Get Connected.

Do you enjoy your work?

Sure.

How would you paint a thumbnail sketch of yourself as a person, how would you describe your personality?

I think I am fairly happy person I am definitely a talkative person. I'm a little bit shy so I think this plinth project is challenging me a bit but it's exciting so maybe I like challenges. I've been a vegetarian for almost nineteen years and for just purely ethical reasons but I have no problem with other people eating meat. I just think everyone should cut that back just a bit. I love to travel, I have two enormous cats and I think I am a fairly normal person who is, you know, working with some extraordinary people.

Are you looking forward to going non the plinth now?

Actually I am yeah.

Okay, I'd like to cut it short as you are going to go up and ...

Yes.

So thank you very much indeed.

Thank you.



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Is there anything else you'd like to say?

No I can't think of anything no, not really no.

Thanks again.

Right, thank you.