

One & Other Project

Hello my name is Kate Rowles and I am interviewing you for the Wellcome Trust as you are taking part in Antony Gormley art work One and Other. The date today is the 19th of July 2009 and if you could please state your name, your full name, your date of birth and where you come from.

My name is Mark Jordan, my date of birth is 22nd of July 1960 and I'm from Belfast in Northern Ireland.

Great, and how are you today?

A lot warmer than I was an hour ago, up on that plinth, quite comfortable, not quite so stressed as I was [chuckles].

Yeah I bet, if I can just take you back just before you went on the plinth.

Yes.

Right back to the beginning actually to sort of ask you what was initially that prompted you to apply for this project?

I can't remember when initially found out about it I think it was probably surfing the net, I do a lot of surfing the net and I came across the Antony Gormley name which I am familiar with I've been to a few of his exhibitions, I'm a bit of a fun, do you know, and having the project I thought 'what a great idea' and seeing that it was possible to apply for I put my name down and didn't really think I would be chosen but I was so here I am.

And when you found you got a place, how did you decide what you wanted to do with your hour?

I decided not to rush it as it's one if a life opportunity and I wanted to make the most of it and I laid in bed for nights and weeks possibly thinking of different things I could do, I wanted it to be something that's important to me, that has significance in some shape or form and the first idea, I came up with lots of ideas, the first idea I came up follows actually that I thought I was going to run with was to do a little statement on the futility of war and I thought I wanted to grab attention, I thought if you are going to do this you might as well do it right, catch people attention and I was going to be in pig's blood just on a pure simple statement about the futility of war and then the more I thought about that the more I thought it's a bit cliché, there's a million people doing the futility of war things and I thought, ok what else can I do, what can be more personal? And I thought what is important to me? Friendship and love is more important to me in the world, I'm not a man of property or money or anything but I have absolutely wonderful loving relationships with my friends and family and I thought that's what I want to do, I want to let people know that I care about them, you know and I want to make some sort of statement that is very intimate and very personal and just highlight the paramount importance of friendship and love and that's what I call the little piece; 'the paramount importance of friendship and love' so I built a little website and I started thinking how can I best highlight this, what is the most intimate thing I can think of? And I still had the blood idea in my head from

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wanting to [do] the futility of war thing and I thought, I got a bit frightened, I was lying in bed, it was 2 o'clock in the morning on a sleepless night and it was sort of like an Ulrika moment. I thought what if I asked all the people I care deeply about to let me extract some blood from them? And I thought, there I do that? Because then I got frightened because I'm thinking what if they say no? What if my vision of love and friendship isn't quite the same as everybody else, because I realise it's a bit out there, I know it's odd, you know. If I was to collect a little and get their agreements then what a beautiful way to sort of highlight that importance, you know and then I started asking people, would they be willing and they all said yes and I was delighted of course and that was the initial idea. And then as I laid in bed, in the next week or so I thought I could enhance it by creating some poetry around it, do you know, and I asked people who had already agreed, I was a bit cheeky to go back to them, now you said you are going to give me blood how do you feel about writing a poem that highlights in some way the importance of friendship and love and I wrote a little piece myself and in the end they all agreed and I was like, wow.

Hmm.

I was quite moved by some of them, do you know and that's what I've done I've gathered 12 samples of blood from the people that I love dearly and that was quite an interesting experience as you can imagine, because I'm not a doctor or a nurse and I had to, I had to do a lot of research to find out what is the absolute safest way you know because I didn't want to put them in any sort of risk and I talked to people who know how to do that sort of stuff, I did a lot of research on the internet and I got my hands on little butterfly needles and tubes and little holding containers and I got some appr [???], coagulants and I explained to people that I don't have training in this 'are you still prepared?' I used absolutely sterile wipes and I got my partner whose, my hands are too shaky, to do it, so I got my partner Paula, who was very supportive with me all the way and she's an acupuncturist, she is well used to sticking needles in people, do you know and I ended up doing two or three myself. As a test one to see if it would work, tried it on myself first, I got the blood and it went quite smoothly, do you know, it worked exactly as we thought it would work, we hoped it would work and the only sort of problem I had; I was initially going to gather like half a litre of blood from each person, or 200 ml or 300 ml but I couldn't get that much from people so I supplemented it with fake blood. I thought it doesn't really matter, the act of them donating, do you know, and that was the piece, I was on today, pouring pig, fake blood on a [incomp] pool mixed up with a few drops of blood from all the people I loved and bathed in it and read out poetry. |And the final piece: I asked people whether they would submit poems and short stories on love and friendship and if I can enough people submitting it, I can compile them into a little book and I am going to make a scrap book of everybody getting their blood off to make videos and stuff.

Hmm.

And little notes and I'm going to make a little scrap book of it all, I probably duplicate it and give it to them.

Hmm.

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Don't know as a thank you.

Brilliant, hmm, would you like to say the name of the people?

If I can remember them [giggles] yeah, there was myself, I started the ball rolling, my partner Paula and my son Connor, my daughter Christine and my mum currently she is 72 and agreed, she is quite game and my brother Carl and I asked my brother Grant, but he's a doctor and ethically he wasn't able to support that for obvious reasons you know but he did support me in other ways do you know.

Hmm.

And my friends Arthur, Julie and Gary and Laura of course, and Dave the train as we call him [the interviewer can be heard laughing] and I think there might be all of them, twelve.

[Unable to hear what the interviewer says]

And yeah, these are all the people that have been very significant, supportive and loving in my life and this is a kind of tribute to them. I have been seriously ill with Crohn's disease for 10 years, I had to retire from my job, I used to run a charity for drug addicts and I spent a lot of time being ill.

Hmm.

And I'm still quite ill and I was worried I would not be able to make it up there today but I'm not having such a bad day today, you know, I'm a bit sore now.

Yeah, hmm, and your, your friends and family who did this, who donated blood, which part of their body did you take the blood from?

From their arm?

The arm, yeah.

Yeah.

And how did they react when you first asked them, they were supportive?

Yeah they were supportive, with a supportive laugh, I suppose like 'are you serious?' they were making jokes 'what do you want blood?' Actually yes I do.

Hmm.

Yeah but they were very supportive they pretty much jumped straight to it saying yeah.

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Is this kind of, in character with you, is this something that you, to use blood is very, hmm, extreme message, kind of..?

I kind of used to be in a lot of extreme sports and stuff I've never worked with blood or created art of that nature before, so it's quite new to me and quite frightening you know, to do that.

Hmm.

I know it's a bit out there, worried about to know it's a sort of maniac [incomp] of it all but I would have, I would have always been a person who takes risks, push boundaries and do that you know.

Yeah and how, can you comment on how the experience was bathing in the blood and your, if you can remember your emotions when you were standing on the plinth?

I didn't think it would make me feel anything because I am so used to the idea; it's been in my head for weeks and weeks not, but when I got up there and started mixing the blood with fake blood and stuff there was a real intimacy, I felt nearly like crying you know because of how intimate it was, it was a mixture of a bit frightening and a bit lovely do you know [interrupted].

Yeah and so [pause] I'm trying to think, I'm quite moved by what you've done, yeah, I'm just wondering, one of the questions that we ask everybody is what's important to you in your life at the moment, I think I already know the answer but..?

Well it's of paramount importance, hence the name of the little piece, 'the paramount importance of friendship and love', the older I get, I used to be into a lot of material things like fast cars and the older I get I see how futile a lot of that stuff is; you get joy from material things from very short periods of time.

Hmm.

But that's nothing like deep loving relationships you know, if anyone of those people are in difficulty I'll be there for them and I know they'll be there for me, do you know. [interrupted]

Yeah.

To stay somewhere, they can stay in my house. I'll feed them if they need help, I'll be there and it's the same, it's a wonderful security for me. I'm quite [incomp] with being disabled or not being able to work a lot of the time but, hmm, but it doesn't really matter because I've got the support of these people, do you know what it's like [chuckles].

Hmm, yeah [pause] so now that, now that you've performed how are you feeling having done your piece in a way?

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I feel sort of tired, I was very stressed and kind of nervous, I know I don't look like a nervous guy; I'm 6 foot 2, skin head and tattooed. I'm fragile in some respects and especially travelling in the last few days, my daughter graduated in Manchester 4 days ago so I flew over there for a couple of days and then came down here, but with my illness it's take a lot out of me you know.

Hmm, yeah.

I just want to lie down and sleep now [chuckles], I'm in a fair bit of pain with Crohn's you know.

Yeah.

So I'm gonna go home fly back to Belfast and then one other guys who gave me blood is gonna, he lives in a beautiful place up in [incomp], on the other side of Ireland and I'm gonna stay and chill out at his house for a few days, you know, me and Paula, get a wee break [chuckles].

Yeah, hmm, sounds nice, have you, can you give me a little bit of information about you as a person, your social background and coming from Belfast, can you tell me a bit about your life?

Hmm, I kind of grew up in the trouble in Belfast, I grew up in a sort of working class loyalist household. There was a lot of grief in the place I ended up in all sorts of predicaments with the local paramilitary and stuff do you know. I stayed, I was kidnapped at one point, taken away you know, sort of by a murder squad but they managed not to murder me, [chuckles] which was nice.

How old were you when that happened?

16, do you know, it was a terrifying moment but that was kind of how it was in Belfast in the 70's, you know.

Yeah.

I was in Bell [???) a satellite town at that time, I didn't live in Belfast at that time but hmm getting in [interrupted]

What, who was it that kidnapped you?

I'd rather not say.

Yeah, ok, I know.

I'm still worried about them [chuckles]. Then I got into community work in my late 20s and I ended up running a youth centre and then I went to college and done community work and I ended up in the drugs. I specialised in addiction and I ended up a drugs charity for recovering addicts, for years and years until my illness got the better of me and had to [cherry picker beeping in the background] retire medically.

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Hmm.

And I've been sort of hmm exploring, I wasn't really a creative until maybe 10 years ago and then I started writing, because I was lying around the house and there was nothing else to do and I had a short film that was funded by Northern Ireland screen and it is doing very well around the world circuit and will be shown at LA short fest next week. It's been in most of the major festivals across the world and we are about to shoot our second funded short in 2 weeks' time and hoping that will do well. The idea in the next year is to write a feature film out there do you know.

Hmm and what's the name of the 2 shorts?

The one that is out on the circuit now is called 'Rub [???] and the preacher'.

Ruben and?

'Rip and the Preacher'.

Ok.

And the one I am about to shoot is called 'the dinner party [pause] and [interrupted].

Could you say a bit more about these?

Yeah, 'Rip and the Preacher' is 7 minutes film and it's about a street hood whose coming out of his dad's funeral and he's furious at the rhetoric that the minister has been given about what a lovely man he was and all the usual stuff, because he knows it's not the truth. His dad is a decent man but he wasn't all this stuff, so he is coming out there angry and he sort of a gun carrying street hood and as he runs the corner, still furious he runs into the preacher played by *Jeremy McSorley*, a very well-known actor and the street preacher start giving him fire and storm, 'do you want to burn in hell' and stuff and after arguing for a few minutes fiercely and violently he pulls a gun on him and forces the street preacher up an alleyway and to cut a long story short, he gets the preacher to play Russian roulette to back up what he said, about his ultimate faith in god and the preacher refuses to do it; 'that's insane' and the guy walks away laughing because he's just been proved right; it's just rubbish, he doesn't really believe it and the street preacher cannot stand that you know that he hasn't got faith himself so he calls him back, he plays Russian roulette with himself just to demonstrate his faith in god and he gets away with it [chuckles]

[The interviewer chuckles]

And it's doing really, really well at the world festival in circuit at the minute, so we are very proud of that and the actor called Megan Lennox, who will someday be a famous actor, is very good at doing what he does. And the next film is called the dinner party and it is about who were sexually abused by the same teacher 30 years in the past and it has just come to light. One had been to court and went public with it, you know, and the other one, they don't know each other but they made a dinner

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party and it transpires that this one had hidden his and doesn't want to go public. It's a disgrace that this one wants to go public and they get more and more antagonistic towards each other across the dinner party and it ends in a scene of extreme violence. And it's an exploration of the different ways sexual abuse can affect different individuals, do you know.

And what was your role with those films?

Writer for both films.

Congratulations.

Thank you.

[Chuckles] is this something you have been passionate about for a long time?

Hmm, no, no, I've never done anything really creative until 10 years when I was housebound somebody said 'why don't you write a book?' and I thought all right because there is nothing else to do and I wrote a how to stop smoking book because, hmm, I trained in addiction, you know, and I put something back. I gave it away on the internet; my idea was to give 200 copies away over the internet for a year I might give 200.000 copies away see what the feedback is like, I kind of run with it and gave away 50.000 downloads, do you know and I thought 'oh that's kind of good' and I started writing more stuff, I wrote a film script; a feature length film script, I went and bought some books on how to write a film script. I had no real interest at all, other than somebody saying that it read quite well, had I ever thought about writing film scripts. He was in the film industry and I thought I'll go write one, got some books and wrote one, put it out there and [incomp] but it got a remarkable response and I was offered 4 different options from different companies and I picked up a literary manager in Hollywood and stuff, but still in the draw somewhere waiting to break, you know.

Hmm.

And I moved from that to written short films and that's kind of where I am at now, but I've written lots of poetry and short stories and stuff do you know, I enjoy creating.

Hmm. Have you, hmm, have you got a particular, the subject matter there, hmm, about sexual abuse and about hmm quite violent work, is there hmm, is there a particular kind of motivation for the subject matter?

Probably because I've been immersed in violence and, from an very early age living in Northern Ireland it's hard to avoid, you know and I have quite a lot of experience with people who have been sexually abused because of the nature of my work with addiction, a lot of people who are chemically dependent have histories of sexual abuse.

Hmm.

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So I'm very familiar with the whole area.

Yeah.

Because everything I write has some sort of personal knowledge or experience of myself.

Yeah.

Because it's easier that way [chuckles].

Well hmm good luck with your film.

Thanks.

If I could just go back and ask a few questions about going on the plinth, hmm, with the, there are a few questions that we ask, one is who are you doing this for?

I'm doing it primarily for my friends and family, you know, and there's a wee bit of me who wants ideally, that people view it on the net or wherever it gets shown that consider friendship; what it means to them, you know, and whether they will or not I have not idea, but it's nice to think that seeds might be sewn.

Yeah.

And somebody might realise how important friends and family are to them do you know?

*Yeah off course, and what impact do you think the project will have, overall?
[pause] I know it's difficult to comment.*

Hmm, I like any project that is different or unusual or out there, pushing boundaries or experimental and this has all of these elements. The very idea that excited me, and I'm sure it's exciting in thousands people out there who view it, who want to be on the plinth themselves and maybe it makes them think about. You see all the press conferences talk about what is art, you know, but for me art doesn't really exist except in the minds of the beholder, do you know. If someone see something and they think it's hard, then it's art and if they see something that's not art then it isn't. It's quite that simple do you know, I don't know if art actually exists, I don't really care, do you know.

Yeah, ok and have you, can you, before you went on the plinth we asked whether you had any hopes, fears of expectations, can you remember that before you went on?

Well my hopes are that some seeds will be sewn and people will consider the nature and friendship and love and how important that is. And it's a very short life that we have, do you know, and hopefully I would love the idea if one person re-prioritise their stuff and shifted their focus towards friendship and love, do you know.

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Yeah.

Away from the material, hmm, my fear was because it's quite odd, it's quite extreme what I was doing and that scares me and I know it's going to push a lot of people's buttons. Do you know and my fears are that there'll be sort of big media articles 'there's a maniac on the plinth, do you know, but I can accept that if you put yourself on the line, some people are going to chop your head off and that's how it goes, I might just not read them because it would hurt me too much [chuckles].

You had a paddling pool didn't you?

Yeah.

On the plinth, can you just describe, hmm, just for the people that couldn't, that haven't got the visual sort of procedure, you inflated a pool and put the blood in the pool.

Yes, basically the paddling pool bears no significance in terms of art or, there's something that contains the blood but I didn't want to mess your plinth up.

Hmm.

And I had to find a very simple and usable way to contain it, and a child's paddling pool was the obvious answer. Something like an inflatable to stick up there and contain most of the blood and sit in it so that I'm not trampling blood foot prints all over the place, do you know.

Yeah and what did you wear and did it have any significance?

Hmm, the significance was just white, I wore a white shorts and white sort of sleeveless t-shirt and simply white to highlight the blood. I thought it would good background for blood, do you know, and I wanted to expose flesh as much as possible, but I would be overly immodest just so the blood would be on my flesh because of the level of intimacy that I would create.

Hmm, hmm.

You know, the vast majority of fake blood I got from a theatrical supplier, do you know, and I added just a few drops of blood from my friends and family.

Hmm, can I ask you to comment more about growing up in Ireland during the troubles, just to give a kind of a bit of context from your personal experience, it's a lot of history there that's it's kind of really, hmm, to learn about that through an individual experience is quite hmm, I just wonder if you would like to comment on ...?

Sure, sure [cherry picker bleeping in the background] I mean my upbringing would not have been that unusual compared to the person who kidnapped me [chuckles] it happened to some of my friends as well you know, our estate is a council housing

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estate and it was controlled by paramilitaries, do you know, which meant when things got rough. They put blocks up and no one was allowed in that place, security forces or anyone, you know, there were a lot of gangsters with guns about and stuff, and they ruled the roost and they were like, they were responsible to maintain the law and order to some degree within that estate, so antisocial behaviour would be punished by them as well as the police. People would be taken away and beaten and some people would be shot in the leg and some people would be murdered, depending on the severity of their crimes according to the paramilitaries, you know. So there's, if you kind of grew up it seems to be the norm, it's only when you get away from it in seize fire you realise 'oh my god that was such a weird unusual environment, you spent 20 years growing up in it, it just seems the norm.

Yeah.

Hmm.

As a kind of, can you remember growing up with your parents and how they sort of protected you from that or helped you experience it in a way?

Probably the most, it's probably a Protestant Catholic thing in Northern Ireland. The most important lessons my parents taught me was that Catholics and Protestants are exactly equal, there is no difference and should be treated as such and that was a lesson I took to heart from a very young age, even though I was, I knew very, very few Catholics because there were very few in our estate because they are segregated in little estates of their own, do you know but, from a very early age I was very aware how much hatred there was between the two communities and about how much violence, I never liked that. I never took a side and thought you know, this is my side and I don't like them you know, my parents told me [incomp] at all we are all equal and should be treated as such.

Yeah, hmm, do you still live in the same town as you grew up in?

No I grew up in Banger which is South of Belfast and I went to university in Belfast in 1984 and I am still there today.

And how is it to live there now?

It's, they call it the seize fire but there's still lots of punishment beatings and shootings in the legs, there isn't the bombs, there isn't the bullet flying. Over the years in Belfast I was caught up in 3 bombs blasted across rooms and things, you know, which is a bit terrifying you know, I was in the office one day I was probably the most frightened when it was over. I ran a social club and it closed between 5 and 7 but I would stay on because it would open at 7 again; I went up to KFC to get a bite to eat and had to walk down past a police station and there was a concrete safety [???] box at the time, as I was walking by, I'd eaten the chicken, this car came skidding up about 400 metres down the road, I'm watching it thinking what is going on here, this guy jumped out with a should rocket launcher and I'm standing beside the police box [???] and he fires it, just as it felt the muzzle of the rocket launcher I thought shit, hmm, by the grace of god it exploded prematurely, 10 or 20 metres of

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the rocket launcher it exploded and it took out all the windows of the houses and in our, the building I was working in and stuff, and I was glad by the grace of god it exploded before, I was standing 10 feet from the target he was aiming with a policeman, do you know, and that was quite an experience. And another time in the same office, I was on the phone with a friend and somebody came out with a rocket launcher, because we were near a police station and there was a car parked behind houses and these guys had drawn up with a car with a shoulder rocket launcher and fired it supposedly between the two houses at the police station at the end of our street. But they had a car in the car park so I'm on the phone with my friend and I hear this massive explosion and a pile of smoke up and I say 'look there's a bomb just gone off outside or something I've got to go' and she's like 'you're all right? Yes fine', so I went out and walked over to the car park and the car park attendant was there and he was shaken up he was in the car park boxes and the car was blazing and the police and the army were flying out all over the place, but it has been there was a trap deliberately hit the car to attract security forces and unknown to me or anyone else. There was a 250 pound car bomb in the car as well in the car park, so I'm talking to the car park attendant 'oh it's a disgrace bla bla, bla' and I walked back to my office, I better phone my friend again and say 'look I'm ok it was a rocket attack', which we thought it was at the time and when I'm off the phone the 250 pound bomb went off and it blew all my windows open and bits of fixtures and blew me off the seat onto the ground and an astray landed on top of me. And I'm lying on the floor and my ears are ringing and my immediate thoughts are the car park attendant is right beside that, you know, he's in his little box do you know, and I say I've got to go and another bomb went off and it was worse this time and there was police and army everywhere, I'm not sure of the casualty rate but there were a few policemen. The idea had been to lure them into that car park you know.

Hmm.

And I think there was a few, not many incidents but a few policemen were seriously injured and the car park attendant escaped unscathed, do you know, but that's kind of. Most people growing up in Northern Ireland have experienced at least little bits of that sort of stuff, you know [cherry picker bleeping in the background].

And do you feel the need to communicate this with your films, your experiences [interrupted].

No I don't, stuff I don't talk about much, it has no real significance, its stuff in the past that I don't like. There's a sort of real dirtiness and stuff that just gets left in the past you know, I'm much happier now there's a seize fire, it's a bit better, you know.

Thank you so much.

Thank you.

I'm really glad that you've had your turn, that you managed to communicate your message of love.

[Chuckles] Thank you very much.



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Thank you.

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