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**I: = Interviewer**

R: = Respondent.

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- I: Nick Cass, Judith King interviewing Matt Stokes, last interview for Mapping Contemporary Art Project. It's the 18<sup>th</sup> today, 18<sup>th</sup> October. We've quite informal at this stage, we've got less of a series of questions but we have been broadly following the same themes. I suppose the project itself was about getting to grips with how working in heritage affected your practice, what working in heritage means or is like for you, what the longer term impacts are. We also want to have a little thing about what skills you have either developed because of the project or think that you needed within the project. That's the scope of what we're thinking about, is there anything else?**
- I: Yes, having had a gap thinking about the impact it might have had on you or not, or your thinking.**
- I: We don't expect you to remember all those things but we will prompt you as we go through but that's the general scope of what we are thinking about.**
- I: Your general reflections, now you've got distance of how it went and where it could have gone, and what impact it's had.**
- R: Is that the first question?**
- I: Yes.**
- R: What impact it's had, is that the question?**
- I: Yes, let's start with that and you'll probably, will go back into the project and think actually it would have better if we'd done that or... Do you think now that it was an important commission for you and that it will probably, or not... What is the impact it might have had?**

R: I'm just having a quick thinking, thinking back and in terms of impact I suppose one impact that probably is a longer term point and something that was maybe different within my practice which was positive, was working purely on a sound installation. I'd not really up until that point worked purely on a sound installation. Sound, music has been an important factor in many projects but usually it's accompanied by a moving image or something else. This was to past projects commissioned and since then I have had to help and produce other sound, purely sound installations. Although I'd worked with musicians before it was an interesting process working with Jordan and Marty, at times a bit difficult working with them just because we would have meetings and then I would walk away and things were changed, because they were together and I wasn't there.

They would decide something and then suddenly had to come back and something had changed quite radically, or something would have just have appeared and it's like, oh right, hang on a minute. That is partly the nature of the collaborative process and I guess in collaborative processes in the past quite often I've been working with people who aren't necessarily from an Arts cultural background. I have worked with people from an Arts cultural background so there was a bit of grappling with the collaborative process with Jordan and Marty and how that was working. I guess that's the nature of the collaborative process, they're always going to be different and it's going to always change.

Looking back I would definitely have said it was quite ambition to tackle what ended up being a 46 minute piece. I think from Jordan and Marty's point of view they would say that as well. It was quite a task to do that in the timespan. I think there were great benefits to doing the amount of research and in that contact time I had with people in the immediate vicinity of Holy Trinity, how much that actually came through in the final piece I think was probably very little. It was important in terms of Holy Trinity essentially having no audience or very little visibility in the area. Even externally there was a building that sat there but people had forgotten about it and not many people had been through the door for a very long time.

There was this, at the start, idea that by meeting people within the local vicinity that it would start to attract people to the project and then, as a consequence, to the building. I think that did happen and the Soup Suppers has worked really well. In terms of the final piece of work it seemed in some ways hidden. I don't know if that matters, probably not, that it's hidden. I'm trying to think of other things I've mentioned in terms of impact.

**I: Let me ask you a bit about that, does that concern you? Do you feel that was your remit?**

R: In some ways I possibly felt it was a little bit of my remit in terms of from the initial site visit with the artists who were interested in the Holy Trinity commission, the way that Amanda would talk about the building and where the Church Conservation Trust were at with the building and what they thought about it and how it's positioned within the community. It certainly seemed like that was a big part of the commission, or indeed what they would like to achieve to keep or establish contact links with the immediate community, as that was essentially the nature of the building historically.

Does it concern me? I think I've talked about it with other past projects that probably 95% of the work and the things that go into the project, 90-95% is hidden away. You see about 5-10% of what's gone into the project, in terms of the final piece. In some ways I'm used to that. It always feels a bit disappointing and it feels like there's a lot of leg work that's gone into the project which then melts and fades away.

**I: I think we talked about that a little bit, didn't we? It was very clear that for Holy Trinity community development was as much a part of the project as was the final artwork. I remember talking to you a little bit before that but for you the artwork is the artwork, and the other is just the development to get to that point. I think that's it, does that still feel right?**

R: Yes, sort of, I suppose it depends how the Soup Suppers were dealt with, were they just part of the process or were they as much part of the work in terms of, yes, it's about developing the work in doing that but were those moments as much part of the work? Sometimes I find that line quite difficult to navigate really, like what's the project, i.e. it's the final thing that goes on display, is that the artwork or is essentially a lot of the other stuff behind it as much part of the artwork. It's just often there's not the capacity to be able to present that to a wider audience. It's a very small amount of people that see that little bit and experience that little bit.

Sometimes that's only through something as formal as a publication that you can go, well this is what happened, this is the project with all these little things that happened along the way and all the stuff that's collected. Again it's sometimes the research, the things that get thrown up in the research or that you find out about are incredibly interesting and again that disappears but it's as much part of the story to get to that point, I think.

**I: I think interestingly actually it doesn't really matter, trying to seek a definition of which is the artwork and which isn't is kind of interesting to think about. I don't think it really matters because for the people who went to the Soup Suppers that was quite profound and engaging with art making. Whether you define the Soup Suppers as art or not it's still part of that project. In many ways maybe it doesn't matter so much.**

**I: It's interested because we are talking about this process versus product because often for the commissioner the product is the thing that they focus on and say that they want but the argument that an intermediary or something, is that actually the process is just as valuable as that. It's quite interesting to hear from your point of view.**

**I: Interesting, in a way is that why Holy Trinity is perhaps quite different from the other case studies because for them they were more into the process, weren't they? It was actually all about that engagement. It's not that the artwork wasn't important because it clearly was. It was to get to that point, into the church with something them but for them, that process to get there was really central wasn't it?**

R: Yes, yes. I think sometimes that's a blurry line in commissions and artwork that's produced where there from the start the desire to have a strong socially engaged

element to it. It's like, well then what's being asked. You could run a project that's just socially engaged and that is the process is it, and that's what it is about. Like you say when there's a product there's something that's wanted at the end, something that's tangible that people come and visit over a long period of time. Sometimes those two can be slightly conflicting.

**I: Gibside very definitely wanted a product, they wanted something that... Even when an interpretive programme was suggested it came out that they were really very interested in having artist's talks, having engagement. (unclear 00:13:44) wanted the thing in the landscape.**

**I: Which is often what those organisations want. They don't see the value of the process.**

R: I think I was, inevitably it was like most project I pull apart lots of elements of the final thing, the final piece, some parts of it I liked, some parts of it I didn't like as much. That came out of the collaborative process, bits of it were taken one way by Marty and joined bits of it. I had a bit more of a steer on and took them another way, but overall I think the way it worked and functioned in Holy Trinity was good. It didn't impose itself on the space and it felt like it brought the space to life which I hadn't really... I mean stuff has happened within the church but it animated the space in a way that I thought was positive and did work for the audiences.

I did have a few people say we went to go and visit and have connections with some of them, either they were born there or had some family links and they came away saying I didn't know about this bit of history of Sunderland, or didn't know about Holy Trinity and they've maybe seen the piece work but didn't know anything about the place.

**I: You said it animated it, and it doesn't really matter but I'm curious, can you say a bit more what you mean by that, that you felt it animated with church?**

R: I suppose very simply in that it was a space where generally no one would go into, not much happened in that space. Obviously it was just before the conservation was happening. It was very much in a state of flux, with scaffolding at one end and very crumbly, not slightly, very crumbly. I suppose the idea that, well I guess Amanda from the very start was saying that the idea of bringing a sculptural work in would have been a very different aspect and then possibly felt a bit more alien within the space. I don't know.

**I: It's fine.**

**I: Can I get back to the brief and it's this thing about engaging with the community and social engaging practice, I just want to unpick that a bit. The brief have got a focus on community engagement. I'm quite curious as to how you actually read and receive that and manage to relate it to your practice and whether you consider your practice socially engaged or not. I'm just curious about that?**

R: I think it's quite a complex thing, socially engaged practice covers such a broad range of, I think sometimes I'm quite wary of that phrase being used because I

think there can be the implication that the artist is going to come, they're going to work and find this community that sometimes, particularly in the case of the East End, it's seen to be quite fractured. That's historically how that area's developing. One person, an artist going into a place is not suddenly going to bring together all these groups. If someone is going to do that, then that's a really long term project to undertake. Looking at a year, or less than a year of developing something, that's not really going to happen. I've kind of forgotten what the original question was there.

**I: I was just saying when you saw that brief, it was so focussed on the community, how you received that and thought, yes, that is interesting I can make, I can work with that, maybe we talked about that in previous interviews. I'm just unpicking a little bit more.**

R: It was something I thought it, well I suppose in the case of Holy Trinity it didn't surprise me that being an essential part of it and it didn't daunt me in anyway. I think during the site visit it seemed Amanda was already mentioning groups that she had had contact with and so it felt like it wasn't just going to be starting from scratch. Amanda had identified some groups already and building those relationships was good. Out of those then maybe other relationships would develop. I suppose it did have an impact on work. Also it depends on what you're talking about in terms of the community, are we just talking about the people who live right next to or within the small area of Holy Trinity, like the residents, or are we talking about the people who work in that area.

Jordan was just on the edge of that area where his studio was, so in some ways he was also part of that community. It's quite a loose thing...

**I: Yes, what defines the community. I just want to ask one more question about your artistic practice. Collaboration is a really key part of your artistic practice, you talked about Jordan and Marty making decisions that you came back and thought, where's the control in this and how did you feel... Did you feel compromised with the work, or did you feel the work was compromised?**

R: There were some compromises and again I think inevitably with something that's collaborative, in that I was working with two musicians who are going to have a certain way of working or thinking about things, which is probably different to the way I would think about things and also I'm not a musician. Again I'm going to think quite differently about the making of music. I mean definitely, there were points where I would quite clearly say if I didn't like something.

**I: You were very clear about that?**

R: Yes, and as it got towards the end we were also running quite short of time to get it all produced and so when it came back to the last track there was a definite, right, we need to cut. It was the last section because we pretty much worked on it in sequence so as you hear it that was the sequence of it. The last section which was the most difficult to grapple with and I could see why, but Marty said he struggled with the bit which was about current times, modern day because it's so present. Sometimes it's easier in a way to reflect on the past and to respond to

that than the stuff that's actually going on. Also just in terms of the instrumentation of it. There were various instruments but I remember listening to it and going, it sounds far too like some kind of Christian rock track.

**I: Oh right, okay.**

R: We need to take all of that out and rethink it. It got part way there but that was the bit for me that if I could have cut any bit out, that would have been it. It would have lost that event though.

**I: We didn't get that at all, it was both your work.**

R: It was just that there was just this... I remember hearing it for the first time. We talked about some things and they'd recorded and I knew when possible I wanted to be there for recording but I don't think I even knew. They were like, we need to record it and I listened to it and I just remember thinking feeling like the blood was draining as I listened to it thinking this is so not what I thought it would be. Also, lyrically the conversation we'd had and just too many things were going all over the place.

**I: You had to pull it right back?**

R: I was like... And I probably didn't say it in simple terms that this is awful but I was just like, we need to really pare this back because it can't be used as it is.

**I: They were the things at the back going on.**

R: There was also trying to do it in a delicate enough manner but in some ways it's like for people living in the area. It ended up being an anthemic kind of piece, the end bit. I still don't like it but...Every time I listen to it, it just screams out at me. I can't listen to it because I guess I know the process and how it did sound and I find it very difficult to disassociate from how it initially sounds.

**I: It's not like that at all.**

R: I had to apologies to the musicians that we just completely cut out after the pre-recording. It was like, I'm really sorry but we just really had to pare this back.

**I: That's really interesting. I suppose I've been looking back at the groupings and the questions and the significant aspect of this is thinking about heritage and how we started off by asking what your general understand of heritage was and about what it is about working with heritage whatever we understand that to mean. I guess I wonder whether you have any reflections on the idea of heritage more broadly in your practice now having gone through this project. We know that working in heritage in various ways has been part of your practice and you mentioned it this morning about whether you would go on to do another one. I guess it's just that I can ask it as a more specific question if you want me to but it was just a reflection on heritage more broadly, your understandings, your relationship with it as an artist?**

R: Yes, I mean like you say it depends on the definition of heritage but it's been an important part of my practice for a long time and whether that's the thinking of heritage as being something very much of the past, or even stuff that's happened quite recently but is still a part of the heritage of a particular place or a particular community. I think the stage I'm at now I still think heritage will continue to play a really important role in my practice and what I do. Before we came here I did mention that I felt I wanted a break from heritage commissions, those which are kind of... Partly it's a feeling oh am I just, to put it really crudely, in a churn of heritage commissions.

You research into a particular collection, a museum collection or whatever and a bit of history on a particular building, you produce a commission and that has a particular time span of about a year or ten months or so. That commissions over, it goes up, it's over. I'd quite like not do that for a little way and also I'm in a fortunate enough position that Paul Hamlyn is allowing me to do that and take a bit of a break from that and to make more self-directed decisions about what I might choose to respond to or not.

I: **That's really interesting actually.**

R: There are things that have come out of past projects as well where I feel at the time I haven't been able to take certain ideas up that have come out of projects which I would like to but hasn't been the possibility. Whether that comes down to capacity in terms of funding, time, inevitably you get to the end of a project, particularly when there's quite a lot of research been involved, I suppose like Holy Trinity, some of that is presented and visible in the end product, the end artwork and some of it's not, but there's other really interesting stuff which I would like to take up.

Some of it I suppose, the idea of actually being able to revisit things connected to a particular place or a particular bit of heritage.

I: **Can you just say, partly because I don't know what's Paul Hamlyn, have you got some funding from them for research or is it a project?**

R: Yes, so Paul Hamlyn awards for artists, have given money, so three years, it's spread over three years. £20,000 per year, so that's £60,000 over three years.

I: **Fantastic.**

R: No strings attached at all, so it's why it's so unique that you're given the money and then whether that's supporting living or research, whether that is supporting the production of work.

I: **Okay, and one of reasons I wanted to ask that was because in a sense quite a lot of the debate that came out of the conference was about whether these types of commissions, whether it's a churn of responding to this and then responding to that are becoming increasingly narrow and have a lot less space to support the artist doing what they actually want to do which is research. In a sense that is completely at the other end isn't it, this is funding with no strings or a certain type of commission which actually**

**doesn't necessarily allow you to do what you said, to make some self-directed decisions. In a way that also inflects on what type of briefs...**

R: I suppose that's just generally part of the commissioning process though, even if you took the heritage part away, it's being commissioned to make it work, there's something at the end of it. You're going to have to make decisions at some point or another and that's always, I think of some past projects, it's that moment of going well this research could carry on and on and on but decisions have to be made because something has to be produced, whatever that is. Sometimes that can be really positive because I suppose like with Holy Trinity, at the start I had the sense it would be a sound installation I hadn't made a sound installation before.

I obviously didn't know how it was going to sound or what it was going to be like at the end. I suppose just to relate that to Holy Trinity is that I suppose it was... How to put this so it doesn't sound too crude, well it probably won't sound crude is that it was probably made quite palatable for an audience, the Holy Trinity piece in that it was quite easy to get lyrically and things. Whereas maybe if it was a piece for more of a gallery setting it might not have that same outcome. Particularly because you make a piece, whether it's made for English Heritage or some other organisations, National Trust it is probably going to have to work for a particular audience and that's probably laid out at the very beginning.

If you maybe wanted to test the boundaries of that audience that maybe becomes more problematic.

I: **That's interesting.**

I: **Yes, that's very interesting because it's what we're coming back to when we interview the partners is audience and, well there's two things you said that I want to go back to which is do you feel therefore that you were compromised, your work was compromised or you were aware that you had to make it...**

R: Yes, well that was interesting, going back to the bit that I don't like of the piece of work, the end of it. When spoke with Marty and Jordan about it and we were trying to thrash out what it was going to sound like, I don't want to say there was quite an element of pessimism in the way I was... We were almost verging on something that was, well I don't know, I remember in the conversation we were talking a bit and trying to work out that maybe there's guitars in there and it's all getting a bit Joy Division-esque, and I think Marty went, I can't make something that's so naked, or feel so pessimistic or grey.

I: **He didn't feel he could?**

R: Yes, he's from Sunderland and he and his family had attachment to the East End and things, so for him it was quite... I think he felt he had to make something more uplifting so that there was a conflict there because we were like, yes, it could sound like, we need a glimpse of hope within this but let's not make it too... I think when Marty went away he had a different moment when he just thought, actually I can't make it sound like that, it's going to have to sound more like this. That was

quite interesting, the moment of conflict within the piece. I'm slightly forgetting the question you were asking now.

**I: I was just saying whether you felt it was compromised by the audience. I think I'm particularly interested in this thing about if you talk to the organisations, or the businesses they do say our audience. They have expectations about their audience. They know who their audience is, but do they and the expectations of what that audience can encounter and where it goes over a boundary and it becomes... I find it quite interesting as to who's making those decisions.**

R: I guess it's slightly complicated and a bit more complex than just the idea of compromise because working with an organisation such as the organisations that were involved in the commission, and working for example, for a gallery and producing work for a gallery, is that I suppose there is an element of what is the audience expectation when they go into that place, into that building or grounds or whatever, in terms of they're going to see. I guess because of that place... Going back to Amanda in the early stage talking about if that audience is suddenly presented with something that's really confrontational and really difficult, I suppose for the organisation that does create problems because then how is that organisation being seen and framed if they've asked an artist to produce, or allowed an artist to produce something like that, will that put people off?

I suppose there's all sorts of things going on and Amanda she was quite clear from an early stage about her thoughts on certain elements of contemporary art.

**I: It's a tricky one isn't it, we were talking about this yesterday. I was saying to Nick yesterday that it feels like sometimes they are the gatekeepers of what the audience can. Well they are, they do make decisions about what audience can take. I find that uneasy, but obviously I inhabit that in between world where I'm trying to find artists that would understand that but at the same time are not going to produce a joyful Christian thing, do you know what I mean?**

R: I suppose in relation to these commissions, Gibside was interesting because how do you deal with a figure like Mary Eleanor Bowes? You could obviously bring up some quite tricky subject matter and it's like should that be shied away from by the organisation and the artist or not? It's like how does that get dealt with. At some point should some of us say that's the subject matter... The thing that immediately came to mind, should that attempt to be tackled by the organisation or presented in a way in which it's not just, look at our lovely grounds...

**I: I think it is really an interesting question and that kind of thing touches on some of the conversations we've had about how the artists at Gibside responded to that, how, while Gibside set out that they wanted people to understand the Mary Eleanor Bowes story, actually when they were talking about the success or not of the project, it has always been about numbers and nothing to do with the shifting attitude of understanding domestic violence and things like that. It is really interesting.**

**I: There's a confusion there.**

**I: Yes, I think there is a confusion and again it comes back to that line about is the site, in an abstract sense, the place to provoke and challenge people and if it is to what point should they be provoked and challenged. There's probably two specific questions that I want to ask and one which relates to a very specific research question in the bid which I've just looked at. Does taking on a project like this generate for you new creative approaches or new strategies that you can then carry forward into your other practice, whether that's a commission or not. Does it generate new approaches for you to do these kinds of things?**

R: How would I approach a project, yes, they're all different. You go into a different place, but in terms of the paths I take with choosing research as a major part of how the project develops and how that moulds the final form of the project, not just in terms of content but in terms of whether film, event or whatever is going to use, that's not going to change. Because it's a commission I've had to say, it's going to be sound installation and the form it was going to take, that was more laid out to begin with. In many ways we'd prefer it. It's quite difficult for an organisation to go, well I'm not going to tell you what it is. Again that's sometimes the conflict, it's actually can I just work and then figure out what the thing is going to be and that's getting the trust from the organisation.

I don't think that's going to change, obviously in terms of what you mentioned before, purely working with sound as an installation. I'd use the word sound installation quite loosely with [unclear 00:43:57] because it was a piece of music, although the way it was constructed there were elements with the aid of speakers relative to the handbells and the way it was recording with the handbells using eight mics and so on. It was a kind of sound installation but I suppose, this was the question that came up from transferring it to the Hatton Gallery, it's like, it's not in Holy Trinity, it doesn't have those connections and the acoustic and everything any more the building offered. Is it just a piece of music now, once it's put onto a CD, it's in stereo form, so it is just a piece of music.

It's like, is that alright, I don't have a problem with it, and maybe that's good. Usually I steered clear of that thing of a project being produced and then going, oh, but let's just put it onto something that people can take away and listen to at home because it's going to be quite different to try and think of an older piece of work that [unclear 00:45:01] like Cantata Profana, the extreme metal vocalists, because I always wanted to keep it as this eight channel installations and there's video screens and film screens involved in that as well. There was a point of actually, could we put it onto a vinyl, just as it's own track. This is one of the few times that's happened, it has happened once before, but in some way it's that letting go. I think as artists we get quite hung up sometimes on that and it's that balance between actually is it because the concept of the piece of work needs to be installed in a certain way and these things happen and I think sometimes yes. Sometimes I think that letting go is going actually it's fine for it to be out there in the world in a different form. It's still fine, it still works.

**I: That's been an interesting change then hasn't it in a way, in that for this you think actually, yeah it's fine. It's going to be a CD.**

R: Otherwise what life is it going to have now, after Hatton and things, because it's made for that building. It was like, to be honest it's probably going to sit in a box or on my computer as a file and then ten years later the hard drive it's on, I won't be able to plug into it because the formats have changed and it's like, I don't know... You just go, it's done and in some ways being put onto a CD and letting that go and run out, whatever people think of it, it's like is that just a bit of a full stop on it. That's that done now, it's fine if it never has any presence again as an installed piece.

I: **Interesting.**

I: **Now this is interesting because we touched on this yesterday with (unclear 00:47:16) and he felt it was an indulgence to have, not an indulgence, he was worried and concerned that works, such as a physical work is dismantled and then goes.**

R: But it happens so often .

I: **Yes.**

I: **He was horrified at the idea that Fiona's piece, you would spend all that money and then not having anything to show for it at the end. For him it was value for money, if we pay for something we want 15 years' worth of work out of it.**

R: I think that's the thing. I've generally not made, not so often made physical things. I think particularly because we're for quite a time producing more moving image work and generally they are now files on a hard drive and they have this physical... Yes, some of them still go into gallery shows, some of them they were just made for a particular thing. In some ways I can't see why they need to be shown again, it's like they've had their function, they've functioned and done what they were meant to do and now that's it.

I: **What's going to happen let's say you have a big survey, you have a show and you want to do Holy Trinity that's going to be...**

R: Again it's like I suppose in the, I'm going to use this horrible word but (unclear 00:49:11) survey show or...

I: **Retrospective...**

R: That's hopeful isn't it, but if you were to take and use this very generally in the view of an artist it's like there are lots of divisions within that artist's practice and thinking that the stuff that's produced for, I'm going to call it public commission might be quite different to what I was saying earlier, produced for a gallery space. Actually would those works necessarily ever come into a gallery space in that context.

I: **Interesting.**

R: I would be quite wary of doing that.

**I: Yes, okay, so were you worried about bringing it into the Hatton?**

R: Was I worried about bringing it into Hatton? To be honest, no because it was being installed in the context of Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage experience so in some ways I wasn't really that bothered by it.

**I: Okay.**

R: Initially I did think this is going to be weird but (unclear 00:50:44).

**I: That's interesting too because Fiona was very bothered about that.**

R: Yes.

**I: Which is fine.**

**I: Absolutely, totally, everybody's...**

**I: Part of that, we were discussing a little bit yesterday as you said conceptually it only worked in relation to the Orangery so it was actually... The more I think about it the more I see it as (unclear 00:51:14) having brought the plants to be there, and so the Orangery was a much part of that thing and even though I knew it at the time I understand that more and more as I think about that work. However there was also something that Fiona said which was about production values in the sense of she constructed the thing which only needed to survive for however many weeks in that space. If she was making a thing that was going to last for X number of years she may have made it very differently and I think also was a really interesting point around moving things.**

R: I suppose in the sense of the Hatton show being put on there was, with all the work she could say whether it suited Philip's, whether it was what I was doing. I mean the weight of the work is going to be completely different. In the case of (unclear 00:52:19) it's like if you're reading it within the building that's massively different to listening within a space that has absolutely no connection. The weight of it just is completely different. The simple thing of the acoustics, because it was designed with the acoustic in mind because it had a very long delay and it changes once you bring it into another space. If it had been a much drier space, in the Hatton, with lots of soft furnishings around or whatever then again it would sound probably, I don't know, it would have changed again.

**I: I remember talking to you about this that I was very struck by the way that the installation in the church made me walk around for quite a long time just listening to it in that space, and the very three dimensional and body way. It made you do that. In a way, in the gallery space I don't know that you have the same feeling.**

**I: I agree, for me it made me look at the architecture of the church a lot more and have a connection with the functioning of things that I was looking at. Whereas in the gallery I didn't have that reference. I knew the work though.**

**I: We've probably got about eight minutes to run. I've got one specific question and this is my last one really, it's a specific question and it doesn't need a very complicated answer. One of the aspects of navigating these projects is your skills, the skills of the artist in a very prosaic sense, in terms of, I guess it's just thinking about what skills is it that you bring to the project, or bring to projects like this and part of this is, again, it's the everydayness, in terms of training artists, how do we support artists to do these kinds of things better. That's not only about creative practice but for skills more broadly. What skills do you bring to these projects or do you think are needed?**

R: Yes, that's an interesting one.

**I: Organisations very definitely think and part of this is the creative bit, but they're very definite, we want an artist to do... It's that moment that they decide they want an artist and it's partly what skills are they reaching for that they don't have within their organisation.**

**I: Yes, I think to articulate that is quite difficult.**

R: Yes, I suppose because over time and the way my practice has developed over time in terms of this very broad research process. I guess I've sort of honed that over time to be quite multifaceted in the way that I'm quite happy to go into a community, a room full of people. Outwardly I'm not particularly an extravagant, extrovert person, I'd say I'm quite a shy person. I'm quite happy to go into a room full of people I don't know and just talked to them. Equally I'm quite happy to go into archives and I'll sit there for ages going through all the materials. I suppose it's that multifaceted research approach on one scale and then being able to go I've got all this stuff, and then them trying to pull it into something that becomes tangible and manageable and I suppose hopefully conceptually tight.

**I: I don't want to put words in your mouth but part of that is about creative practice in terms of bringing something to a conceptual fruition, if that's the right word, but is there an element of project management in terms of organising all those details?**

R: Yes, definitely I've learnt over time to project manage and that has always become a big part of the projects that I work on, this idea of project management which sounds really dull and non-creative. Whether that's having to do pre-production prep on a film or managing budgets and horrible spreadsheets for budgets...

**I: That's why your proposals are like this...?**

R: It sounds so dull and non-creative but in order to do particularly film works when you've got stuff going off all over and it has to work in a certain budget then, yeah, that does become part of the skill set. Also I suppose I don't have a particular way of working in terms of a medium that I feel bound to. I don't feel bound to making a film or bound to making an event or objects or whatever that is.

**I: That is brilliant, that's useful and partly when I think about that question I think all the way back to my level one Fine Artists Professional Practice module and I think what is it that I need to be doing in that module, just the very first steps to say, yeah, I want to think what drawing means for your practice but what a practice is involves a huge range of things that, yes, you need to be able to read an Excel spreadsheet and understand budgets so... Okay, that's fine, for me.**

R: I'm going to leave that on the Excel spreadsheet...

**I: No, I'm not, I'm going to bring it back. I'm bringing back.**

R: That's my skill as an artist.

**I: No, your skill as an artist actually is, you said a really interesting thing which I think is that you think you're quite a shy person, you feel as if you're quite shy and yet you can go in and talk to people. I think why you're thought of as somebody who works well within this... Well that sounds awful as well, it all sounds very boring. Where you're brilliant at this sort of work is that you're interested in people and it's people's history it seems to me that is what you really get. You're interested in people, you're not just playing lip service to, oh I work with the community. You're actually drawing from it. You are actually listening and absorbing and it is very evident that that absorption of that listening goes into the making of the work. That is unusual. That's where you're unusual and that's why you keep getting the commissions...**

R: There was something else that popped into my head then, and this sounds as not really a skill, it's just something that immediately popped into my head. As an artist it doesn't sound weird, but I don't go in, I don't have any expectation of what I'm going to make. I go in without expectation of it and it's like I don't know what this thing's going to be. I don't know how well it's going to work. It's only through the process of, which does happen quite often, I start to meet people who become involved in the project, even if it's in a very slight way. It's one meeting and the conversation trail's all over the place, but the expectation develops quite often through those meetings to the point where, as an artist I become quite concerned.

Obviously then if quite a few people have been involved it's like what is their expectation of the piece. It quite often doesn't come out of my expectation, it's like what is their expectation and there's a management of expectation. Also for the organisation as well, obviously there's an expectation but quite often it's the expectation of the people who have become involved in the project however heavily or slight that is, I think that for me that's quite often the most difficult bit to grapple with.

**I: Yes, we'll leave it like that then.**

**I: Yes.**

**I: That's brilliant.**

**I: That's a perfect place to stop. I think you do have a huge sense of responsibility and that comes over as well. I think that is what people recognise in your work that there is going to be a sense of responsibility but equally I'm more concerned that that responsibility doesn't start being exploited.**

R: I think that's probably why I'm wanting like through Paul Hamlyn...

**I: Yes, you need that.**

R: ... maybe just have some studio time, because after a while I'll go... I suppose going through that on each project that worry about what are they going to come up with next. I'd quite like to do something where I don't have that.

**I: Maybe you'll do something really contentious, bigger than life, violent and... Well I don't mean that your work isn't, oh I'm getting myself into a...**

**I: I'm going to stop this here.**

**[End of Recording]**