

One & Other Project

Okay my name is Tim Jones and I'm conducting this interview ...

Hello, nice to meet you.

Pleased to meet you too, on behalf of the Wellcome Trust and the One & Other project in Trafalgar square. It's the 13th of August 2009 and the time is 2.20 in the morning. Can you tell us what your name is, how old you are and where you come from please?

Right, my name is Andrew Joe Holland. I come from Rossendale, Lancashire and what was the other question sorry?

How old are you?

How old, oh yes, well I feel about eighteen but really I'm fifty-two, so that's it.

Ok and how was it you found out about the One & Other project in the first place?

I'm not quite ... I don't really quite remember I think it was on the website, I think I was just looking up Antony Gormley and I found it quite fascinating and I signed up straight away and I wanted ... and eventually it came through and they asked me to participate which I agreed. It took me about three minutes and I agreed so if I'd thought about it a bit longer I might not have agreed but I'm glad I'm here and it's made me think why I'm an artist. And what I like about Antony Gormley's work and I think I realise now the bit I like about Antony Gormley is it's a very democratic sort of art work. It includes as many people as it can and that's one of my aims, it's to try and include as many people in my art work as I can, so that's why I do teaching, teach art and try to persuade people that they are able to do art and even though they say they are not artists I try to give them exercises that enable them to produce stunning pieces of work.

Can you tell us more about your, you know, your art form. What it is you are doing?

My art form, I'm a fine art graduate and I did that a long time ago about 1978 in Newcastle polytechnic. Ever since then I've had non-art jobs but I've had a job in a studio, commercial art, and I did that for thirteen years painting a lot of pub signs, designing and painting pub signs and I painted lots in London and in Greenwich. I've seen some today that are still going and in Manchester as well. In the north west and in Wales and all over the country and then in 2000 I became disabled due to a thing called dystonia which is something that gives you ... it's a movement disorder, it closed my eyes shut so I became actually blind, I was registered as blind at the end of 2000 but ever since then I've become better and I've registered from being a registered blind to de-registered. I can drive and everything, I still have trouble with one eye and I still have this dystonia but I'm really pleased that I'm a lot better and it has redirected my career. I'm a sort of self employed artist and I do a job as a teaching assistant just to keep the money on a regular basis. So basically that's my life and I like painting in oil paints and I've been doing these watercolours strangely at night so when this 3 a.m. slot came up I was quite excited about that because everybody said, "Oh no, it's no good" but actually it's the best time for me because I

One & Other Project

find this time of the day the more peaceful, you can contemplate things and people are sleep and you can be quite, quite, you can look around and see some beautiful reflections. I'm hoping to take some photographs once I'm on the plinth and work from those either oil paintings or water colours so that's me really.

And you mentioned the promotion of inclusivity.

Inclusivity, yes.

Can you mention why that's important to you?

Okay, I don't like people saying I'm an artist, you know, I've been born an artist, I like the fact that you can include lots of people, I'm not a purist, I don't ... I'm not, I like people showing their work and I genuinely think it's very good, I don't just say it's good. I like seeing people doing painting and drawing as long as they are engaged in the process. I'm quite pleased with that, I enjoy doing other people's work and am genuinely enthusiastic about their work and ways of getting them out of this horrible idea that they can't do drawing. I tricked them into doing really good drawings by using viewing screens and things like this, they are just grids and if you put a grid on something and break it down into small pieces and that makes it a lot easier for you and it makes it a lot easier for me too and they are able to create a lovely drawing which they didn't think they could do and I work with people with mental health problems I worked with old age pensioners, all sorts of people and I find that they respond to this sort of encouragement, that's it.

Okay, thank you, can you tell us more about your background, how you found art in the first place and then what is significant in your work?

I found some drawings I've done in a Dutch Master's book when I was about three so I was doodling in these Dutch Master's books when I was three and I have always drawn and painted. And when I was eleven, my great uncle Leonard Pilton, he sent me a [first aid] cover of a stamp he designed and he said it was specifically for me and ever since then I wanted to be an artist, after that I wanted to be an artist like him and my cousin Rosemary was an artist and I wanted to be just like her. So it was these role models, these people who told me that they worked in the arts, they encouraged me, they gave me some encouragement to be an artist after this point and Leonard Pilton, he painted a watercolour which he gave to my mum and dad on the date of their wedding as a wedding present and it's an absolutely fantastic watercolour and I always wanted to paint as good as that and as well as that and so I look at this as my talisman and I find this painting a real source of inspiration and so that's really why I wanted to become an artist.

And why, how did you find this kind of painting or studio commercial, how did you find the commercial art?

I found it very difficult because I realised I didn't know how to paint even though I'd done so many years training. I didn't really know technique-wise how to do it and it was a revelation, it took me quite a few months to kind of tune into the way they painted, the way they should be painting and I had to do the same picture again on

One & Other Project

the other side, you see, so it was quite a baptism of fire really and it was quite thrilling to set myself this problem, this project, and after a few years I became more confident so I feel like I've been given the chance to learn techniques, quick techniques to paint and speed up pictures and I found it very, very useful and one example I was given the job of doing four portraits in a week which were small portraits to give to important people, to give as a present, their retirement of fifty years in the job or something like that. This was impossible because I was doing one a week and I decided to look up this book and I found this book on drawing from the right side of the brain by Betty Edwards and she suggested that you turn your picture upside down, I did that, I turned these portraits upside down and I did all four in a week with time to spare and the boss at the time thought they were the best portraits that I'd ever done so if you ever get stuck, turn your picture upside down because that's the secret, you know, the secret, and I found it very useful and after that I did everything upside down, it's much better, it gives a much better result because it makes everything very abstract.

Great thank you. Could you tell us about how you felt when you developed this sight condition?

Well it was a bit devastating because I had to give up this job that I liked, you know, painting every day and getting a regular salary and it was quite a shock really because my eyes would clamp shut. I tried painting and carrying on work but I was painting literally with my eyes shut and it was impossible and I went through a stage of injections [?] of toxins in my eyes and, oh the side effects of that were horrible, they gave me double vision and all sorts of things but it led on to a course I did at Liverpool performing arts for disabled people and it was a workshop leading course and I really and thoroughly enjoyed that it was a two year part time course so I finally got my certificate off Sir Paul McCartney himself. He shook my hand and I was absolutely star struck and it was absolutely brilliant, the things I learnt as well. I put that back into my teaching and the workshop ... I really enjoyed doing the workshops using the techniques that they showed me and it's not just ... the process involves getting to contribute. If everybody is contributing then that, I feel, is a successful workshop.

And what things would you say are most important to you at the moment in your life?

Well my wife is the most important thing to me, she is waiting outside in the rain and my two sons, one is watching in Canada at 7 o'clock at night and the other son is here with his girlfriend Alex and they are the most important things in my life at the moment and I just want to do the best for them really. So I just want to ... so they are proud of me and I do the best for them because they deserve it and I try to do things, I try to help them if I can. So apart from that I don't really want to be famous, I just want to do better paintings, really good paintings, and I know when I've done a good painting and I just want to keep learning things about art and that's it really and that's it.

And what hopes and fears do you have for the future?

One & Other Project

Hopes and fears ... I think health is a bit of a problem because I've had the shock with my eyes, what's around the corner, but I keep trying to keep myself fit. I don't smoke; I don't drink very much so hopefully I try to keep myself going. I cycle to work every day and I've not missed this last year, I feel this keeps me going it keeps my body a bit fitter than it would be if I drove a car to work and fears ... I don't think, I don't think I've got any fears really except, except that really.

Thank you and who would you say you are going on the plinth for?

I am going on the plinth for my cousin's son Charlie. He's deaf and it just shows a real pluckiness, when he was born he was very, very ill and we go to church and we pray for him and he pulled through and now he's a lovely little lad but he's deaf and I rang earlier his mum up and Mike, his dad, and I said, "I'm going on the plinth. I wouldn't mind raising some money for Charlie" and they suggested this charity east [?] Deaf Society who've helped them come to terms with Charlie's deafness and he's about to start going to school this September and he's such a lovely little lad and so that's why I'm doing it, I'm doing it for him really.

And what is it you will be doing on the plinth?

I'm going to be doing a drawing through one of these viewing screens that enable any non-artists to break down things into small sections and hopefully it will help me pick up work quickly and if it stops raining, hopefully it will stop raining, because if it's going to crinkle ... I'm just hoping that this, I've been using it recently, well, for quite a long time actually, this technique and I'm hopefully going to use it tonight on the ... this morning on the plinth so it will be looking through a window and it goes back to you know the history of painting, a painting that I like particularly is called *A window to the world* it's called, and my viewing screen will do that. Is that ok?

Fine, thank you very much, and how are you feeling just before you go, how has the emotional journey been since you found out and just before going up?

I feel a bit nervous and wanting to run away but it's like ... it's similar to when I used to go and up and look at people diving off a diving board, oh I'd like to do that and then you go on to the diving board and you think, "Oh dear" but you are up there and you can't really go down and it's a bit like that. I can't back down so I'm going to do it and I'm going to give it my best shot and if I make a mess of it well that's it, I can't change that, I'll give it my best shot and I hope the weather dries up so that my paper doesn't get wrecked.

So what would you say, as your closing thoughts? And any importance or significance of being part of the One & Other project in Trafalgar Square?

Well, I'm really impressed with Antony Gormley's work I've been to Crosby Beach quite a few times and I'm actually quite stunned by the way that anybody can access his work and I like the Angel of the North and I've seen quite a number of his pieces which have been quite emotional for me because he does include lots of people. This project has generated, you know, so much interest and it has generated employment for yourself and the other people it's brought out quite ... up a notch or two, quite a

One & Other Project

few notches and people are talking about art. What is art? What is this performance art? Is it ... you know, who is Antony Gormley? What does he do? Why does it do it? What's the point of art? And it brings up all these questions that are all chestnuts but they are very important to heighten the profile of art in this, you know, the society we live in. I just love art, I think it's a fantastic thing to do it, you can do it from any angle or position and you can be a full professional, you can be an amateur and still get a lot out of it. I'm just really impressed that this project has got so much publicity and I'm very impressed with the plinthers that I've seen, especially my cousin who was on last week, just a coincidence, he was blowing a sousaphone and lighting up a sun. Every time he blew the sousaphone he blew up this sun and it was extraordinary to see somebody, you know, up there on the plinth and he didn't know I was coming on this week, you know, it was quite a coincidence but I think some of them are very serious and some of them are very light hearted and it is a reflection. It is a reflection of some parts of our society. I don't know how true it is but it is a reflection, it's not a complete reflection but I don't think that Antony Gormley would be ... it is reflecting something about the people who want to go on the plinth.

Now what impact would you like to have, what impact, what effect?

What effect? I think it opens up art to a lot more people and people feel they can have access and it removes this idea of elitism and it makes it more accessible to everyone who wants to be interested in art, who wants to be involved in art and I think anything that does that is a great thing plus it's employing people in this day and age of recession, it's helping to employ a lot of people. I like the security guards, the production people that manage it, the JCV drivers and everybody who works in this building, it has a ripple effect and I think it's a great thing, a good thing.

Great, thank you very much.

Right, thank you.