

One & Other Project

My name is Verusca Calabria and I'm here today to interview Claire Ross on the 24th March 2010 at 8 p.m. and we are in Brighton at the moment so Claire thank you for agreeing to be interviewed again

No problem.

I just wanted to bring you back to the time when you were on the plinth because we know how you felt before you went on the plinth but we don't know what it was like when you went on the plinth and when you came off the plinth as well.

Hmm.

So just to bring you back to that time, you told us that you were going to curl up into a ball when you went on the plinth and I watched your performance and of course you did do that. So how was it?

Oh it was very scary and quite terrifying I had intentions of moving around a bit more kind of crawling or exploring but I just got really quite scared and genuinely couldn't move from my little curled up ball, so very ...

So what were the reactions that you had from people in the square?

I wasn't really very aware to be honest. I kind of, I looked a little bit ... people, I really didn't know what people were doing, some of my friends I knew were watching me and I felt like I couldn't meet their gaze I couldn't really. I wanted to hide from them even so I was kind of trying not to look at the people around me because you know I was found it very intimidating. It was quite interesting, my boyfriend was trying to record some of it when I was up there it was just ... with a cheap camera recording and when he was doing that there was someone a passer by just talking and he was like "Oh she's really boring isn't she? She's missing a golden opportunity up there, she's not doing anything, she should take her clothes off." So we've got like the recording of this random stranger and then my friends were like "You are speaking about someone who is our friend up here," and "She's still missing a golden opportunity up there." So I thought that was really interesting you know but I didn't find out until after I got down obviously. But I was a bit worried because a lot of people would have just thought it was a waste of time you know but I thought it was quite a valuable thing to do so.

When I watched your performance I noticed that you curled up for quite a long time. But eventually you opened up as well, your body language changed, do you remember that?

Yeah I think I thought, I kind of thought that I can't stay curled up for the entire duration. I need to kind of explore a little bit, you know, see what's going on you know look around and, it's not very often you get to sit up there you know. So I kind of tried to you know look around a bit more and kind of explore and see what's happening. I got a little bit braver when I got up there. I started to feel more confident again.

And what sort of reactions did you get from people when you came off the plinth?

One & Other Project

Hmm, from my friends they were very concerned about me because they knew what I was going to do and they knew how nervous I was about it and everything so I didn't really notice much reactions from other people around really. So yeah ... but my friends kind of came and gave me a big hugs and looked after me and took me out for a cup of teas afterwards and made sure I was okay because I think some of them were quite worried that some of my best closest friends were quite worried about me being up there - is she actually okay?

And how did you feel afterwards?

Really spaced out, really like I'd gone so far into it, feeling like really scared, really vulnerable and just really exploring. I was feeling so much that when I came down I was really nervous of everyone, I was stuck in that head space so I was really nervous and really quite spaced out and couldn't ... I didn't really understand you know what was going on, do you know what I mean? So it took quite a while to get back to myself afterwards.

And where did you get the idea from, about curling up into a ball?

Well I spent ages thinking about a million different performances to do. I had so many ideas but I didn't like any of them so, you know, they wouldn't work or I just wouldn't have the confidence to pull them off, you know, it would take far too much planning and various different things or just something to say that it would seem good but then in reality it would be really stupid and would people want to see me doing this. So I kind of took a step back and thought about it and I was like, well I am actually really scared of doing this you know I'm really not very good of being the centre of attention I really try to avoid that so I thought well I can just be as scared as I feel so a kind of thought about like in a situation when I'm nervous then I want to curl up in a ball it's kind of a natural reaction to kind of go and hide under the table or something but you can't do that like in social situations, you can't just go and curl under the table and be as scared as you are you've got to try and be brave. So I thought that I would just explore being scared and curl in a ball and do what I felt naturally like what I wanted to do that you are generally not allowed to do in normal situations, it kind of came from there really.

Just to explore a little bit more about this feeling of wanting to curl up and perhaps hide away in certain social situations, how does that relate to your life?

Well by the time I did this I'd been unemployed for about a year and I'd been quite isolated down in Brighton so I kind of, I really got out of social situations. So I was really uncomfortable, so it was something I felt very frequently if I was put in a situation where I'd have to communicate with people or anything like that I felt I wanted really often to curl up in a little ball and be invisible and for no one to see me at all. I was being quite shy and nervous you know even as [inaudible] ran up and so it was quite a, something that I always wanted to do but didn't really happen very often.

And how did it affect you, having done that performance on the plinth which related to your feelings and how, where you were at in your life at the time?

Well I had a think about this because of this interview I kind of thought about what's

One & Other Project

happened since really and I think at the time it was kind of quite a good thing to try and explore that as far as I could, to really try and push that one. Since then I've a job I started having new friends in Brighton, now I've started being more sociable and I was thinking about the overall pattern and it feels a bit like I'd got into this isolated spell it got worse, worse and worse and it was kind of like almost I hit rock bottom but like a turning point because when I started working I had to like I had to be brave and speak to people and you know running away wasn't an option you know and I had to get over the idea of the public. I really had to face people so since then I kind of put the mask back on I've been a lot braver and some of it has actually become real confidence you know. So it feels like I've had this whole journey of spiralling down getting more isolated and socially inept and then doing that was like a really kind of point and then going back up again, yeah.

Thank you. So where would you say this introversion that you also talked about in the previous interview comes from?

I think I've always just been really quite shy and introverted since I was a child it was my natural disposition really, just to yeah hide from groups of people and things.

So what was it like to move from Scotland to Brighton?

It was a massive change. I moved down with, I can't remember if I said this before, I moved down with my partner and we broke up quite quickly after we moved down so I was pretty much by myself here I knew one or two people kind of and it was a huge culture shock you know I went to uni in Sterling which is like this kind of little town you know. And I moved down to Brighton and there's all these things happening all this fast alternative people, I had blue hair at the time and you know in Sterling walking around with blue hair I got stared at, come down here walking around with blue hair and no one looks twice you know. So it was, it was really scary not really knowing anyone in this whole strange city trying to find ways to do things having money to go out and meet people it was, it was a big huge change for me a bit transition.

And what motivated you to move down to Brighton, at the time, with the boyfriend you had then?

Well I finished university and I didn't like it in Sterling. Scotland is quite small, you get to know the cities quite quickly and none of them really appealed to me. So I'd been coming down to London to visit friends for a while and didn't want to move to London because it was too frantic so Brighton seemed like a nice little place I came down to visit and it seemed quite interesting. So I thought yeah I get away from Scotland and cut all ties with it for the most part and come down and start afresh here.

And how is life like in Brighton now?

It started to pick up now, I've got, as I said I've got a job now [at the Unemployment centre in Newhaven] which ... I don't particularly like the job very much but it gives me the means to go out and meet people because I've got the money to do it. I've got a bit more confidence in myself and I met one or two people through work so it feels like I'm actually starting to settle into the place. I'm actually living here as opposed to just living in my little room you know, yeah.

One & Other Project

You mentioned in your previous interview about Torture Garden [Fetish club] and being involved with that, could you tell me more about it?

Torture Garden ... that was a particular performance I did with my friend who's a performance artist. It was called 'Femi,' it involved taking people's burdens and literally putting them onto their bodies and they took the burden and then destroyed, it was the basic premise behind it all so it was supposed to be a kind of very ... Torture Garden is a very beautiful kind of place it's full of people who are very aesthetic and very like, how they look so we tried to get that image across an aesthetically pleasing thing but also get some spiritual elements you know taking of burdens and removing them and that kind of thing.

And how did you get involved with the Torture Garden group then?

It wasn't with the *Torture Garden* group as such it was my friend's theatre company who had a performance and he just happens to know someone at *Torture Garden* and they kind of you know got a space at Parsley ball [?] I think it was or something.

And what's the name of the theatre company that your friend has or works at?

It was his first performance, he curated lots of different performance artists you know new people coming along and things like that.

Okay just to bring you back to the time on the plinth, I think it's quite interesting to explore how digital media and the internet in terms of social networking may have affected your choice of representation, what you may have left out and what happened afterwards, so did you use any social networking sites to talk about you going on the plinth?

I didn't at all. My internet was really, really dodgy at the time so I could barely access it at all so I looked at the website, the One & Other website briefly looking around that but that's all I did about it, I didn't really interact with the social media aspect very much.

And how about the comments you got on your profile, you got quite a few. How did you react to that when you saw them?

I was really surprised that people were actually interested because I thought what I did wasn't very visually pleasing. A lot of people went up there and did a big performance and had a big message to say you know but I just sat in a ball so I didn't think people would be very interested with it or really engage at all. So I was really surprised that people had considered it and had ideas about what it meant you know.

Shall I just bring you back to think about some of these comments, somebody here mentioned about being anonymous and how come if you wanted to hide how come you did talk about yourself and write up a blurb about yourself, how does that sound to you?

I did actually, I thought about that I didn't put a picture of myself up from my profile. I was really, really unsure of what level to go for on that because part of me just wanted to be completely anonymous and not see anything but part of me wanted to

One & Other Project

express what I was going to do a little bit you know express why I was doing it a bit you know. So yeah I really debated having my actual name or fake name I decided on my name but not my full name and I decided no picture but to write stuff about myself.

Did you watch yourself back after being up there?

I've not watched all of it. I've watched... bits of it was kind of intriguing you know what do I look like sitting up there you know. So I flicked through a little bit, it was quite disturbing when I first watched it actually. I was quite surprised. I've been told by my friends I was quite a kind of striking, striking is probably not the right word but it was quite an affecting image and when I watched it I was quite surprised it was quite affecting you know sitting curled up there I think I felt a little bit emotional when I watched it actually.

How do you think your friends and family might have been affected by the experience of going on the plinth?

My friends ... I think they were very excited about it for me and I think some of them were quite moved some said they really felt, there was one particular person ... a friend who commented that she was watching it online while I was doing it she had to keep watching, compelled to keep watching to be there for me to support me in some way because she thought she felt sorry for me she felt empathy towards me and she wanted to support me and give me a hug but all she could do sit there and watch. She sat there for the whole hour watching me to try and support me although I didn't know it. I thought that was a very sweet sentiment, oh yeah I think some of them were really quite worried and some were quite moved but yeah some people said the honesty and vulnerability really touched them and things like that. I didn't really tell my family much about it, I kind of mentioned it to them but they don't follow arty things in this way but they are very proud of me after having done it though they don't know what it is but they are very proud of it anyway.

Where do you come from back home? Where do you come from in Scotland?

From Edinburgh originally, I grew up in Fife and went to University in Stirling.

So just to think about the time on the plinth, how do you think it has affected you personally? I know you mentioned about becoming more confident but is there anything else that has come from it do you think?

I think I became slightly more engaged with arty things, you know, kind of performance based things having done it, I like doing that whenever I'm involved with my friend, because he is my friend I get involved, I help him out and that's usually how the dynamic goes. But this feels like I've done something by myself and for myself and I came up with the idea by myself and things you know. So it's a kind of a bit of a confidence thing even though I was randomly selected so it wasn't that my idea was picked or anything but it kind of made me feel confident more interested in the whole performance aspect and things.

And how much did you know about the project when you got involved?

One & Other Project

When I first, what's the word, when I first volunteered for it I guess I knew nothing at all about it. My friend with the theatre just said 'there's a really cool project going on in Trafalgar square do you want me to volunteer' and I was like 'what does it involve?' 'oh you just get on the plinth and do a performance' and I was like whatever thinking it was like there would be lots of people volunteering for it and there was no way I was going to get picked anyway. So I didn't really pay any attention to it I was kind of distracted he was terribly excited about it all but I didn't really know anything at all.

And tell me I know you have a job now and you mentioned in your previous interview that you were thinking of going travelling when you saved up, going to Australia and I think in the previous interview you also mentioned about possibly getting into more performances in future and so on, so what is it that you are hoping for?

Well it's kind of changed a bit since I got this job. I had to really drop a lot of things in London as I'm working full time now so I just can't go up there for days on end you know so it's kind of right now it's really gone back to me getting a new house, making friends in Brighton, trying to settle in here for a while. Now that I've started settling I want to continue this for a while. I don't necessarily think I'll stay here for very long but maybe for a couple of years or something, trying to build something of a life here for a while [inaudible] better jobs and things like this.

And what were you doing before you had the job in terms of things happening in London?

Yeah I have some friends in London so I got up and visited them really frequently. I did lots of things: I painted, I wrote and made clothes, spent lots of times cooking and walking and passing my time, you know, playing instruments and things like this.

And so what's your favourite pastime?

Gosh my favourite one? It depends. I go through phases; sometimes I love painting sometimes I love playing violin, I love listening to music, reading, I think right now it's probably reading.

What do you like reading?

I read fiction, at the moment I'm reading Milton's *Paradise Lost* - when I was at university I had to write essays like I referenced it really frequently but never actually read the whole book before. So I thought I should probably get that done at some point so I struggled through the first ten pages and then starting to get into the swing of it and I'm quite enjoying it now.

And how about music, when did you learn to play the violin?

I started playing the violin when I was in primary school. I was about seven or something, really young, and I played all throughout school then I kind of stopped when I left school and went to university. I didn't play so much not too long ago ... I had my violin brought down to Brighton, I was really excited I missed it so much and then actually I picked it up and tried playing it and I wasn't very good anymore. So I went through phases I'd play and right I'm going to re-learn this thing and start

One & Other Project

playing and playing and getting better and better and eventually get frustrated because I can't play as well as I used to, so I put it down and moved on to something else.

And how about performances, are you still doing that with your friend?

Not really, there's not been a specific stopping or anything it's more that I don't have time to put into it. I don't speak to him as often because I'm down here he's up in London so I'm not really as involved in all that stuff anymore.

Okay and how would you say now looking back what is the most significant thing you remember about your time on the plinth?

Most significant thing ... I actually think the thing that stands out most is quite random. My friend had this new girlfriend along with him who I hadn't really met yet, she came to watch me and there was one point when I was starting to get a little bit braver kind of looking around and I kind of looked over the edge and she was just standing right in front of the plinth where I was closest to the ground and she was just looking up at me and she just kept staring and you know obviously just thinking and pondering. It looked like she was connecting with my situation, she was trying to fuel things and I looked at there and saw her standing there and I felt complete terror of this girl and I just got straight back into curling into a ball as I was really frightened of her for some reason, I'm really not quite sure where that effect came from but it's the bit I remember most of all really, she was wearing a red coat I think, I remember something red going on.

Did you talk about it with her afterwards?

I didn't actually no. I've not spoken to her that much, I think I just met her out and about and then I started to work not long after that so I didn't tell her at all she had this effect on me.

You know you mentioned you like writing. Have you written anything about this experience?

I thought I had; I meant to. I had every intention of writing a big blog, I had photos, I had pictures people had taken. I copied what was said and some from Twitter and put them in files on my computer and I was absolutely certain I'd written a big account of how I felt just afterwards. But I can't find it so I'm thinking I might not have written it, I certainly meant to write it but I think that maybe I didn't, maybe I wrote it on paper and I've lost it or forgotten it or something.

Maybe you don't remember the names of the files?

Possibly yeah it wasn't with the other files that had to do with this.

So what did you collect then, what do you actually have?

I have ... my boyfriend got quite carried away taking short video clips and taking pictures; a lot of them didn't work so well but I've got copies all of them as I said I copied from the websites the comments that people made and pasted them. My friend uses Twitter a lot so she sent me an email of some of the interesting

One & Other Project

comments people had said about how they engaged with my performance or whatever so I've got all of that in a file as well I'm sure I had intentions at some point of putting this all together into a big, one big thing and making it into some pretty file with pictures and you know making it into a memorabilia thing out of it all but it never quite happened.

Will you do that in the future?

Probably yeah, at some point I'll get spurred on and remember 'oh that was pretty exciting' and things like that, kind of put it all together.

So you mentioned home and your family not using the internet or technology so much or not watching the arts, did you talk to them about the experience at all?

I actually deliberately didn't tell my family initially because I wasn't sure what they'd think of it. So I wasn't sure what I was going to do and I love my family but we are quite separate. We have got very different interests you know and perspectives on life so I thought initially of not telling them as they might just think it was stupid or mock me or something I don't want them mocking me so I did really close to the time I kind of told them a bit and they didn't I tried I didn't really go into details of what and why I was doing it and they didn't understand because all I really said to them was going up there do nothing and curl into a ball and be scared and they thought that was a bit of stupid idea I think. Of course they were supportive and excited on the day, you know, but no, they've not seen anything from that. I think I've shown them one picture when I went up at Christmas. I think that's all they've actually seen so far. I mentioned to my parents that there was going to be a book about it 'oh you've got to get me one' they were really supportive and interested.

And how do you feel about your family's excitement about your involvement in a national project?

I like that they are excited about it but part of me feels like this is a little bit defensive of it, you know, it's my thing. I kind of ... I'm worried about it as I said they are not interested in art things at all you know generally art things are *poncy* for the most part. So I'm a bit nervous of showing them anything much about it as they might dismiss it from me, it was a very important experience, you know, so yeah I'll get them a copy of the book. I'll show them and they'll be happy and lovely but I feel a little bit defensive overall really.

And how do you think it affected your friends and the way they may have looked at you after this experience?

A lot of my friends said they are impressed with how brave I was because they know I don't like being the centre of attention at all. So they were kind of ... they gave me respect for actually going through with this and actually not giving up and not doing it and for being vulnerable, for being in front of everything really and just letting myself go there, it seems to be the reaction, quite impressed and respectful of it and obviously very excited for me as well, so.

So I'm wondering whether you'd like to talk about your hopes for the future?

One & Other Project

My hopes for the future, I don't know about the future, I'm thinking now of I don't know, I want to do everything. I want to move to a different country, I don't want to stay here, I want to ... I'm thinking about going into healing, counselling kind of jobs in the future but I can't see any clear immediate path into that at the moment so I'm just going to learn things and hopefully at some point I will end up as some healer/counsellor type thing or maybe something entirely different.

And why is that, why are you attracted to the idea of being a healer or a counsellor?

I want to help people, it really appeals to me. I don't know, to help people, help them develop and heal from situations, you know, it's something that I'm quite good at; being supportive for people and you know people tend to open up to me and talk to me so I think it would be really satisfying way to spend my time.

And why do you see the aspect of healing being separate from psychotherapy for example or counselling?

I don't necessarily see it as being separate. I think they can be seen as separate ideas, I think what my vague kind of thoughts about it all, which are very vague, I'm thinking about healing maybe Reiki healing or massage type things, that kind of physical healing along with some kind of talking therapy counselling type thing. If you use some together it can be quite useful for something so these are the areas I want to explore but I don't have got any counselling qualifications or anything like that, it's still got to come together I think.

Okay thank you very much.

Thank you.

I hope you've enjoyed it.

Yes, scary but good.

Thank you.

END OF RECORDING