

Audio File Name: MF_NT_Cherryburn_Interview_2_Sept_2017
Date: transcribed 19th December 2017
Comments: reviewed March 2021
Duration: 01:03:35

KEY:

Cannot decipher = (unclear + time code)

Sounds like = [s.l + time code]

I1: = Interviewer 1

I2: = Interviewer 2

R: = Respondent

I1: Do you know Mark Stokes?

R: I've never met him, no.

I1: Is it working?

I2: Okay, yes, I think it's all done so if I just put that one there as well. Okay.

I1: I haven't got my list, my thing.

I2: Have you not?

I1: Oh it's alright. I probably put it in...

I2: So, there's a bit to be read out so it's the 2nd September and it's an interview with Mark Fairnington. This is just the introduction I guess. So thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the research project. I think the key purpose of this conversation is to collect information about your experience of creating a new artwork for a heritage site. You don't have to answer all the questions, that's fine. It's part of a longitudinal research process so the plan is to follow up on some of these questions and things in later interviews. Given that you are named within the project, the information that you provide will be used within a range of outputs from the research including, but not limited to, conference papers, journal articles and published material. Okay?

I1: Okay, I'll just start off, okay. So just thinking about the... I know it's slightly different for you because you didn't do this site visit, did you?

R: I did, yes.

I1: Yes, you did. Could you just reflect upon the way that the selection for the commission happened, so the brief? If you could give us your reflections on whether the artist brief was useful, any thoughts that you had on that brief and why you decided to respond to Cherryburn.

R: I thought the brief was fairly clear really. I mean it gave a clear description of the overall project and what the point of the commission was. I think that was important. It's an area that I've been interested in any way, is how you can monitor the effects of putting contemporary art into a different situation. I've worked a lot, mainly with museums and collections so this was interesting in the way it connected to work that I'd already done. The expression of interest, it was quite difficult to do that in a way, in the sense that you think I could do all kinds of things. So at that point I put down everything that came into my head in terms of my thoughts about the site, my thoughts about Bewick and how it connected to the work that I'd done in the past, my own work. So I suppose I think, looking back, my expression of interest was probably a bit too expansive. So when I got asked to put a proposal together for the interview, I really shrank it down to one specific thing. That became much more focused after the visit to Cherryburn because it became very clear to me that what they dealt with very well there was the prints, the wood cuts, the printing processes, the publications, all of that stuff they covered very well. The one thing that began to interest me was how he gathered his information and the fact that the walking was fundamental to the process. It was the walking that rooted him in the area so although the publications were international, in the sense that they made his name international, the fact that all the information was gathered locally, particularly in the tale pieces they had this profoundly local subject matter. That interested me and I thought, "I've done that kind of thing before in sketchbooks where I've been travelling. It will be really interesting to repeat that process," so that's where I thought I would base the work that I did on a series of walks that had Cherryburn at the centre but mapped the route between Cherryburn and Gateshead, where his workshop was. I haven't decided what all those walks will be yet but the process is in place really and I know what I want to do with them. As of yet, I don't know what resulting paintings would be. The other thing about coming to Cherryburn was realising it's a very small site. There's not a lot of space to show work. So I got interested in the idea of work that I would make that reflected the scale of Bewick prints and had that sense of intimacy about them. I liked the bedroom in the house as a possible place to show the work and where the work would be a very site specific installation in that space. So I think after visiting the site, the idea came together fairly quickly and fairly coherently. I realised that the drawings that Bewick made while he was walking, the drawings that became the source material for the prints were... I hadn't even known them before actually because you put Bewick drawings into Google and the prints come up. Then I realised that there were these collections of drawings in Newcastle. I found some images of them and I thought they were really interesting images actually, very different from the prints, very subtler surfaces and touches on them. That made me think that was a really interesting parallel to my work actually looking at the drawings and researching

them in more depth and showing them. So I think over a period of about a week really I think the proposal came together in my head, what I wanted to do.

I1: I've forgotten what I was going to say. When you say, which was true, the expression of interest that you put in was far more expansive than that, do you think that's a good way of actually getting information from artists, that stage of initial stage and then asking to deepen it?

R: I don't know how else you can do it but I think it's problematic because I know from talking to Andrew that people looking at the expressions of interests would look at the idea of doing a life size bull painting and say, "You couldn't show that at Cherryburn." At that point I didn't know that because I hadn't had a chance to visit. So I think there is a danger that people may come out with ideas that are immediately out of...

I2: Yes, not possible.

I1: Not possible. That's interesting. So really, actually, the site visits should come first in a way.

R: Yes.

I1: Interesting.

R: But I mean not just with this project, with all the projects that I've done, the sense of allowing you the time to embed yourself into it was really important I think. I mean my thoughts about the work, I might make a change all the time, even now. I think that's an important part of the process. So there is that difficulty with the kind of selection in that you want to have some idea about what someone's going to do but you don't want to close down the possibility that it may change.

I1: As you say, it's difficult from a commissioner point of view because the commissioner wants an idea of where it goes but it's quite interesting because that research period is crucial, isn't it? Things actually could change quite dramatically during that research period so that's an area that is interesting to look at I think.

R: Yes. I mean I suppose what was interesting for me in terms of the proposal was using the blog, which is now a website, using that as a way of monitoring and tracking the process of making the work. I've never really done that before.

I1: So it's changed the way you're thinking? So it's changed...?

R: Well it means that I need to think about making something that someone will come to and be able to read the story of how the work has been made at different points. This thing will build through the process of making the work. That's not something I normally think about when I'm making work. You don't have to think, "At this point, how am I going to articulate where I am or what I've done?" But I think in terms of the overall aims of the AHRC project, it's a really quite important thing. It's not like you have something at the end which suddenly everyone

responds to, which you could have I suppose. But my thing I think the idea that the process of making the work from the walks to the sketchbooks, through to the studio work is visible.

I2: Yes, that's really interesting, isn't it?

I1: Yes, because this site has had an influence on obviously how your practice is...

R: I was talking to Anna last night. I was saying that... the woman who has designed the site was saying she really wanted to get some sense of what the audience was. So what Anna was saying well as soon as it's there, it's got stuff on it, she can send it to all their volunteers and immediately get feedback from them, does it make any sense? Does it work? What's not working? From it, do they get a clear idea about what's happening? She said that because the volunteers really want to know that information about projects that they're involved with, they'll be very forthright about that. So at that point, any changes that need to be made to it can be made based on feedback from the volunteers that work at Cherryburn. I thought that was really useful actually.

I1: That's useful because some people might find that really quite a threat.

R: Well it's about them looking at the website and if they say, "Well I haven't got a clue what this is about," then obviously we need to think, "Well okay, that needs to be looked at," because if it doesn't actually communicate the information, then it's not much point really.

I1: That's interesting because that leads into the relationships that you're beginning to develop with the site staff, I think that answers that question in that obviously...

R: There's very practical things like the tall bloke, is he the manager of Cherryburn?

I1: He is responsible for overall, Cherryburn and Gibside and so he has an overview.

R: I was talking to him about the difficulty of contacting Chillingham Castle and he said he's got a friend who lives on site, lives in the castle grounds. He can get me in touch with the people that run the herd, so that sort of thing is really useful.

I1: So actually relationships, so building relationships, personal relationships with the people is important.

R: Yes. I think what was interesting about last night was I think there's a genuine interest in this happening. They want it to happen.

I1: Yes. That's crucial, isn't it, otherwise there's no dialogue and there's no expansion of your thinking. How about the relationship with the project and the research team, how do you see that developing or any comments on that?

R: Well it's something I'm interested in, just from the point of view of my own academic role and my involvement in research at the University of the Arts. I'm really interested in how practice led research can be part of gaining new knowledge or part of the research process. Even within the University of the Arts, the practice-led side is pushed aside in terms of the written thesis, all of that and partly because it's very difficult to say what is learned or what has been achieved. What I'm really interested in is how the actual process of making the work becomes a point where meaning is generated. It's not in the information that's gathered before and it's not in what is said about the stuff afterwards but actually at that point when you're making the work is where new meaning is created. I think that's... so taking the process of making the work and actually finding a way to monitor how it's being viewed by people I think is really interesting. I mean it's a difficult thing to do. I mean I think the project you set for yourself is a hard one actually.

I1: Can you expand on that new meanings created?

R: Well I've done a lot of work with collections with scientists so at that point it's very easy to say, "Well I'm looking at this. I'm making images of that." I take lots of photographs of the things that I'm looking at which becomes images for the paintings. When it becomes the finished painting, it has another meaning which isn't any of the meanings it had before. It's not how it works in the scientific context. It's now how it is in the museum. It becomes something else. That's the meaning that would be impossible for me to say, "This is what it's going to actually say," because it's wedded to the processes and the materials and the actual physical characteristics of the work. I mean the bull paintings are the size of bulls. Seeing an image of one in a book or projected, you don't get the meaning of the work. I think it's a very difficult thing to articulate to people who aren't used to looking at work actually. Then there's the more detailed descriptions of what's happening on the surface of a painting, how the brushstrokes are working, how they're articulated in different ways and how, as I've had with some painters looking at work, certain brushstrokes will remind them of a way another painter works. It's that kind of thing. It's the complexity of those interactions that I think...

I2: Can I just clarify something because I think what you've hinted at is the problem of practice as research. So what I'm taking from what you're saying is that the painting itself is an output of research that rather than then needing to write about it.

R: Yes, absolutely.

I2: That's what I got.

R: But I think part of the structure of research within academia is that it's very rarely looked at like that. In fact, most people who look at the research I'm doing will

have never seen a painting. I think the problem with it is that most people who've never seen a painting won't see that as a problem.

I2: No. I guess this is the historic problem about practice based PhDs, isn't it? It's like actually they still need to write 30,000 words. Art is not seen as complete without that writing. I think that's an interesting challenge.

R: I think it is a challenge. I think it's difficult, certainly for PhD students that I've supervised is that they find, especially in the first year, it's almost there that their practice really gets hammered. It becomes really difficult for them to see. They have to wedge what they're doing into this other thing. I think they find it quite difficult. But I think it's also about finding ways to articulate what practice-led research, how it brings new meanings into being. I think that's why this is probably interesting for me, is actually finding ways to do that.

I1: I remember your interview, you spoke about this area of seeing your work in museums and collections and your personal interest of how that works. I remember you explaining that quite well, about why the research project, why it wasn't just a commission, it was actually a research project that you were interested in. Can you say a little bit more about that? Can you remember? I mean basically you were saying it wasn't just the commission at Cherryburn, it was that the research was part of the whole project, the whole commission.

R: Yes. I mean partly because it follows on from projects that I've already done but none of them have required me to do what this is asking me to do in terms of making the work available or making the research side available to be monitored and all that. I suppose my interest in that side has grown, partly because I think in the same way that you and Andrew realised, there's this huge area where it's thought that it's a good idea to put contemporary art into museums and artists' work with collections and then it happens and then they go away. There's no real idea about what has actually happened and there's no real process, I don't think, being developed to monitor what happens. It's just assumed that it's a good idea. But I think, as the funding situation gets more difficult, people will be called to say, "Well okay what is going to happen? How is this actually going to change things?" But I've seen, from my own experience, especially with the Horniman show, that the curators didn't know what was going to happen. They didn't know what the show would be like or the effect it would have but they really got something from it being there. It was that thing that I really began to be interested in. It was visible how it connected to the collections but it was different from the collections. It wasn't like a contemporary art show. It worked within the museum so it bridged this gap between contemporary art making and a collection that's known and loved and used by lots of people. But yes, I think with Cherryburn, I mean I've always been interested in Bewick and his work so it opens up the opportunity to look at that in more detail, which I wouldn't have done if I wasn't doing this. But I quite like the way little avenues of possibility open up when you work in a project.

I1: The relationships, my last question is about relationships, how do you see... I mean can you see how the relationships that you see from last night are in place where you've got the Cherryburn, you've got the research team, how

would you see those developing over the next two years or how would you want to see those developing and what would be useful?

R: I think for me, what I'd like to see is that all aspects are integrated in the sense that the people at Cherryburn know what I'm doing and have a sense of what I'm doing throughout the whole process, that the ways in which it feeds into the research side are there and work. It feels like a very big project so the coordination of it I think is critical and the gathering together of information as well.

I1: I've got another question that's just occurred to me. What about the relationship with the other artists, which of course... is that important?

R: I think it would be important in terms of being able to hear what they're doing and find out what their experiences are but I think an ongoing connection, I wouldn't see that as critical actually, myself.

I1: Right, that's interesting. That's fine.

R: I mean I see that as your role really to bring those bits together but it's difficult. I mean it's a long time. It's difficult to know what will happen. I mean the interesting thing for me would be once the work is installed. I mean I see the research as something that will carry on after that. So the installation of the work isn't like that at the end. That's something I would like to think about quite a lot in terms of... I mean I know that Cherryburn want me to come up and talk to people and stuff like that and that's fine but I would be interested to see it as a project that carries on right the way through to the final show and would be developing all the way through that period really.

I1: But for you personally, do you say I'd see it continuing after the installation?

R: Yes, definitely.

I1: So you think it's going to have quite a big impact on your practice?

R: Well I would imagine that I would carry on coming up and doing walks, even after... I mean it wouldn't be a finished series of paintings where you think, "Okay, that's done." Things come out of things like that and I would imagine I could be working on it for a year or more or two years. I don't know but that's how I see it.

I1: That's interesting.

R: So even to the point where the Hatton Gallery could have new work in it because it doesn't feel like a closed thing in a way.

I1: So it's not like a normal commission where you're just saying, "This is for this. It's for the season between April and September," which is what usually a commission is and then we work out de-installation, taped away, finished.

R: I mean all of those things might happen but it wouldn't be how I see the work.

I1: Yes. That's interesting, okay.

R: Because I've never really worked like that. With all the different collections, there tends to be a point where suddenly it finishes in itself, there's nothing more there really. But this is slightly different in that it's not like a contained collection. It's the world out there. I think that's interesting for me actually. I mean I've always liked the idea of doing landscape paintings I suppose. I've never really managed to come up with a reason to do it.

I1: That's great. Okay, that's good for me.

I2: Okay, so creative practice. So I guess there's a couple of questions, thinking about your practice. So a question about practice generally and then thinking more specifically about the project. So we'll probably be interested to know whether you've got a formal statement of practice that we could have a copy of but can you just describe what your artistic practice is?

I1: We were talking about this this morning.

R: When you say the practice, do you mean the work in studio or do you mean the... my statement really is like a research statement I guess.

I2: Well let's start with that and then see where that gets us. It's if the practice is driven by the research, then maybe that's an important place to start with a description.

R: Well I'm a painter and I use painting as a way of investigating my interest in particular collections of different kinds. When I'm working with a particular collection, that seems to then generate a format for a series of paintings based on the things that come out of it. So for instance, when I was working with the Wellcome Collection, what came out of that was a series of miniature portraits of characters in the collection, objects, faces and that was established as an idea quite early on. I would then go back into the collection and find other things that fit into that. So the paintings vary in scale hugely, from the life size bull paintings to the tiny little miniature paintings. But each series has a conceptual coherence that links it to the collection or whatever I've been looking at.

I2: So is the idea of a series important in relation to working through an idea or does that somehow relate to the idea of collections as being a series of objects?

R: Well I think certainly some people writing about the work have described my work as being like an arc where I collect a bit of that, collect one of those and one of those. It does have that sense to it. I think the series, showing the work as series helps to give a sense of what the subject is in each one. I think it's also that what I do is I start by taking photographs. I'll take hundreds of photographs. That's like the field trip, get them back and begin to look at them and different things come out of them so they inevitably will generate a number of different works. But I think it's not series in a very formal sense. I have to, with some of the paintings, decide that I'm going to do this number. So with the bulls it was six. That came from

thinking about Jannis Kounellis' horse piece, the six horses in the gallery. I thought, "Okay, let's just stick with six." When I actually did a life-size painting of a horse, I was thinking of Whistlejacket. So I thought, "That's the one horse. I don't want a series of horses, just the one." I mean they come out of my engagement with art history and other artists who've made work with similar subjects.

I2: I think you've probably covered a little bit of this but it's just worth asking the question if there's anything else that you wanted to say about your process for approaching this particular commission.

R: Well it's very different from the way I normally work. I don't normally do walks and I don't normally make sketchbooks so that's quite new but I think it's quite interesting, quite liberating in a way. Although there's a point, in any project, where I don't know what the work is going to look like, I really don't know what the work is going to look like, I vaguely know what size it's going to be but that's about it.

I2: Is that the nature of the site that has dictated some of that?

R: It's because there's so much information there really. It's difficult to know what's going to filter through. It reminds me a bit of when I went to the rainforest, this [s.l. sci-art 00:35:24] project with an entomologist. You get out there and you think, "What can I paint? I mean there's just so much stuff here." It really does take a while for things to come through although yesterday I began to get a sense of... I'm interested in the link between still life and landscape. You get objects in the landscape that aren't supposed to be there and that's something that I suddenly thought, "That's interesting," so maybe that will be the point, I don't know. I think that allowing the time for the ideas to come through to the point where there's a clarity about them I think is important.

I1: It's interesting you were saying liberating because it could be quite daunting but you're seeing it as it feels as if it's unravelling, it's actually going to be more expansive. You really don't know where it's going to lead to.

R: No. I was thinking last night about text in the pieces, these phrases like talking to the woman and suddenly coming up with that sentence. You think, "That's kind of interesting in a way." If you take it away from me talking to her about her kid, it suddenly becomes something quite poetic in a way. So I was thinking maybe there's a way that the text can be integrated into the work. I don't know. I mean it's...

I1: Well we'll see. We could track it as we go through.

I2: So in a way you've covered the next question around how this is different so that's really interesting. I guess maybe moving on, and it's impossible to ask this question neutrally. I'm not even going to pretend that it's possible to have a neutral conversation. The question is, what would success look like for you in terms of this project? So maybe just respond to the question and then we can unpick what we're interested in in terms of that question.

R: I think there's different kinds of success. What, for me, would be a successful piece of work, regardless of it being part of the project, I think I do have a fairly clear idea at the moment of what that would feel like. I want it to be something where even when you're in the corridor you don't know it's there. You go into the bedroom, you turn around and it's there. It has a sense of not being a picture on the wall, being part of the structure of the building almost. That's what I would hope would be a successful thing. Then the other success is that people do get something from it and then the other success is that people do get something from it. The process of using the website to send out information has generated an interest. I mean all of those things I think would, in relation to this project, make it successful or not. I mean I hope the work is something that I will enjoy making and it will move what I'm doing to somewhere else.

I1: **Okay.**

I2: **That's really interesting.**

I1: **We're covering things that are down here. The next section is about audience. So actually, this is quite an interesting one I think, which is who do you see as the audience for the new work that you'll be creating? It's quite a...?**

R: Yes. I mean at some level I think my involvement with it and my involvement with the place and making the work is about my engagement with it. So at that point it's not about thinking about an audience really. I think it's very difficult to... I don't think I've ever made work thinking, "I think this would be the kind of thing that would work there." I mean I have had a little bit of experience of the people that actually go to Cherryburn. I see people come and they have this interest in the place and a love of the place, even if they don't know who Thomas Bewick is. So I think there'll be a casual audience that come to the place who may or may not know that the work is there. I like the idea that it's something that people come across and it immediately grips them because of the scale of it and the fact that it has this sense of place, it's there because it has to be there. What becomes more difficult is when you take it out and put it somewhere else, put it into an art gallery. I have done work, I think particularly with the Belize work actually, where the work becomes so engrained or embedded in its own little bit of space that you take it out and put it somewhere else and it almost becomes difficult to see what it's actually about. I don't know what would happen about that really.

I1: **I mean that is actually a very interesting observation, actually what happens when these site-responsive works become divorced from...**

R: I mean when I took the Wellcome paintings and showed them in a gallery in Germany, people didn't really get them. They really didn't understand them at all. They thought they were slightly disturbing and wondered why anyone would want to paint them. I don't know. Yes, you can't really know.

I1: **So I mean what you're saying, which is interesting to unpick further down the line but it's interesting to hear, actually from my point of view it's**

interesting, is actually when you're making the work, you are not thinking of the audience. You're fully involved in it and not having that other bit.

R: Yes. I mean the one thing that happens is even if you're working with somewhere or something that's very specific, once it's in the studio, it does, in some sense, separate itself from that. So at that point I'm hoping that the work will begin to have some sort of sense of itself that's not just about Cherryburn or Bewick but at that point it could become something that then has a life beyond the project. But it is quite a difficult thing because a commissioned piece is for a place, whereas this is something will then have another life after it.

I1: **You've said a little bit about the site staff and how you think that's going to develop at Cherryburn and the volunteers. Did we talk about the volunteers? How you might interact with them? You talked about the website, didn't you?**

R: Yes.

I1: **You're interested in that.**

R: Yes. I think that's really useful input to get very early on. I mean just going back to the other question, my initial thought about the Hatton show was to actually recreate the bedroom but I think that's a bit fussy, that you actually make the bedroom the work, with the work in it. I think it's got to have some sort of...

I1: **That would be interesting. We'll see if that happens or not along the run. Okay, I think I'm done, yes.**

I2: **Okay. So I guess we're on to heritage, that's right?**

I1: **Yes, we're on to that, yes.**

I2: **Okay. I mean this is a very open question in the sense that it's not necessarily about your work, it's just a general sense of what does heritage or the word heritage mean to you?**

R: It is interesting. I mean I feel very English I think. It's something that I... I think I feel, as I was talking to Julie about earlier, because I was born in Gateshead and my family have lived up in Northumberland for quite a long time, that was where we came for our holidays. The sense of this area of the country being part of my heritage is something that I feel. But they are vague feelings, they're not specific. They're not really attached to sites as such. I probably have a similar relationship with parts of London as well. It's the sort of thing that gets triggered by songs and music and suddenly you think, "Oh yes, that feels like it's part of what my history is." So that will go from Northumbrian bagpipe music to Madness or something like that. But I do think, not just the idea of heritage but the idea of national identity is something that seems to be really important at the moment and something that is quite a difficult thing to talk about and negotiate really. So I do think this is part of that in a sense and also how we relate to the natural world. Countryside is part of the heritage as well.

I2: Could you just say a little bit more about that sense of difficulty?

R: I think the difficulty is... well certainly with my, I was going to say my generation but the people that I know, my friends and acquaintances, their lives aren't where they were born or where they grew up, not even necessarily with their families. They've moved. They've left the places where their families were. They create different relationships, create different communities. So I think the sense of place is a very difficult one to define. If I have a sense of place in terms of where I am in London at the moment, it doesn't have a long history to it. It doesn't go back generations. It's when we moved there ten years ago. I do find this thing that I have with the North East, Northumberland, quite interesting. I don't quite understand it but it is a very strong feeling that somehow that is part of my heritage. But I think it's the difficulty of actually trying to articulate it as it is. In a way, if someone asked me to write about it, I probably would really think about it and do it but if you can get by without having to do it... I remember, as I was talking to Julie earlier about going through the adoption process. One of the things I really remember about it was you were asked to talk about your childhood and your relationship with your parents in quite a lot of detail. I'd never done it before. I'd never really thought about it. That was really interesting suddenly thinking about how they were as people and how they were as parents. That kind of thing I think is something that you could probably do with that idea of heritage and sense of being in a certain place but I've never done it. I mean I don't know how you...

I1: That's a whole new project, isn't it? It is about where you feel a sense of home is. That's a very strange thing, especially if you don't like the place that you were brought up in, so what does that mean? I mean that's a whole other place, sorry.

I2: No, it's really interesting. It's very hard not to just turn this into a conversation, which is very tempting to do. Okay, so that's a really interesting sense of heritage, of a personal sense of heritage but is there a sense of it being significant for your artistic practice?

R: I think it is but I can't define it. I mean I did a series of paintings of Morris dancers and I felt that that was something, there was this eccentricities of English folk culture that I began to get interested in. It hasn't really gone any further. Things like the bull paintings where you go to farms where they're breeding these animals and they're part of the culture and the landscape of a particular place. So I touched on it in different ways but it's never been an aspect of the work that's been focused on or articulated in any way really.

I1: Sorry, I'm going off piste here, do you think your work is English?

R: Yes, I think it is. I think it's rooted in the 19th century, absolutely. All the collections I've worked with are the legacies of empire. I think one of the things I found interesting is how the paintings become a way of negotiating your relationship with these histories all the time, the complexity of them as they are now. Something like the Natural History collection, that was built up at a point where the world, this infinite place where you could grab anything from anywhere and bring it back and this sense of boundlessness. Now it's framed by conservation, the fragility of the

planet. I find that interesting, the way that these things embody different world views really, yes.

I1: There's quite an interesting question specifically for your work but from an observer point of view I would say your work is very English. I'm not quite sure what I mean by that because obviously it's quite a complex question about what is English and what does that mean but it does feel quite rooted in something about identity.

R: Yes. As I've shifted towards portraiture and the work that I've been doing with the Museum of London, it takes another aspect as well.

I2: I'm just immediately beginning to think about country house collections and the landowner specimen paintings. There's a whole history of that kind of painting, which I'm beginning to see the bull paintings in that context. It's really fascinating.

R: I mean my connection to those things, the way I work with those things is not coming in from a critical point of view. I guess it's more from a surrealist sense of the strangeness of these things that have been built up according to a set of rules that have now gone. You're left with things that work in a completely different way. Like the Horniman, the way all the animals in the stalls are wrapped up in plastic, that's just a practical thing of keeping them safe from bugs and things but they're very strange images. That's the kind of thing I guess I look for, where the things break away from the context that they're in in some way. I think making those paintings and then showing them in the museum along with the objects, it wouldn't have happened before. It wouldn't have occurred to the people working there that that might have been interesting. So that's the sort of thing, little glimpses of things that are there, I guess. It's interesting - again this is a bit off - going to the (unclear 00:57:04) at Venice, there was a lot of work that had this quasi-documentary feel to it where things, situations were just being shown to you in a way that was really powerful, without the artist imposing some sort of narrative on it. I mean there was a film by this Canadian artist and it was a film of a book and a guy turning the pages of the book and talking about it. It was a book about big game hunting. He was one of the guys that showed all these big game hunters. He was just talking about it but page after page of dead zebra, elephants. It was the matter of factness of it that was incredibly powerful. I think that's something that I really connect to, that...

I2: That's really interesting. Last question if I may, I guess we were just interested in getting a sense of what your relationship with heritage sites has been in the past in terms of your personal history. Outside of your artistic practice, what's your general engagement with heritage sites?

R: It hasn't been obsessive I'd say. I mean particularly since having the kids, actually, they're not that interested in them. It's a bit of a torture taking them round them. I mean I was in a show at this place called Calke Abbey, which was really interesting. I enjoyed being involved in that. But I haven't been that involved, it's more the museum collection side.

I2: Yes. I think what we're interested in certainly is the way in which opportunities like this, whether it allows people who have a real existing, long history of being a National Trust visitor, either personally or through their work, allows them to begin to make working relation to them or that it does do what is often the rhetoric, to offer the opportunity for artists to work in a way that they've never thought of before. So I guess it's just that sense of have you been a National Trust member since you were...?

R: I mean I have been a member of the National Trust actually, yes, so it is something I've done but I don't think it's something I've looked at in terms of possibilities for making work actually.

I1: That's interesting because I would have thought that you would. That's quite interesting. At a guess, I'd think you...

R: Yes. I don't know. I mean I was involved in a show at Compton Verney, which is a similar kind of thing. I like the idea of the way a site would engage with the work or influence the way the work operates. I mean it's also the timeframe. I mean I was working with the Natural History Museum for maybe four or five years and then the Horniman for four or five years.

I1: It's a long relationship.

R: They're quite long periods, yes.

I1: That makes sense as to why you think that it's going to carry on afterwards. So actually, for you, it has quite a profound influence on your thinking and your work.

R: Yes.

I1: That's interesting but that's quite interesting that I kind of made an assumption that actually you were seeking out those in order. I did assume that.

R: It's quite fortuitous and arbitrary really where I go next actually.

I1: That's interesting because I thought you had almost like a strategy.

R: To be honest with you, in terms of finding subject matter, strategies doesn't really work for me. It's the unexpected, the thing you're not looking for, which is why the walk thing is interesting because I don't know what I'm looking for. Then you get to a point where you kind of think you know what you're looking for and then it begins to focus what... so when I first visited the Wellcome Collection, I just went through all the cupboards and took hundreds of photographs. It really was like you go out, you grab stuff, you bring it back but the next time I had a much clearer idea about what I was looking for and was able to pinpoint it. Then after I'd started making the work, I knew exactly which object I wanted to go back and re-photograph. But I think that first bit of not having an agenda is actually, I find, quite interesting. It is a bit scary because you think, "What if nothing happens?"

I1: But you're confident that something will happen?

R: Yes. From yesterday I am actually.

I2: Okay.

I1: Good time to finish.

I2: Yes.

R: Okay, good.

I2: Brilliant.

I1: That's really good. Just on a practical note...

[End of Recording]