

One & Other Project

My name is Verusca Calabria and I'm here today on the 15th of July, 2010 to interview Carole Miles on behalf of the Wellcome Trust as part of the One & Other Oral History Collection and a website that we'll be creating. So I'm interviewing Carole using Skype to Skype and we are able to see each other at the moment which is great. So Carole, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed today.

It's my pleasure.

Fabulous. So just to bring you back to the time on which you went on the plinth. As you know, you were interviewed before you went up, but we don't know what it was like for you once you were up there and once you came down. So tell me, how did it feel to be on top of the plinth?

It was really exciting going up in the cherry picker and I only realised how high up we were when I saw the video feedback and the photographs that people had taken. I think if I'd known how high it was, I would have felt more nervous, but I just kind of felt excited and relieved that everything that I wanted to take up, it was possible to take up, that it wasn't raining and there wasn't a high wind and that some lovely people had come to support me, so that was really good, and it just felt like something incredibly special.

So you had this fantastic piece of artwork with these three sails. You mentioned your father helped you build the structure to carry them up there.

Yes.

How did you come up with the idea?

I suppose it's because there had been a naval connection, both Merchant Navy and Royal Navy connection in the family. And it had been something that I had been thinking about anyway and you're in Trafalgar Square, it's commemorating a naval battle, but also it seemed like a good opportunity to take a journey out into history and memory and recollection and a lot of things, I don't know. So it was kind of like a symbolic joining of different parts of my history.

You mentioned about Who Do You Think You Are? as a programme [?] despite your interest in going back and finding out who you are, or you were, up to your ancestors.

Yes.

So how did you find that process of going back and researching your family history?

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Very engrossing. I mean you can eat hours and hours of time chasing up things and you can get sent down, sort of sidetracks and blind alleys and come up with people that you're not related to at all. But again I think that the Internet has made it so much easier because you can make contact with people, they can send you information, in a way that doesn't cost them anything, you know, I mean even posting a letter, it's an effort to go out of the house and put it in the post but you can attach documents, you can talk to people, you can chat with them, so that's been very good. But I myself haven't managed to get any further than eighteen hundred. So I would like to be able to do that, but because initially it was my father's side of my family that I tended to look at more because they're in this country, the places that they came from were quite accessible and also my great-aunt, who's now dead, she just missed being a hundred, she sort of started off that interest and she gave an album of photographs so I was quite curious because none of these people have actually got names on the back. I didn't really know who they were. Some people could tell me who they were. I started trying to follow them and also being quite interested in what the women's lives might have been like because just within the space of two hundred years, for women everything has changed so dramatically.

Did you find anything in particular that resonates with you about your family history?

I suppose that in every generation there seemed to be women who are quite determined characters, you know, they're not running around being famous, but they seem to work very hard, do something with whatever it is that they have available to them. I mean, I was particularly interested in a series of unmarried aunts and sisters and how they came to, sort of, be in Cheltenham, going from Bighbury, Arlington, which was very small villages in the Cotswold's and at that time the Cotswold's were still an agricultural community, you know that people in our family were in domestic service, were farmers, were carpenters, were wheelwrights, blacksmiths, those kinds of things, and you sort of think, well actually, how do you end up owning a house in Cheltenham and the other thing which really did spark my interest was through ancestry, the ancestry website. A lady contacted me and said I think I have your family bible and I probably mentioned this in the tape before but I thought well that's very strange. She said, "Would you like a copy?" I said, "Yes please." And then, in speaking to her, she said, "Well you know I'd be more than happy to send it to you" and I said, "Well how much do you want?" She said, "Three pounds", which seemed to be a bargain. I sent a ten because I thought that was fair but was very, was very curious and it's just a very, very plain book. I put it in a safe place, I can't see it at the moment, it's usually here but the book itself is very, very plain, nothing ornate, but on the back, there was the first set of Miles names that I had come across, and then

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on the front, there was another list of names which had been written by a lady called, her maiden name was Margetson, her Christian name was Emma. And she had written all the book, the dates of birth and deaths of her children and she had ten or eleven children. She had two sets of twins, who only I think the longest surviving twin was just a couple of months and the others died very soon after being born, which seemed to be a very hard thing to bear, you know, to have two children and then to go very quickly. And then she had another, a baby who died in infancy and a child who was called Emma Florence who died when she was twelve, and the last entry, she sort of says, "After a brief illness, she was the sunshine of our home." And that seemed to me like a voice coming through time saying "I want you to remember me." See I get all choked up when I think about it and the whole thing of finding the bible, finding out the fact that the flyleaf was actually detached from the book, it could so easily have not been in there and somebody else said it's very rare to find times of death so you know there may be ... in those days people were having large families and quite often lost children, you know, because the diet was poor, they were ... they had very busy lives. I did a little bit of research about infant mortality and at that time, many children were dying sort of within days of birth. And through that, they did a lot to look at hygiene and sterilisation of, what was that kind of thing, and also in agricultural communities, I think that, you know, there were various elements of hygiene that had to be looked at for the children. So again, you know, what I liked about the investigation was it's not just persona because how can you know people who were decades on from you?

But it's also looking at social history and how things connect, and as a child, I loved history. It was one of my favourite subjects and the history teacher that we had was very good at sort of putting you in a time frame but also asking you to visualise it in various ways. He'd sort of say, "Well I want you to write the front page of the newspaper, I want you to do the illustrations, to conjure up this period of time and what you know from a historical perspective" so it always seemed to be a living thing. And I was one of those children who we were taken to visit quite a lot of um you know England is full of stately homes, national trust properties, that kind of thing, and when I went in there, I didn't think, oh I am peasant stock, this doesn't belong to me, I though, I always felt, well the history belongs to me, as much as it belongs to anyone else. The archetypes don't belong to me, but you know, we all are part of what was made and what exists and as an artists feeling connected to artefacts that are there. So sort of feeling I have as much right to be here as anyone else, so maybe that just makes me a bit revolutionary maybe. I'm sure somebody will want to put me in my place but, you know, I think it's good because I think it's easy to see history as dusty and dry and irrelevant, but I think that you do see that there are cycles that repeat themselves and that times are always seen as both good and bad, you know and that people's fortunes can change within a generation.

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How long have you been working on your family history research?

I think probably it's been about three years, but not you know, not in an intense way, because sometimes, as I say, it does eat up your time and you've got to go and do other things and you can get very sort of old and cricky sitting in front of the computer for hours on end. But one of the things that that we have done, because my partner, he comes from the potteries, so you know when we've been to visit his family, we sort of, taken little trips around areas, seeing if we can see any of the places and the thing that is very striking about his family is that they are really part of what happened during the industrial revolution, that they came from rural areas, that they ended up, Hanley, Burnsdon, Tunstil, Stoke-on-Trent and that factories, you know, the bottle kilns, the pottery factories, grew up and the houses were built around the potteries to make it easy for people to get there and you would have kind of streets of families living in one place and then they'd move to other families when ... to other streets when the families increased. But now most of that's gone. It's been and gone in a hundred years, you know, those streets, those kilns, don't exist anymore. You know, you might find a street name. And the other thing that I find quite poignant and sad is that Stoke-on-Trent itself, the whole potteries area has really suffered, you know, it's lost its industry and a lot of the people who were the kind of movers and shakers, the people with the ideas, have gone. But the people who became the workforce, that supported those ideas, they're there, but what they did has gone. Everything leaves, you know, they have been going through a process of regeneration, but we're in a recession now and things have kind of ground to a halt, so they're at a pause. What they will do in the future hasn't become apparent. What they did in the past, has gone, so it's almost like they're holding their breath, and it's quite hard to kind of get out of that, I mean we can see it from my partner's children, two of the three of them have almost been unemployed since they left school, and that's just them, you know, but you sort of think what must it be like for the older generations who are used to getting out. And the whole of social life was connected to work, you know, it's not just about the money, it's about the wider world it puts you in touch with, the confidence that it gives you. And again he's been trying to track down somebody who seems quite curious, and that's sort of led us to meeting all sorts of interesting people and going and seeing the place that she lived in and had her baby in, that was very interesting.

But to go back to, you know, my side of the family again, the Cotswold's were quite accessible and also my great-aunt left papers with her niece who allowed me to see them and it was an opportunity to go and see her and find out a bit about her and also, you know, my grand-father had four brothers and strangely enough, one of his brothers, Lime, they are also local and totally accidentally, I met one of my second cousins and through the Invisible

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Threads project, got to know one of her sisters and again you manage to find out the paths that people's lives take them through and how they get to be. And I suppose the other thing that I was curious about was, was there anyone that was like me, was there anyone who was creative, you know? Or, or is it all, sorry, sort of flicked [?], or is it all working in the ways that they've been working?

I was also quite interested in my grandfather and grandmother's story. One of the first pieces of work that I've made, because now I kind of work using photographs, found objects, texts and digital imagery and try and combine them in a way that doesn't look like graphic design, that is still a piece of art, and I'm still sort of experimenting with the best ways about outputting what I make, but I like the fact that it can exist in the computer and doesn't take up loads of space in the world. That I can take it out and make it in all sorts of different sizes, so what I, what I had with them was that I think they had quite a kind of turbulent relationship, you know. My grandfather met her when he was engaged to somebody else and he was much older than she was and they came, you know, she came from London, he came from the countryside. I have no idea what it must have been, must have been like for them, but I felt that it probably was fairly tumultuous, you know, and there were times when they didn't get on so well and there were times when my grandmother wasn't so well so, you know, that's all other sorts of stories. But in this piece I have a photograph of them from when they were married and I've got a little rookery [?] which is a photograph from where some of my grandfather's forbearers came from and a piece of carving because he was a carpenter and the word 'voluptuous' but it's upside down because, you know, I think this business of voluptuousness was probably what turned their life upside down and that's just me and my interpretation and maybe I've got no business to be saying that, you know, but I think artists are generally cheeky people and they do tend to take what they need from wherever they happen to be. So, you know, that kind of was one of the starting points. Do you want me to carry on about talking about that?

Yes, I mean I can ask you a question as well which maybe goes into the same direction. I suppose I'm interested in how this family history research ... both your own family and that of your partner, the ways it's influencing your artwork over time. You mentioned some of your pieces, if you can tell me more about the way in which you're operating, for example, at the moment what you might be working on?

Well at the moment, the sort of family history side is just taking a breather. I collaborate with another artist, and we spent three years making artwork interventions, connecting with the community, looking at a building, a church building which was built in 1967, which might seem like a bit of a dry thing, but it was down the road from where our studios were and we were invited to go

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and have a look at it and the day that we went, I mean North Hampshire is quite a flat county, but it does have spectacularly wide blue skies on a good day and you can see why there were a lot of airbases here during the Second World War, because it was perfect, perfect for landing and taking off. But we got there and we thought, “Ooh there’s something very special about the energy of this building” and the fact that the inside was very different to the outside. The inside kind of was grey and pointy, the outside, the inside, has quite an energetic space and where our studios has that same kind of things are possible space, as are things are impossible, I am not describing it very well. So anyway, we got together and we did this. So that’s finished, but we want to work together again and we were quite interested in the fact that where our studios are, it’s Corby, it’s been regenerated, they’ve really opened the railway station and they’ve built new railway station. And we thought “Ooh what about looking at the line and seeing where it goes and it’s another way of connecting communities and this idea of the environment you’re in and how it shapes you, the things that may be possible, the things that seem impossible, all of the things you don’t yet know, so we chose twelve names on the line of places that we’ve never been to, and not the biggest places either. Places that are probably quite, quite small, but we like the sound of and we’re in the process of applying for grants to do the work that we want to do. We want to go and visit each place. We want to stage an intervention on each station platform, we want to go and explore each place. Bring our findings back to the studio, make things, take them back to the station platform, share those things with the community, but then also use it as a way of perhaps raising our own profile and getting it out to a wider world. And we’re seeing this again as possibly another three-year thing. But to start off, we’ve started a blog, called ‘Undiscovered Networks’ and every week we post something which may be connected to map-making, travel, connections, places we’ve visited, journeys we’ve taken, work that we currently happen to be doing and we’re finding that’s a very exciting way of communicating, you know. We quite like the fact of not being in the same place but being able to respond very immediately to the ideas that we’re having. When we have to kind of sit on our hands because we can’t actually start making work, for what we want to be funded for until we have the funding, so you know we’re sort of going like this, but we can talk and we can have ideas and that’s what we’ve been doing, so far.

So that’s one strand, but to go back to, you know, what I make, the kind of digital imagery and what I made for the plinth. Again, a month is not a very long time to kind of get your ideas together and the whole thing was a total shock, plus the fact that you’re having to fund it yourself, so you’ve got to make it something that you think you’ll be able to do. But I thought, right well I’ll think about the people and I will think about my mother’s side of the family, because that’s really where lots of the travelling and the naval connections are. Her grandfather came, we think, from the Birmingham area. I can’t find

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him at all in this country, but, you know, he was um a boxer in the Navy, he was a fighting [?] champion but, you know, how he met my great-grandmother Carrie Holland I have no idea, but she was definitely one of those larger than life women. And my mom also is a great storyteller, you know, she would always sort of sit us down at mealtimes and she would share her past, what she did as a girl. We would kind of back her, "What did you do as a child mummy?" You know, that kind of thing, and she was always happy to talk, but she did it in such a positive way and a way which puts you in a place, do you know what I mean? I've never been to South Africa, but through her voice and her stories, you are able to kind of connect with your imagined notion of that place. So I thought, "Well actually Carrie should be a starting point, and so the first sail was about her and I think that there are a fair few kind of mysteries with her because she married one person but she also had a family with another person, and I don't think she married, or she was married to him. In South Africa there are two, she bought two plots. One was in the Catholic cemetery; one was in the Protestant cemetery. One, her husband and her eldest son are buried together and I think where she's buried, she's buried with what we would consider her second husband who was the father of my grandfather's half-brother, who was in the merchant navy. It all gets very, very complicated; we could be going all over the place. So I thought, "Well the first sail should be about her and those sorts of things," so in it I've put a mariner's compass because in a way you always kind of want to know what direction you're travelling in and where you happen to be in the world. There's a photograph of her, well there's an image of her, which I've manipulated, which is her and a man, who ... I don't think he's the man that she married but I think might be the man that she had her second relationship with, but it's at an earlier time so again that has a mystery for me. And she's also at her thinnest, she's very, she's sitting in a very regal fashion, you know, and he's standing behind her and he has this beautiful watch chain on and you just sort of think I wonder what the occasion was, I wonder who they are, I wonder what they're doing?

Then there were also, in another family album, there were pictures of a sailing ship and a crew, so I thought well I will use them, I don't know who they are, I don't know how they connect, but the fact that they're there, there must be an importance to it. And then there's an image of her later on in her life and she's sitting with her dog Jim and there's another one and she's with her niece, her husband, who was in the Royal Navy and two other sailors, and there's an element of formality, informality about that image. And then I've got images from, there's a dictionary that someone gave me that I like to use, it's kind of like a college children's dictionary, but it has little illustrations in, in some places and so I like to take the dictionary definition and then I like to play with it and overlay it and bury it and tie it upside down and make lots and lots of layers. So for me there's lots going on, but also it's a lot about how we remember things. We remember things in fragments, we don't always

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remember them in a logical sequence, well I don't anyway. So it's putting it together and also I like to use extremes of colours, I like to push it to as far as the computer will take me. And sort of in my own practice, I've sort of been thinking, how can I make work that makes me feel like my hands have had something to do with it, because it's quite a, you know, working on a computer is quite a virtual thing. You haven't actually painted anything, you're not really sure that you've actually made anything, so looking at different ways about putting it so, I've used transfers and I've sort of overlaid the digital image on a mono-printed image, and then I've stitched over it. But for the sails, I've just took them as they were and found somewhere that could output it onto silk for me and I was really, you know, I was really delighted because it wasn't too expensive and the colours were staggering. You know I thought, "Wow this is just really exciting." And also it worked as a sail and I thought it would willow, so that was sail one.

Sail two was about my mother's family coming back from South Africa to England and, you know, having been through that process of leaving the country and leaving your family and then going back to them, that kind of tug that it has on you, it's exciting to travel but also you know you're being sent out into the unknown, it's a big thing, you don't, it's very, the place you've come from is very different to the place you're going to, what would it be like, will you be accepted, you know and financially it was very different for them, the, you know the place that they [?] in the world that they came to was very different. But they're optimistic people and they sort of made that journey and you know I think it was a good thing and again sort of moving at times of change. And some of the things that I could talk about, I don't really want to talk about because they're not my story, they're my mum's story, you know that's, and she did talk about this in a local, rural history project. But so that was again they came in parts. Mum came first, to see what it was like. Then her brothers and sisters, then her mother came and her father came later because he got to wind up the, you know, there was a fishing business that he ran, he got brothers and sis ... well brothers, and also there was the work that he did in the power station. So he worked very, very hard and he was an incredible character too, you know. He was a good storyteller and both he and my mum sort of have, we could have, we could say have seen people who weren't there but sort of have seem to have sort of seen, let's call them ghosts, I don't know that I really, you know, but I believe that they believe that they saw what they saw so that all becomes part of the stories that they tell. Then yes, he came back so in sail two I used a scan of a card that my mum had sent to her father before he left, you know. It was a bon voyage card. There are also some photographs of her, her mum and brothers and sisters just before they set sail so again. It's a course, but also there is an image of her uncle Victor who went on the Discovery II, which seemed to be sailing around Antarctica and the Falklands and charting the number of blue whales that there were in the ocean. Again, I've managed to find out a little bit more

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about the Discovery II, but not very much, so that's something that I would like to find out a little bit more about and sort of from an invisible threads connection, you know the fact that he went to the Falkland Islands and my partner, Andrew, had been in the RAF and during his time, he was an airplane fitter, he fixed chin hooks, and was stationed in the Falklands, not during the conflict, but you know, or was it during the conflict? I don't think that he saw sort of any of the battle, but the fact that he was there, that again strange coincidence or link that you know nothing about and you find out later. And I like those things, you know. I'm not sure that they mean anything, but I quite like that they are there and, in a way, it kind of relates to the sort of work that I'm making, that you can put these little bits of buried treasure and you can bury them again. They mean something to you, but to young [?] might not mean anything, might not even see it. It's there for them to find if they want to, but they don't have to. It doesn't affect the nature of the image.

And the third image was the most personal to me, because when I was fairly young, there was a thing called ... you could have a ten pound passage to Australia and my dad had wanted to travel, he'd been conscripted but found that he couldn't actually go into the army or any of the services because he had a heart murmur so my mum's dream of future travelling didn't happen. They were here so she thought well yes, you know, I think that's a good idea, so we uprooted ourselves and went to Australia in the sixties, the late sixties and, you know, I remember very much waking up in Australia and listening to the radio station, which wasn't Radio One, which was very different, which was full of adverts, and I thought "Ooh we're in a very different place here now," and the climate was very different. And I have to say I was horribly homesick the whole time I was there, but I'm incredibly glad that we went. So that was about our sailing out and putting part of the map of Western Australia in and pieces, you know, photographs, manipulated photographs of us and other parts of that journey. The other thing is that now, it's very strange, we've just recently had a family wedding and my aunt who had come out from England to live with us, she had her children there, her son has been living over in England for a fair few years now and he's recently got engaged to somebody from Holland and my other cousin, his, she has gone to live with her family in Australia, but she came back for the wedding of her brother who is married, who has just married somebody from Bulgaria, so that whole thing of our family connecting with people in different places, you know, being quite English in some respects but also part of a wider world, I think it is very liberating and exciting and interesting, you know, and the fact that you've got different languages coming in and different points of the globe that you connect to in an invisible kind of way.

Ok then, now just to bring you back again to your life as a visual artist, if you could tell me how you became an artist basically and then I'll move on, ask you more about your experience on the plinth.

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Ok, how did I become a visual artist? Well I suppose the first sort of, the first thing that I ever did, not very notable but when I was four, I made a painting of my aunt, one of those typical children's paintings with great big sunflower hands and that went into an exhibition of children's artwork. So on that very, very slender basis, I thought I would become an artist. I had no idea how you might do this. There was nobody else in my family that has done this, and always as I say, you know, that three things kind of link what I was as a child to what I am now and that is love of history, love of art and love of literature, you know, stories. So it's words, pictures and a connection with the past, but also placing it in the present and I suppose really, you know, I don't know that I was a particularly rebellious teenager. I tended to hang around with, you know, a group of girls who were much more popular with the boys, who were much better looking and that gives you a certain kind of confidence and where I got my confidence from was who I was academically and what I could do with a pencil or a paintbrush, you know. And that also sort of leads you back into your bedroom, so you spend a lot of time either reading or drawing and painting and making, making images and moving in your head you know, creating other worlds for you, so you know what was going on in the outside world was quite different to what was going on in Carole's bedroom [and Carole's mind. And when it, you know when it came time to decide about a career, you know it was at a time when there wasn't really very much careers advice and art really wasn't seen as a viable profession though, saying well you could be a teacher, or possibly you could go into advertising but my uncle was in the advertising. Didn't think that I was quite pushy and cutthroat enough for that, so I decided that I would do a joint Honours degree in English and Visual Art. And again, I'm not sure how well that worked for me, and the place that I had to find myself, I'm not sure that that was the right place, but where you happened to be is what forms you, so you know it was, it was good and bad by turns. It felt very far away from home, I mean it was only Wales, but it did feel like a long way away and again it was a place where people were reclaiming their language, so in some respects you do feel a bit of an outsider, you know you're an English person in Wales and the Welsh were having a very, very strong revival of their own identity, and more power to them for doing that you know. But again, you know, I happened to find myself on the edge, by the sea, and that I loved. I loved being by the sea; it's such a dramatic and ever-changing thing. And so, later on, I think that some of the work that I made again went back to that whole business of the sea being a metaphor for emotions and putting you out in the middle of something unknown and the fact that you do need to connect with other people and that, possibly, you know you start off in your life and you make this little paper boat and you stick it on the waves, and you don't really know how to sail, you don't know how to navigate, it sinks. You learn as you go through to life how to build better boats, you learn how to navigate the waters better. You set off to you know the people who seem to have something in common with you, the

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lighthouses who are a beacon in your life, or the people who have other boats.

I suppose also quite interested in what's going on in people's heads, emotions, but also I think that it happened at a time in which, you know, sex and drugs and rock and roll were very much a part of what was going on in the mainstream art world, things that are sensational, things that are, yes, about people who have sort of a wilder personal life, like the Tracy Emms and the Damien Hirsts. The fact that they're doing things on a grand scale in a way that suits a public arena and causes controversy, and I suppose this is where my, the shining part of my personality doesn't fit with what goes, goes on there. And also as an artist, you're always dogged by how good am I, am I any good, is what I'm doing good? Does it have any relevance? And so I suppose what I've done is I've sort of stepped back and thought right, I'm just going, I'm not really entering that world. I'm doing what I'm doing in my way and so, I suppose, the opportunity on the plinth was a way of kind of stepping out of my psychological bedroom and out into the world and saying yes I am here and I am doing and it is important, and I have got something to say, but I don't really know if what I have to say has any bearing, relevance, meaning or importance to other people, you know. It's quite a scary thing and I think you know, Antony Gormley, he puts himself out there all the time and he uses his body as a way of communicating his humanity and our humanity and linking us all together, but it's done in such a way that you know it's something that people want. It's something that people put within their environment and can connect to. And that's a very clever thing. You know?

So what attracted you to apply for the One & Other project?

I suppose I was quite conflicted because when I saw what people were doing it and thought, "Is this art? What do I think about it?" Because there was a lot of, you know, extreme behaviours and exhibitionisms and "Find me a job" or using this as a way to raise money and it was quite sort of strange and I did feel that there weren't many things that I could watch for the whole hour, but it became quite addictive. You know you did sort of check in to see what was happening and so I went to the One & Other site and found that the way, the way in which you took part was by entering a draw and I thought, "Well you have nothing to lose by entering a draw," you know but I also thought at that time that the idea was that you would take groups of people, that the whole plinth surface would be peopled by groups of people. So I thought, "Oh, it's not just me, I'd kind of like to do that, that sounds like really quite nice." I didn't think it was me on my own for an hour. And then the chance of actually being selective as it went well, as every month went by and I'd get an email, and part of me just kind of had a really strong feeling that it'd be something that I would do. Part of me thought, "Ha!" every time I got an email, "No you're not taking part, phew, that's good, I don't have to do that, ah, lucky escape I can

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carry on being a bit cynical, about it, you know, when it got to be October, I thought “Oh, so it’s all finishing and I won’t have got to have taken part.” I felt quite sad, you know, I did. Part of me really did want to be involved, didn’t know why, but I just kind of did, and you know I’d also entered Andrew, my partner, but he hadn’t had any success and then I just remember sort of checking my email one morning and then seeing, “You have got a place!” Being “Oh my goodness, what am I going to do?” And I just went into a total state of panic. I thought “I have to write back and say no I can’t possibly do this” and I then thought “Well, perhaps it’s, you know, Jo and I have a sort of mobile sculpture kit and I thought perhaps we can take that up and then it said “No, it had just got to be you, it can’t be an ‘us’ it’s got to be a ‘you’,” so I thought “What can I do? I don’t just want to go as me.” And it was really good because, you know, I started talking to a couple of friends about what I might do and how it could connect to the next project that I was going to go on and do, which was the invisible threads thing. And, you know, they were, they were very encouraging and I just plunged straight into it and thought, “Why not? I will, I’m going to.” And this is what it will be. And also it was quite nice because I could also ... it was something that I could do with my dad; you know that he could make the boat for me but he was getting a little carried away. We were going to have, you know, we were going to have a full scale copper model of the Victory up there and I said “Dad, I’m going to fall over it, it’s too big and I can’t take it. We’ll just have to cut it, cut it down. What I need is something to put the sails on and also, you know, to have a little symbolic plough would be quite good.” And he was a bit disgruntled about that, but I think also saw that you know that the sense of it. But it was also really, it was really good because Andrew took the day off work to come and help me and dad came too because I couldn’t really do the mast by myself. And there have been, there had been quite a few things on the journey there, which, you know, I’ve written enough in sort of detail in my little diary of the experience, but one was ... I was a lot bigger, twelve months ago, and the whole business of having your photograph ... I still find it very difficult. I’m not photogenic. My face doesn’t work properly in photographs, and I’m horribly, horribly self-critical. So I’ve got years and years of really terrible photographs, so I’d stopped actually using a picture of me to represent me. I might use something else but the plinth people said we have to have a piece of visual information and my passport wasn’t up to date and I had an old paper driving license neither, so they didn’t, those photographs didn’t apply, so they said “We have to have an up-to-date photograph.” so Andrew had to run around the garden and the house trying to get at least one image that I could upload to my website.

For some reason I couldn’t hear you for a moment so we’ve just started the call again and if you could just tell me about the photograph. Are we talking about the profile?

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Yes the profile photograph because I thought that I would just be able to use some sort of an icon, you know, but they said “No. When you come to sign-in we need proof that you are who you say you are and some of that has got to be visual proof.” But after a bit of running around, we did manage to find that, so that was good and then I had another phone call from the team who help you get up on the plinth and they said “We need you to come earlier, because we want to see whether or not, the sail, you can get the sails up and down if there’s a high wind you know, health and safety. We have to check that that’s all ok” so we did that. I’ve just realised Verusca, I thought I’ve seen that picture before, and you plinthed too, didn’t you?

Yes. I was on the plinth too.

Yes, I recognised your picture.

How did you know that?

The icon that comes up with you on Skype, that’s the picture that you used as your profile page and I think I probably clicked it, but I knew that I’d seen you, so yes I might not be able to navigate my map, but I can definitely recognize things by pictures.

Brilliant, thank you. So, just to bring you back to the time of the experience, there’s a few questions that I ask everybody. So first of all, I noticed, when I watched your video, that you had some conversations with members of the crowd, in particular, Captain John.

Yes, yes. Before, I’d heard about Captain John and I’d seen him on some of the other live streaming that I’d been watching. He’s quite a character and in the porta cabin they’d been telling me about him, the fact that he’d been there right from the beginning and that it had almost become his life, he was almost like camping out there. And you sort of thought “Wow this really has connected in an incredibly powerful way with him and he felt very much part of it. And I thought that’s a fantastic outcome you know for a piece of art, that it’s, that it makes such powerful impact on somebody who is a member of the public, is a member of the audience, but then also becomes incorporated in the whole thing. Before I’d gone on, a friend of mine had said, “Please don’t put on your phone, it’s awful when you’re watching people on the phone.” So I thought of not having my phone on but Captain John was standing next to another friend of mine and right from almost two minute, two seconds onto my experience, he was there and saying put your phone on, I want to talk to you, and you can’t really reject somebody’s desire to communicate with you, so I thought I will, I will talk to him. And it’s a very, it was a very strange thing because the people below can’t hear you very well and you have to shout and

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you have to lean over so you stop being sculptural the minute you start doing that.

But on top of the plinth, what I'd seen was because it was miked-up, you could have a very intimate conversation with people you couldn't see in a very dreamlike reaching out across the ocean kind of way, and in a way that's what I had wanted it to be. But again you feel very tall and because there are your friends who've come to see you and they want to speak to you and they're yelling up at you or they're singing sea shanties at you, and you can't ignore them you know, so it's this real push and pull between audience and two different states of presenting what you were doing. So yeah that was that was, that was quite strange and I was telling Jo, who I collaborate with, yesterday that this conversation with you would be happening. And she said oh we watched the whole hour and we thought it was really good and loved the way that it was just like you having an intimate conversation with us about what you were doing. So that it was quite nice to know that that, in that impact had been and I was also, the other thing that that happened to me up there was I do have, I suppose like everyone I have an exhibit an extrovert side of my nature, so you know, being in a performance mode quite appealed to me, but then when I got up there, I sort of immediately felt shy. And I thought, "Ooh, what am I going to do?" So I almost hid behind the sails, you might have seen more of the sails than you actually see of me. And in, before going, I thought I need to have something to wear. And this goes back to what I was kind of saying about I had been a lot larger a year ago and the whole business of you know me, in the world, was quite difficult you know, feeling myself to be the largest person in the room, but also the most invisible. So it almost linked in with the push and pull of how the plinth worked you know. There's you as performance, and there's, there's you as stilled sculptural thing, being not thing. A person isn't a thing. Um and I thought oh I need to have something to wear. I have to have something that just kind of unifies me, so I went rushing off to a shop and just buy their merest fluke. There was a coat there which was exactly the kind of shape that I wanted and you know, six months ago I wouldn't have gotten it on and the fact that I could put it on and zip it up and take it away with me, thought wow I've come partway on my journey as a person you know and also I suppose it links again this idea of the physical sense of yourself with what Antony Gormley does, uses the body as a way of connecting as an artist with the world. And through art, you know, in days gone by, the what you would term the voluptuous female, or the really rather overweight female, had been presenting loads and loads you know, the naked woman in art. It's what as a woman you get presented with and now further down the line, the whole business of being an acceptable woman is this thing which has a body which is not far away from being a man or a boy, you know. It's sort of tall and it's lithe and that kind of thing. So to be able to reengage with the world of clothes and dressing up was very liberating for me so again that was another thing which seemed to be part of the specialness of being on

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the plinth. It was me regaining myself as a visual entity you know, as being ok and acceptable. And I was only partway there then and I'm still not completely there and I'm never going to be perfect. I, my shape means I will never go in in the middle. Um you know I'm going to be that way, or that way as opposed, well I mean, I have to say it in words don't I? I will either be triangular, but upside down, because my hips are smaller than my shoulders, or I will be straight, you know. It's a weird thing and again it goes back to what you are as an artist. You're never ever satisfied with what you do. You're always striving for the next thing. How to make it better, how to do it differently, what is the next idea? Not the place that you've been, the place that you're going to.

Just to bring you back to your idea about the effect of going on the plinth was, can you talk about anything else you think that the experience brought to you?

I felt that it was it was incredibly beautiful. It was nine o'clock at night, it had just stopped raining. So the square is lit up and you see the, you're kind of surrounding by these fabulous history buildings and you're looking out at the National Gallery which is full of incredible artworks anyway you know and the lights, the fact that the sky was navy blue, it wasn't black, you know, and you just kind of wanted to look out and be quiet, didn't really want to talk all the time. You wanted to be in that moment, in a place that you'll never be in again, not that that many people you know, two thousand four hundred people was it, got that chance, and your timeslot is a night time timeslot, it seemed to be very special and also conjured up other memories for me, you know, sort of coming, driving through London at similar times at night and being very sort of excited by the lights and the possibility of a place, that energy of the place, the fact that it is quite, I think it's quite a special city, you know. It's not huge, it's not full of ... it's not America, you know. It has a complicated past and we have a really complicated relationship with that past, but I think it's still got something that is incredibly moving about it. And I think the fact that so many visitors come means that yes it does, you know. It must connect with them in some way and we can't be all bad, you know. You could look at our colonial past as being shameful and execrable and something not to be proud of but also there's something good about us because why would people from the colonies want to come here, you know? Why would they want to settle? The relationship continues in different ways and it will always be complicated, but we're made up of so many parts of so many different people and I think that's a good thing.

Thank you. So I know that the project staff would send a booklet to the participants to tell them about what the experience might be like. Did you, as part of some of the instructions, did you get in touch with any of the media, your local paper, for example, or anything like this to let them know about you going on the plinth?

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Not the media, no, because it was all it was all quite, it was all quite, or did I? I think maybe I did. But they got in touch, the local paper got in touch after it had happened so it didn't really seem much point in revisiting that, but I did use the One & Other page and I did use Facebook. I didn't have an event page but I did sort of tell everybody that I knew that this would be happening, you know, and I was quite surprised at how many people sort of put really nice comments, both on Facebook and on the One & Other thing, that they felt linked to it and, you know, were pleased for me and had enjoyed my experience by extension.

Were you aware that there were two, and still exist, one on Facebook and one on Twitter, of people that were following the project, both plinthers to be, and followers, talking to each other the whole time? Did you know that?

I found them afterwards, yes, and I have, I think I have signed as being a member of the Facebook page, but there haven't been kind of any updates, and I haven't checked in for a while but I don't Twitter. My phone is so, well actually look, I can show you my phone. Very ancient technology that, you can just about text from it. Oh and make phone calls.

I'm just wondering whether you got to know anyone new through the project, either in a virtual situation online or as part of actually coming down to London and standing on the plinth?

Well I suppose meeting Captain John, that was great, and I loved all the people who were in the cabin and the people who sort of helped me get up there, they were fantastic. And I'd love to hear from them again but again I sort of come over all shy, which is silly really because sometimes I'm shy and sometimes I'm not depending on the day. But I thought they were fantastic, and what I would have loved to be able to do in coming down, go off and have a ginormous sort of drink or a party or a conversation with all the people who were in the square. But, you know, living in Northamptonshire and having to get people back home, we had to sort of strike down and leave as soon as the interview had taken place so I didn't, you know, I felt whisked away from all those people so I didn't have that that opportunity, you know but did have some conversations and actually whilst I was on the plinth, a friend of mine who couldn't be in the square, she was in France, she was the most determined person. She was absolutely determined that I was going to answer my phone and talk to her, so I was talking to her while she was in France with some friends of hers and sort of talked to them, you know. I haven't had a chance to meet them yet, but, you know, they kind of enjoyed it too. But yes, not really, it really didn't sort of make too much of a difference. And I don't know whether that because my hour was at night and also came so close to the end, it was the second last week. So a lot of people had more

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time to kind of connect with each other and follow each other and sort of make those relationships.

Actually six hundred and two times your video was liked. It doesn't mean that it was six hundred and two people that watched it, but the bits of it was voted as liked. I also noticed by watching the video back that you have a group of supporters clapping for you, at the bottom of the plinth, were these your friends and family?

Yes, they were, there were friends and family and, you know, there had been some old school friends, there had been some recent friends, one of whom was standing next to Captain John and her name is Phillipa Tipper and she's a storyteller and we'd met through doing a project which was working with children and getting them to respond creatively to a local history ... it's not a monument, it's a place, Rockingham Castle. And I was incredibly touched that she and her friend had come and they were so excited and they really enjoyed it you know, so seeing them and their happy smiling faces down at the bottom gave me more confidence you know, which was great.

Now you've mentioned earlier before we were recording, that you wrote a diary from the moment in which you knew you were going on the plinth up to the time at which you went on the plinth. So tell me your motivations for writing about it?

Again, the sort of the lead up to it, it felt like being on a journey and it felt like going at quite some speed and it was something I wanted to remember. And because memory is a fragmentary thing and you lose things sort of quickly I thought this is never, you know, this is part of history and it's never going to happen again. I would like to have that memory for myself and also I suppose for my dad. You know, because he's not going to be here forever either and I've just seen a friend of mine go through losing her father, who is younger but also a big smoker and my dad's a smoker and, you know, you sort of think, gosh you're taking such risks with yourself so I wanted a good memory of us doing something together and to share with him, you know, as well as anyone else who wants to read it.

And you're going to send me a copy?

I will, yes.

Thank you. So how did you look back at the experience as a whole now?

I just feel incredibly lucky to have taken part. I'm so glad I didn't go with my first impulse which was to email straight back and say no I can't possibly do this and to actually have done it. I suppose the one thing that I do wonder

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about, I mean quite a few other people talk about us being a thing and I had no idea that the next serious sculpture that was going on the fourth plinth was the ship in the bottle, which has also got fabric sails and I thought hmmm, well perhaps nobody looked at this, nobody took any notice of this, because the next one was going to be similar but different, you know, and by someone who is much higher up the art food chain than me. I did wonder about that, and also wondered, you know, in listening to what Antony Gormley said about the things that he felt that were most successful, he liked the people who were naked, because that related to his work, but also the solitary person standing, just standing, which again related very much to the kind of sculptures that he's made and you know, when you look at them on the plinth from a distance, yes it works really well visually and it connects very much with the tradition of what is sculpture. But also I thought it was very brave of him to sort of say, "I am open to this sculpture being whatever the people who are taking part choose to make it." That's a very generous thing, I think, you know. I also wondered about the financial implications for him and the team in the cabin said, "Oh, he put a lot of his own money into it." Didn't have to do that, again, very, very generous, you know. I think the thing that I thought was quite sad, I would have liked there to have been, I know that there was a quite a lot of people who came to the last day, but it was so soon after having been there, I couldn't get back to the final thing. I did watch it online but I thought "Oh it would have been great to have had a big party and also to have an opportunity to meet Antony Gormley," you know, because again you sort of feel very at a distance from the person who set it all in motion and that's kind of sad. And you do get to feel that he quite likes connecting with people, but I don't know, you know ... he is as much a mystery to me as he ever was. But perhaps that's a good thing, perhaps you shouldn't ever meet your heroes or heroines, because sometimes they can ... they are not their work, do you know what I mean? I don't think I would have wanted to meet Picasso but I think he made fantastic work.

So now, Carole, about the interview, we've come to an end now, I hope you've enjoyed it.

I have. [?] babbled on too much. I hope it wasn't too rambling.

No not at all. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we end?

No, I'm just curious to see what happens next, you know, with what you're going to do, and what the Wellcome Trust will do and I just ... I feel glad to be able to share my story with more people. And so, you know, what was an hour, a very brief moment in time, gets a chance to be longer than an hour and to share it with others.

Thank you so much.



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That's alright.