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**KEY:**

Cannot decipher = (unclear + time code)

Sounds like = [s.l + time code]

**I1: = Interviewer**

**I2: = Interviewer**

R: = Respondent

NT = National Trust Staff Member

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**I1: Okay.**

**I2: Rebecca has got some of these, you know.**

**I1: Has she?**

**I2: I think new ones.**

**I1: Brill. Okay. I think that's alright. Okay. We are recording. Do you want me to do the formal bit of the introduction?**

**I2: Yes, please.**

**I1: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of our research project. The purpose of this conversation is to collect information about your experience of creating new artwork for a heritage site. You may decide you do not want to answer some questions. That's fine. This is part of a longitudinal research process, so we hope to follow up on some of these questions in later interviews. Given that you are a named artist in the project, the information you provide will be used in a range of outputs and research, conference papers, journal articles, published material, etc. Okay?**

R: Yes. Fine.

**I1: Do you want to start?**

**I2: I will. We are with Fiona Curran, who has the commission at Gibside. Fiona, what do you think the word heritage means, to you, particularly? I know. That's a big one, isn't it?**

R: That's a big one. That's quite a difficult question, actually.

**I2: We can come back to them. If you want time to think about that? Do you want to think about that one?**

R: Yes. Sorry, a lama just distracted me.

**I2: Oh yes. There is a lama there.**

R: Just this head appeared across the wall. Sorry. Let's carry on. Yes, can I come back to that one, just because that's such a big question? Let's warm up a bit.

**I1: Would it be worth then, going through the commissioning process?**

R: That might be nice.

**I1: Because, the follow-on questions in section one follow on from the idea of commission.**

**I2: I think that's better. Let's remember that, actually, the first question about heritage is too big.**

**The section two. Actually, if you think about how the commission, from the beginning, with the brief, if you could give us some thoughts about how the brief was for you? Was it informative? Was it helpful? Was it directional? Too directional? Any reflections on the brief?**

R: I really liked the brief. I thought it was quite thorough. It really gave you a good enough start, with the background to the site, the history of the site. It was quite directional, to some extent, because with the Gibside one in particular, they flagged up specifically that they wanted you to respond to the life of Mary Eleanor Bowes. They also specifically said about the year of the celebration of the suffragette movement. There were, obviously, these two very directional kinds of points in the brief.

I find that really useful, personally, because, I think, sometimes when you are faced with the possibility of responding to a place, you are often, especially in a short timeframe, the possibilities are so open and so endless, that actually, to narrow down the frame of reference fairly quickly can be a really difficult process. I have to say, in this particular project and this context, I thought the brief was really good in that sense, of giving you some parameters to begin with. Yes. Is that okay?

**I2: Yes. Can I just ask about other briefs that you might have?**

R: Yes.

**I2: That directional thing, because it is directional, is that true for other commissions? You said particularly this one. Is there, you know...?**

R: I think, it varies depending on the commission. I wouldn't say that would be a model I would always want to follow or subscribe to. I think, with this one, it is probably to do with the timeframe. There was quite a tight turnaround between being approached about it, and invited to apply, and having to come up with an initial response and thought. Then, doing the site visit, but only really having a

week after the site visit to pull it together. That's why I say in the context of this brief, with the timeframe, I think that directional thing was really useful.

However, in other projects I have done where maybe that turnaround time hasn't been so tight, and you've had more opportunity to go and visit the site, reflect on it, do a bit more research, etc., that maybe I wouldn't have welcomed so much that narrowing down. I think it really depends. Each project is different.

**I2: The timeframe, which you've referenced, how did that feel, for you?**

R: It was tight. It was definitely-

**I2: Was it too tight?**

R: Probably, a little bit. Certainly, again in this context, because I was given the opportunity to respond to the three different briefs, although I was invited specifically to apply for Gibside, it was opened up that you could apply for the others. In fact, I did choose to apply for Cherryburn, as well. I suppose, in that initial response time and turnaround, it was quite tight to actually...

You know, that was my decision. I could have, obviously, just decided to just go for the one. But actually, because I was interested in two sites, it was quite a tight turnaround to do some preliminary research. Enough to even know whether I was going to be interested. Because, I mean, that's it, isn't it? You have to start with the preliminary stuff to think, "Is this even going to be of interest for me to pursue it further?" After that initial thing on both sides, I thought, "Oh yes. Both of these are actually really fantastic sites, and I'm really interested in them myself. I am going to develop two projects." Then, was given the opportunity to choose one to go forward.

Yes, it probably wasn't long enough. But, then I did it, and it was okay. We are here now, and I am really excited. It is like everything, isn't it? In the past, when I have done these kinds of projects, I've had more time to develop. That doesn't necessarily mean, retrospectively, that that was a better process. Actually, sometimes, maybe having a short timeframe, having some parameters, and having to just respond much more quickly to it is a good thing.

**I2: It's interesting that you say that. Having the choice of three, was that helpful? Or, how did you respond to that, because obviously, you responded to two?**

R: Yes.

**I2: Can you reflect upon that, if we had just said one?**

R: Well, again, I suppose that's the thing, isn't it? If you had only invited me to apply for the one, and said, "We'd like you to apply for this", and I didn't know about the others, I would have just responded to Gibside, and that would have been that. In a way, having those other things on the table, obviously, you are going to just go and have a look at them. Then definitely, we are here at Cherryburn now, and this definitely stood out to me as another place that I would be interested in.

At that point, because the invitation was there to apply for more than one, it was kind of, well, at this stage, the preliminary stage, I am going to do that, because maybe I'll get one of them. But, I wouldn't say it would have been detrimental not

to have them offered up to me, because I would have just been like, "Okay. I have been invited to apply for this one thing." Then, I would have put my energy into the single project.

**I2: Yes. Do you want me to carry on with that one?**

**I1: Yes.**

**I2: Site visits. Were they helpful? I am just particularly thinking about Gibside. How was that? Are there any reflections on that that we could learn from?**

**R:** Yes. A site visit is always incredibly helpful. Obviously, sort of being there in situ was brilliant, on one level. On another level, I think there were a few things about the day that I found a little bit tricky. The first was the scheduling of it ending up being quite truncated, and a bit tight. I mean, that was partly just down to factors like, somebody's train was delayed, and so the start of the day was a bit delayed. That sort of truncated everything else. You know, these things happen.

Then, somebody had booked really quite an early train back, so everything got a bit condensed. It felt a little bit like we didn't really have the opportunity to explore as much of the site as I would have liked to, personally. There were a couple of places there that I had anticipated in advance I wanted to go and see, like the stables, for example, and we didn't get there. That was a little bit frustrating on the day. Because, again, the tight timeframe meant I couldn't come back again before the submission point, that truncating was slightly frustrating on the day.

I think, the other thing I found a little bit difficult, well, not necessarily difficult, but just, I'd not experienced this before with previous projects, was all four shortlisted artists being together on the day, going around together. It was, yes, like I say, I don't want to use the word difficult. That is too extreme, actually. Shall I just wait for this to pass?

**I1: Yes.**

[Break in conversation 0:09:38 – 0:09:50]

**R:** Yes. I would use the word awkward. It was a slightly socially awkward situation. Everyone was just, you know, slightly uncomfortable, I think, in terms of not quite knowing how to interact with one another. Of course, the elephant in the room was that everybody wants to know what everyone is thinking about and doing, but that is the one thing, obviously, no one was really talking about. The conversations we were having were sort of, you know, all skirting around this thing. You can imagine. It just made for a slightly awkward social experience.

**I2: Yes. What about that time we had a dedicated...? How did that work, because that was new, for me, a sort of dedicated half-hour, where you could ask questions without anybody around?**

**R:** Yes. Again, I think, probably two sides to that. One of which was, I think that was really useful, and I really welcomed the opportunity to do that. The downside to that, in the context, again, of the day, was because the timeframe got truncated; we ended up doing it outside while the other artists were very close. Even though you were kind of on your own with the team, there was this strange kind of

situation, again, of the waiting period when you weren't meeting. The three artists who weren't meeting with the team were just a few yards away, kind of thing.

There was also, actually, I probably would flag up, just thinking about how you are trying to record everything, that there was also a slight element, which we did laugh about, of the feeling that you were starting the interview process. Even though we knew, and I remember you saying, "It's not the interview." But, of course, the set-up felt a little bit like you were in the waiting room area. Then, you got your, "It's your turn", and off you went. You sort of sat down, and the team were there, and you had to start asking questions. There was a definite feeling of, "I have got to be asking the right questions here. Are my questions going to make an impression?"

I mean, you know, you are trying to rationalise that, and go, "Look. This isn't the interview. Don't be silly. Just fire off any questions that are on your mind, and think about things that you might need to know now that are going to help you write the final application." But, I just think there was an element of that.

**I2: Yes. It is very tricky, that thing, because there is a practical element to all of this. You can't, actually, sometimes have dedicated days for each artist when you are working in a working environment. There is a practical thing. I think, we forget, that actually, bringing everybody together, and hoping that everybody is going to get all on, and it is going to be all lovely, is a little naive, perhaps, on our part. I mean we do that with fellowships. We have a meal, and everybody said it was torturous. We will stop doing that. Everybody didn't want to drink too much, and everybody was worried. I get that.**

R: Yes. But equally, as an artist, I totally see it, like you said, from the logistics point of view, and the practical side of it, especially because we all live in different parts of the country. Yes, of course, it makes perfect sense to organise a day when we all come up together and have a tour around. Resource wise, it totally makes sense. I just...

**I2: It is on the experience side.**

R: Yes.

**I2: I think that's interesting.**

**I1: Yes. It is, definitely.**

**I2: It is interesting.**

**Just to carry on from that then, the interviews. Anything that you would reflect upon, if you can remember all of that? Is there anything that you would reflect upon, around interviews? You were asked to go through your proposal, talking us through, so there was a presentation element, and then, a teasing out of questions.**

R: Yes, followed by questions. To be honest, that just felt like a standard, formal interview situation. I don't think there was anything tricky about that. I think, I remember emailing in advance about the presentation thing, and asking, "Is there a timeframe for this? How long? How short?" Getting a very vague answer back. Again, I thought, "Well, this could be deliberate. This is a test." Because you do

get that with interviews, don't you? Where it is a bit like, "We are not going to tell you how long." But, I did ask. I remember, I emailed twice with a, "Is there a specific time allocation?" It was definitely a, "No, you can just present to us."

**I2: Then, when you came, we said, "Forty minutes."**

R: Yes. Exactly.

**I2: Okay. I think that's a good reflection, actually.**

**I1: Yes, because it could have been 15 minutes, or 30, or 45. It is very different.**

**I2: Yes, because we did say then, "Actually, we need to ask some questions." I think there was an issue there.**

R: Yes. I think, especially if you are expected to do a visual presentation of some kind, I think it's really important to know how long, the top end of what that should be, because otherwise you are going to end up either not doing the presentation you planned, or you are going to rush, you know, whatever. I think, it's just really helpful if you are told, "No more than 10 minutes", or, "No more than 15", or whatever.

**I2: Okay.**

**I1: Can I just add and say something about this? This is more just to feed into the longitude aspect of what we are interested in, and the interview process, as in this interview, not those interviews. It's just to think a little bit about the way in which there is an idea you have about what you want to do as an artist, and the way in which this process affects and changes what that idea is. There is an important procedural element. How do we work this out, from working with a property point of view?**

**But, there is also a sense of, how does this process relate to your thinking as an artist, and how does it help you, or hinder you, or think through what those ideas are, and in some cases, as you said, limit them in some ways, or open them up in other ways? I guess, it is just interesting, perhaps, to think about it.**

**I2: Yes. I think that's interesting.**

R: Yes, definitely. I suppose that's the crux of the project, isn't it? In the sense of that impact, on artist's practices, and also then the impact on the place and everything, and the relationships that are formed.

For me, having done a few of these now, I think, I find it really, really fascinating how it forces you to think differently about your practice, and challenges you in ways. In a way that is about some kind of curtailment, some sort of restriction, and I don't see that as a negative thing. This is what I was saying before. I think that's a really interesting challenge within an artist's practice. I mean, obviously, artists have all sorts of different kinds of practice, so my practice. But, to have a set of conditions, or parameters, or something that you have got to work with, but also push against.

I like that sense of, "Okay. This is the brief. How much do I want to respond specifically to what they are asking me to respond to? How much am I thinking of

things that maybe challenge the brief, or are outside the brief?" I think that's a really interesting process. Then, that conversation that starts to emerge from that relationship with the people you are working with feeds into that.

I think, it's challenging, as an artist. I definitely find, each time I've done this type of project, it's really challenging. But, in the end, that's really rewarding. For me, I think it has really enhanced my experience as an artist, and made me grow and develop into areas that I wouldn't ever have thought I would have been working in.

**I1: That's really interesting. I mean, I guess, that makes sense, Judith, to go onto the next question, which follows up from that in a way, really nicely. How would you comment, or reflect, on the working relationships that you are beginning to develop here, with the project, or, with Newcastle University, or the research team? Can you just say something about those initial stages of coming together as part of this project?**

R: I think, for me, this is a really fantastic project, because of this additional dimension to it, of the research side of it, because I'm an academic. I find it really fascinating that I am kind of on the other side of the fence, in a way, as an artist, being involved in this project. But, because I do work as an academic, I have got this other, maybe understanding, or insight, into things.

This study area isn't my field at all, really, even though I work in it as an artist. But I think, this project, for me, is really exciting, because I do feel like I am participating as an artist, but I am also really excited by, even just this interview. This is really interesting. This other side to the meta-levels of trying to analyse it and to work out what is going on in terms of the relationships and everything.

I mean it's early days in terms of relationships with the whole team. I mean, obviously, Judith, and I know each other from previous contact. But, even like today, for example. I met with one of the guys who is going to help me actually produce the work, make the work. Yesterday, I met with them at Gibside, the sort of project manager at Gibside.

I was thinking about that this morning actually, and thinking, "This is one of the things I really love about doing these kinds of projects. The way it takes you completely out of your normal, everyday environment, and not only geographically puts you in a completely different part of the country, but also, makes you come into contact with people that you wouldn't normally have come into contact with, and start to have conversations with them." I really like that insight into how other people's lives are. [NT], yesterday, thinking about [them] as the – what's [their] title?

**I2: Visitor Operations.**

R: Yes, Visitor Experience Manager. Listening to [them] talk, and all of the things that are [their] priorities in that role, the things that [they are] talking to me about, like what [they are] thinking of in terms of the project, and the affect it's going to have on the environment [they] work[ ] in and everything. Those are things I don't think about in my job. That's really interesting, because it's an insight into how someone else works, and how they think, and what their priorities and what their concerns are.

Again, today, talking to John, who is going to help me build it, all the questions he was asking me about the actual building, and the logistics of making it, as well, it is

great. It is just this really wonderful opportunity to kind of come into contact with people who connect with what you are doing, but actually, come at it from a different perspective. That's why I am saying about it being an enriching experience, because, I think, you grow as a consequence of coming into contact with that broader sort of understanding of the world. Yes. In terms of commenting on specific relationships, a bit early, but you can see the gist.

**I1: The support you've had from them has been really...**

R: Yes.

**I2: Just thinking about that, and just unpicking that a little bit more, if you were making a piece for a gallery, in a gallery situation, those other considerations wouldn't, necessarily, I mean, they may, but they wouldn't necessarily come into play, would they?**

R: Not in my experience. They very rarely have. I mean, yes, you can have conversations with curators, and you can have that sense, again, of discussion and insight into how other people think and relate to a gallery space, and what they are thinking of in terms of their vision for that show, or whatever. But, really, they are not really involved in the development and production of the artwork. Well, unless you are doing an installation piece, but you know, I think it is much more separated out.

Also, it's much more limited in terms of the world that I am talking about. It's a very insulated art world kind of thing, and arts professionals. It's a much more kind of known space. Whereas, I think, once you step out of that, and you come into these public spaces, heritage spaces, different kinds of environments, that circle expands quite significantly. Whilst people might have experience of the arts, or be engaged in it, it is not limited to that. There are lots of other things going on, other considerations going on. That's why I think it is really interesting as an artist, because, it's a bit of a cliché to say it brings you out of your comfort zone, but it does. It really does.

**I2: Do you find the language sometimes you have to qualify? Sometimes, the language, you have to be very specific about what you are saying, more than if you were within an art institution?**

R: That's an interesting question. I think there's a difference. Within the arts institutional thing, maybe the concept behind the work is, perhaps, easier to communicate in some ways, because of that shared language, and shared vocabulary, perhaps. Whereas, when you move outside that, and you are into these different kinds of spaces, then yes, sometimes, the language that you use, you have to adapt it slightly, in terms of it is not all about the concept. The concerns shift a little bit away from that to being much more about experience, the visitor experience, the engagement.

Over the past few years since I have done these, the question has often been, "Well, how do you think the visitor is going to experience this? How do you think they are going to receive this? What do you think they are going to think?" It's sort of a bit like, "Oh." Obviously, as an artist originally doing stuff in studio spaces and putting them into a gallery, it kind of doesn't really matter, to some extent. Obviously, you care that the audience is going to engage with it, but I do not have to think about how they are going to experience it. It's like, "Well, they are going to experience it, and then make up their own mind what it is about."

Suddenly, having that pulled right at the forefront of the whole process, "What do you think?" Or, "How do you think?" Or, "How do you want the visitor to experience this kind of thing?" It has been a definite shift in perspective for me, and focus.

Interpretation. That is another thing. Again, yesterday with [NT], for example, there was a lot of conversation about the interpretation of the work, the panels, the description. How much do you want to give away? How much do you want there to be this element of surprise? There is a lot of that sort of thing. That, again, you have to go away and think about that. I don't want to pin it down as an artwork, because I think, generally, as artists, you don't want to do that. You want to leave it open. But, at the same time, you know there have to be some guidelines. There has to be some way of framing it.

**I2: Yes, some way in, I suppose.**

R: Yes.

**I2: That's interesting. I am sure it will be interesting to track as we go through.**

**I1: Yes, definitely.**

**In terms of completeness, for the questions, and again, this is focusing on the commissioning process and the relationship between the site, the research and the research team. How do you see the relationships developing over the time of the exhibition? Do you see them changing and developing?**

R: I definitely see them developing. I think, even though the initial stage was quite short, and quite tight turnaround, I think, from now to the actual production of the artwork, there is quite a nice lead-in time. I think that now affords the opportunity to really build on relationships, and involve people in the process. Again, my initial contact with the team at Gibside yesterday was really positive. Ed was introducing to me as many people as he could, on site, and really keen to get me.

He talked very much. He talked very much on wanting me to be part of their team, and not wanting me to be this artist who has jettisoned in to produce something, to then disappear. That's not how I like to work anyway, wherever possible. Although I That was really lovely hearing that from him. I very don't really do community projects, or public engagement, the work itself isn't like that, I do make objects that are then put into a landscape. However, I don't want them – precisely the way he described it, actually - to just feel like they have been jettisoned in and plonked, and that the artist hasn't been involved in the process, and people don't know who the artist is and what their thought process is. much want to be involved and engaged with that as far as possible.

On the other side of it, on the university side of it, I really don't actually know what the expectations are on that side of it. I mean, in a general way, obviously, there was the discussion of a research project. Because I am an academic, I have a sense of what that might involve, but I haven't really been briefed on that side of things yet. I think it is hard to say how those relationships might develop and evolve.

**I1: Yes. That makes sense. Actually, it helps think through some of the things we can either add in, or talk to you about.**

**Okay?**

**I2: Yes.**

**I1: Where do you want to go now? Do you want to go back to heritage, or creative practice? What do you think makes sense?**

**I2: I think creative practice makes sense. Let me see that heritage one again. I think the heritage maybe could be at the end.**

**I1: Okay. Yes.**

**I2: I am going to go into your practice, and how you might describe your artistic practice.**

**I1: This is the same sort of big question.**

**I2: Yes. It is quite a big one.**

**R: It is quite a big one.**

**I2: Do you have a formal statement of practice? I mean, how do you present? How do you respond to that?**

**R:** Well, actually, interestingly, I think that has shifted a little bit over the last few years. Partly, again, through doing these kinds of outdoor projects at heritage sites, in fact. Because, I think prior to that, I definitely thought of myself as more of a studio-based artist. I made objects, or paintings, or installations, and then showed them in gallery spaces. That's what I did. But, that's definitely changed over the last seven years. My first outdoor installation was 2010. Over the last seven years, there has been a definite shift in my practice.

Interestingly, that period also coincides with me having undertaken a PhD. I think that can't be ignored as part of that equation. Now, I think, when somebody says, "Describe your practice", in a way, it comes from what I am interested in, in terms of the subject matter. My opening line of my statement is basically to say that I deal with the poetics and the politics of landscape space. I think that even though I know that doesn't pin my practice down, in terms of, "What do you actually do? Are you a painter? Are you a whatever?" I think it really helps to sort of frame it, because that is what I am interested in. Then, it finds lots of different ways of manifesting itself.

I still do paint, and do paintings in the studio that are then shown in exhibitions, or assemblages that involve painting. But equally, I do site-responsive projects. I like to call them site responsive rather than site specific. I think the actual kind of nuts and bolts, practically, of what I do in my work, is very varied, and very mixed media, mixed approaches. But, I think it is all held together by this umbrella interest in landscape as a subject.

**I2: That's great.**

**Okay. If I sort of focus on this bit. You have received the brief. How had the brief, and the site, sort of affected the way that you have thought about the piece you eventually proposed? Can you unpick that a little bit?**

R: Yes.

**I2: I mean, how did it happen, because the brief was, as you say, quite directional towards something? You could have gone anywhere.**

R: Yes. Well, I suppose, the initial starting point is always from your practice, to begin with. There is the history of your own practice that is informing the way you think about things. As I was saying, I have got this interest in landscape. I have got this interest in this sort of poetic sense, the landscape, by which I kind of mean your emotional response to landscape, to place. Then, the politics of it is much more specific to the place itself, in terms of its history.

I am particularly interested in the literal politics of things in terms of, for example, colonial histories. You know, more contested histories, I suppose we might say. Issues around colonialism, gender, those kinds of things are the things I tend to try and tease out of specific landscapes I am engaging with. That's the framework I come in with already, to the project. That's the way I have worked on other things previously.

Then, with this project, for Gibside, there is then this directional thing specifically to the story of Mary Eleanor Bowes, and the history of that landscape in relation to her. That's the next way in, in terms of then going off and doing some preliminary research on her life and history and getting hold of this biography that's available called 'Wedlock', which as you know, is a horrific book, and really stressful.

I mean, I had to order the book, and it took a bit of time for that to arrive. There were a couple of weeks between reading the bits you can find on the Internet and the general sort of picture of her life, to then getting down to the nitty-gritty details that are, for example, documented in that book.

Somewhere between the book arriving and the initial research, the other thing that started to really emerge was this interest that she had in botany and gardening. That was a real hook for me, because of my interest in these broader narratives about landscape, and issues around, as I say, things like colonialism. The history of botany is so bound up with that history that that was kind of an easy way into the project for me, and a hook that got me initially kind of really intrigued. I thought, "Well, I'll just scratch away at this a bit more, and then see where it leads."

Then, when the book arrived, and I started reading more specifically into that, then there was quite a lot of detail in the book about, for example, the glasshouses in the orangery, and the plant collecting. Then, the sponsoring of this trip to the Cape by a young botanist, who then collected new species and brought them back, and then, eventually, had some plants named after him. It started to really grow and expand this interest.

The other part of that then, that came through in relation to the suffrage aspect, was the sort of gendering of education and the gendering of science, particularly, and where botany stood in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in relation to women's education in science. This split, this kind of really gendered gendering of science at that period between how, for men doing botany, it was absolutely about going out there and collecting and everything else, and for women, somehow, it was a pastime. It was about being in the garden.

Then, that led me, research-wise, actually onto some really fantastic work that has been done on feminism and science. Feminist science, and again, colonial histories of collecting. Again, that's my interest and my background, but all these things were like little hooks in there that were going, "This is really interesting, because it is not only about the site itself and her history and the place, which is satisfying the brief. It is also about the stuff that I am really interested in anyway, in my own research." Yes.

Then, from that, for example, I went to visit Kew Gardens, and spoke to the economic botany collection keeper there. Then, that led to the discovery of the Wardian case, which is the form of the piece that I am going to create at Gibside. It is like the lovely research process that starts to fire off in lots of different directions, but you make all these nice connections. You can feel it growing and coming together as a project, and it becomes really exciting. You don't feel like you are trying to adapt or force your practice into something that is the brief.

Actually, if I did feel that, and I have felt that on other things I have been asked to apply for, you know it's not going to work. You can feel it yourself. "This isn't going to work. This isn't for me, because I know it's not clicking. It's not really engaging what I am interested in. I am trying to find a way of making my practice fit what they want, and it's not going to work." If I had felt that, I would have pulled back and said, "It's too restrictive, the brief. I can't do it."

But, actually, the opposite thing happened. That's why I am saying, from that restriction, what's interesting is actually, yes, it was quite clearly defined, the parameters, but it really did open up lots and lots of other research interests for me, that definitely were exciting.

**I2: It's very interesting, because of course, as you say, the brief was quite directional. The story is so overpowering in the abuse of women that you actually sort of went into another way, and made another connection, which I thought was really interesting. It wasn't following this stream that was sort of in front of you. You were going either side of it, and digging around into a more depth. I liked that.**

R: Yes. I think that's where that thing of my practice being quite research-based is interesting, in the context of something like this brief, or this project, is because you have that. You have got a broader body of research to tap into and to draw from, and to build on. Because, essentially, for me, the timing of this is really interesting, having only recently finished my PhD. I have got this whole body of research around landscape. Some of which is already in place, but some of which is new directions I want to go in.

The botany thing is already there, sort of looming, as a new area I really want to explore. This has just, actually, really enforced that, and enabled me already to do new research. I think, what you are saying, Judith, as well, for me, there was a moment as well. I remember feeling really overwhelmed after I read Wedlock. "How can I respond to this woman's life? This is really intense."

**I2: It is torturous.**

R: "I don't really want to go there." But, actually, there was again something that clicked. There was this moment of, "I want to focus on something incredibly positive in her life. Even if it was only this small element, and even if it was suppressed." Which it was. But, there was something in there that then became

more broadly symbolic of women's history at that moment, and that sense of the freedom, the freedom of education to enable you to transcend these restrictions and abuses. I think that, for me, was really important, to focus on something really positive.

Which, was not in any way about whitewashing out the horrific story. But, just about saying that there is maybe a way of thinking about this, and representing elements of her life, to take it somewhere. It was more of a fantasy element of, "Well, what happens is she would have been able to go to Africa and collect these plants, instead of having to pay for a bloke to go?"

There really was this moment of just, literally, genuinely, thinking, "Why couldn't she do that? Why wasn't that available to her?" This alternative history, almost, of her as an individual, but also of women's history. These unwritten histories of this sense of, if science hadn't been so gendered in that way, she could have gone. She could have been the one having plants named after her. Why not? She had the education and the intelligence to do, and the ambition and everything.

**I2: Yes, absolutely. It is interesting that you are focusing on that, and as you say, bringing it back into a more, the focus of everything is on that, rather than the other bitterness that she had in her life.**

**Okay. Sorry, I am giving my own reflections here.**

**Do you think this opportunity is different from the approach you have taken in other commissions? Or, is this how you do approach your commissioning, or your studio practice?**

R: Well, I think there are a couple of things there. I am probably just repeating something I've said, which is, I have got this body of research, and ideas and interests that are genuinely percolating away in the background anyway. Then, when commissioning opportunities come along, or a call out for them, for example, you, like I say, bring that to the table, and then reflect on the opportunity and the place and the site and the landscape. That's been a growing part of my practice over the last few years. It's not necessarily difficult in that sense. It feels like a continuation of something that has already been put in place.

But, as I think I said earlier, I think, this one does differ because of this research dimension to it. That's really interesting, in terms of that reflective process. You go through a process of reflection anyway, as an artist, on your practice, every time you do a project, whatever that is. Whether it is making a piece of work in the studio and reflecting on it, or whether it is actually doing quite a big project that involves lots of other people. Obviously, there is always that self-reflective process going on. But, I think this is really fascinating, to feel like this is happening from day one of this project. It's kind of a bit weird, as well, you know.

**I2: A bit under the microscope.**

R: Yes. It is a little bit. Yes, but at the moment, that's okay. It's a little bit different. Definitely, the structure of it is different than what I have done before. It has got all these other dimensions to it, and it is more formal in some ways than some of the things I have done before. But, in the end, I think, in the way I am developing the artwork and thinking about how that is going to be realised, I don't think that process is massively different.

**I2: Okay. What would success look like for you, in terms of this project?**

R: Oh wow.

**I2: What is that?**

**I1: I looked at that question and thought, "I am not quite sure what that means." But, it is really interesting. I was looking at that question earlier, thinking, "What does it mean by that?" But, you actually said something about an issue where a project might not work for you, and so you would then step away from it.**

R: Yes.

**I2: You said you would step away.**

**I1: I think, it's much more about maybe what your aims are. I suspect it is more to do with that, rather than, I don't know, a million people coming to see it.**

R: Yes. I mean that's definitely not what success looks like for me. I mean, that might be what success looks like from one of the funder's perspectives, and I totally would understand that would tick that, for them.

I think, yes, I suppose, it's a funny word, success, isn't it? But, I suppose, if I was to try and respond to that as a question, it would be around my development as an artist and as a person, about experience. It's about having an experience that feels like...

I am not quite sure what language to use here. Something around developing as a person, because through the contacts that you are having with other people, through the realisation of a project, through the successful completion and the bringing to fruition of a project, I think there is something incredibly satisfying about achieving that as an artist, as an individual.

The challenge of working in unusual environments, and the challenge of communicating with lots of different people that you don't normally come into contact with in life, that can be really difficult, but also, incredibly rewarding. I think, all of those things feed into what I would think of as a successful project, for me. Also, I suppose, the big testament would be whether I wanted to do another one afterwards. It's interesting. I think that is a genuine thing to talk about, because I remember the very first one I did of this nature, an outdoor project, was really challenging. It was the first time I had ever done anything outside.

**I2: Was that at Tatton?**

R: That was the Tatton Park one, Tatton Park Biennial project. Yes, I did find that a hard process, because it was such a challenge to the control, in a way. Because normally, if you are making work in a studio, you have complete control over it. I mean, yes, the work itself has an element of something that is challenging, and it doesn't always go right, and there is a lack of control in that sense. But, there isn't a sense of other forces.

Suddenly, to be out, and you have got all these other things you are having to deal with in terms of project managing, bringing other people in to help you produce the thing, the site itself and the challenges that throws up, the health and safety

logistics, the sensitivity of the site, the not impacting on the environment. Suddenly, you are thrown into this world that is so expansive.

**I2: Audience.**

R: Audience, everything. It is so beyond what you have ever had to think about, or deal with, within what I now describe, as the very rarefied atmosphere of the studio. It is. I never used to think that, but now, I think, "Oh my God. It is so incredibly rarefied, and so sort of wonderfully privileged, in a way." With all its difficulties, of course, but it's an incredibly special place, to be in a studio and not subject to any of those challenges.

The thing about these projects is they really, really are challenging. I remember, at the time I was going through that project, the first time, I did not enjoy the process. I really found it tough. I remember thinking, "I don't think I can do this again. I am not going to do this again. I'll complete it. I'll bring it to conclusion and fruition, but I am not doing this again."

Then, of course, you get to the end of it, and the work is there, and you are so excited that the work has been realised. As I was just saying, about bringing it to conclusion, and then people are responding to it, positively and negatively, but on the whole, positively. That's really rewarding. Then, you start thinking, "Maybe I could do it again." It's about experience. Now, I have done it a few times, and each one has been challenging in its own way, I'm not as scared of, or I am not as nervous about entering into it. I know that there will be difficult moments. Things will be thrown up. But, they are always surmountable. There is always a way of responding to them, and dealing with them.

**I2: I mean I am quite interested in that kind of area, when it gets tight. When these other considerations come in, like the health and safety, and like the audience, and our audience won't understand that, and all these strange challenges that come in, and they really start coming in and being pressurised. Whether that's quite exciting, in a way, or whether it kills the work, it kills the spirit of the work. You feel as if you are compromising. Which, we will find out as you go through whether that has happened, I think.**

**Because, at the moment, you are in control, aren't you? You have put your idea. It has been accepted. Even now, the conversation that we were having this morning about where to locate it, you've had a challenge, haven't you? Because, you felt you were being pushed towards a certain location. You had to be confident enough to say, "That's not the right location for my work."**

R: Yes, definitely. I think, that's really interesting in terms of almost bringing it back to the brief, the question of the brief. Because, yes, there was this conversation about, "Well, what about this site?" A different location than the one where I am going to put the work, because that ties into other agendas, and other concerns that Gibside have got at the moment, in terms of their longer-term trajectory and plan.

There was a gentle sense of conversation about it, in terms of, "Well, if you had wanted a piece of work for this site, specifically, then the brief could have said that." Because, actually, again, that thing about the restriction. That's okay, if that is, was the case. But, the way I kind of explained it was, "If I had been thinking

about a piece of work for this site, it would have been a different piece of work. It is not about saying the work that I've suggested that I want to make can just be moved somewhere else."

**I1: That's really interesting.**

R: Yes. But, obviously, I didn't say it in any way that was going to be...

**I2: You could have, though.**

R: Well, I could have. But, I didn't, because again, I understand the other. For me, I could understand the other forces, if you like, that were then impacting on that conversation from their perspective. It is about that they have got this strategic plan for this particular site, and there is a bit of a fallow year next year before the main plans kick in the following year. It would be really great for them to have an artwork in that. I could see where it was coming from. It's that sense, like you said, of having the confidence. Maybe, because I have done a few, I have got the confidence to be able to say.

**I2: You have got the confidence to be able to say, "That is not the right location for my work."**

R: Yes.

**I2: I mean, that really is an interesting area, I think, because there is a mismatch from what a commissioned piece of work is doing, and is for, and where it can go. I think that's a really interesting area.**

**I1: Definitely.**

R: Yes. It was a moment, of, you know, you are in that moment, and hearing it, and thinking, "Okay. This needs some response here." It needs some careful response, because you need to assert what you want to do in the project. But, at the same time, I don't want to upset them. It is trying to be open enough and gracious enough to hear what their feelings are, and what their needs are. But, at the same time to say, "Okay. But, this isn't that. This is something else. If you need that to happen in this space, then you have got to think about doing another project, or something else."

**I2: I think it's quite a vulnerable position to be in, actually. It does require confidence that some people might not have. Yes.**

R: You are right, because if I think back to the Tatton one, if I had been really challenged about that then, I probably would have capitulated, because I didn't have the confidence. I didn't have the experience. I probably would have say, "Oh, okay then. We will think about another site." I mean, not necessarily given in immediately, but I am sure I wouldn't have quite known how to deal with that, negotiating that in quite the same way.

**I2: I think that is a really interesting question to ask Gibside. I think, maybe that word success ought to be changed.**

**I1: Yes. I think so. It needs thinking through. But, interestingly, it did lead to a whole load of important things. How do we make that a bit more explicit?**

**Audience?**

**I2: Yes. We haven't got much more to do.**

R: Okay. That's fine.

**I1: Who is the audience for this?**

**I2: Who do you think?**

R: Who do I think is the audience? Well, I think, primarily, it is the audience of the visitors to Gibside, essentially. Again, when you do start doing these kinds of projects in these sorts of spaces, I think it is incredibly naive, as an artist, to imagine that it is art community that is an audience for this work. I just think, you know, there will be a tiny percentage of an art audience that will engage with this type of work. Either, because they have a connection to you, and therefore they make the effort to engage with it, or a connection to other partners in the project. Or, they happen just to be visiting, by coincidence.

I think, yes, the audience is definitely, in this context, the audience that go to Gibside, the National Trust audience, and the local audience that use Gibside as a recreational sort of space. I probably don't know quite enough about that audience at this stage. But, I think that's where the conversations with the partner come in.

**I2: Do you want to know, about that audience?**

R: Yes. I mean, when I say I want to know about the audience, it's not going to affect. It won't make me change the artwork. But yes, definitely, I would like to know. I mean, obviously, I have done a little bit of preliminary research about that, about who uses it, and those kinds of questions we discussed on our visit day. We did talk a little bit, generally, about the type of people who use Gibside. But yes, I definitely do want to know, and I do want to engage.

I am also very happy to engage with people on site, as well. Again, I spoke to [NT] about this yesterday. We talked about what form that might take. I said, "I am happy to talk about the work." [They] said, "Well, doing a talk isn't great, in terms of the way our visitors come and go." I said, "Maybe just being available on site, and having some days next year in the summer where I am there. If people want to come and talk about it, or talk to me or whatever." We have already begun to have a very preliminary conversation about how my direct contact with that audience might happen. Or audiences. I mean [they are] also keen on some kind of web presence.

**I2: [Are they]?**

R: Yes.

**I2: What [do they] mean?**

R: [They have] talked about doing a film.

**I2: Well, we are doing a film already.**

R: That's what I said. I did say that, but I think [they] sent [Name] on a training course for filmmaking, so [they are] quite keen to put it into effect, with filming me. You might want to talk about that with [them].

**I1: That follows on a little bit, and, at the risk of just repeating for the purposes of clarity, how do you imagine visitors to Gibside are going to engage with it? I think that's entering the idea of you being on site, or giving a talk. How do you think visitors will engage with the artwork?**

R: Well, I always like to describe what I do, because I do tend to make these object-based works that then appear in these landscapes. I like the idea that they are, in some way, provocative. I don't, necessarily mean, well, I definitely don't mean it in a negative way. I mean, they are provocative in the sense that they are unexpected. It is going to be unexpected. It is like, "What on earth is that? What is it doing here?"

But, I also, and I talked to [NT] a bit about this yesterday, and said, "I do have this thing in my work where I do like the idea of it, in some sense, being quite magical." That there is an element of, it is not just this provocative thing that suddenly appears and is quite dramatic. I think, with a lot of these types of projects I have done that. I really want that element of the sort of magical, not quite surreal, but yes, in the sense of the out of the ordinary sort of, you know, you are coming into contact with something that is not what you would expect to come into contact with.

I think I love the idea of there being a sort of curiosity about that. I know, again, the difficulty with working on sites like this is some people will just not like it. They just won't like the fact that it is intervening in the landscape, and it's spoiling the view, or it's changing the view, even, because people like a lot of that. Heritage contacts often have a sense of being quite preserved, and quite static, actually. I think, sometimes, people can feel very uncomfortable if that is challenged. I get that. You are not always going to be able to convince people that this is a good idea.

But also, equally, from previous experience, I think a lot of people really, really love that sense of the unexpected, particularly if they are repeat visitors to a place, and they are local.

I think that's one of the beauties about doing a project that is temporary. I am not proposing something here that is permanent and is going to be there for all time, and is therefore a complete intervention in the space, and going to change the way people are going to experience it. It is a temporary project. I think that affords you a certain kind of licence to be really kind of, yes, playful, and quite, as I say, provocative and imaginative about how the work might appear to people.

In terms of how, I don't want to, in any way, prescribe how people should engage with it. But, I would hope that it in some way taps into some of those things I have been talking about, about curiosity, excitement, the magic of it. I think there is also something a bit childlike about some of the things I do. Again, the Tatton project, there was a definite feeling. People were talking about things like The Wizard of Oz. That wasn't something I came to it with, but that's something people brought to it.

I think, again, with this one, because of this, you know, my projects are enough that there is something there that is familiar. This essentially looks; it is box like. It is shed like. There is a familiar reference point, but then it is not quite. It is a bit off,

as a form. Then, there are going to be these really bizarre plants that are these incredible colours, that are inside and coming out of it. There are all the things that people are familiar with and know, but then they don't know. Yes. I hope they are going to be engaged by it, obviously.

**I1: Site staff and volunteers. How do you think they will engage with it?**

R: I would say, actually, in very similar ways to the audience that I am talking about. I think, generally, volunteers particularly, many of them are people that really care passionately about the place, and that's why they volunteered in the first place. Again, you will have that mix of people who have a very particular sense of ownership of the place, and therefore don't want any change, or anything they are not comfortable with. There will be a bit of resistance.

But, then there will be other people that are just really excited that something is happening that is different, and draws people in. I think, it is really important to engage with them early in the project. I am trying to do that. That was some of the conversations I was having yesterday, preliminary conversations with [NT] about how my next visit up, for example, might be meeting with a number of the volunteers, talking to them, getting them involved in the project and onboard.

**I2: Yes, so they understand the journey.**

R: Yes.

**I2: I think, often, when things just appear, and people do not understand the rationale, what the journey has been, immediately you are on the defensive, aren't you?**

R: Yes. This project, particularly, as I was saying to [NT] yesterday, in terms of the site staff, [NT] is really keen to have them involved from day one, and to have me as part of the team, as [they] put it. I think, in this project, from the commissioner's perspective, it's very hands-on and very actively involving. It is not a sort of, "Okay. We are commissioning an artwork. You go off and produce it, and then let us know what you need from us." I mean [they are] really keen to have that conversation. That's good.

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

**We are going to go back to section one, which was about heritage. I am trying to think of how. Okay, let's go to the second question. Is heritage significant to your artistic practice? Is it important? Yes. It's history. It's heritage. Does it inform your practice?**

R: I suppose, I haven't necessarily, really, until this project, thought seriously about heritage, as a word, and like you are saying, what does it mean to you? I think, I have always thought in terms of history. Maybe they are interchangeable, to some extent. I think, yes, history is really important to me. Research wise, and my interest in landscape, that notion of history; but also, I suppose, as an academic and a researcher and stuff, that sense of contesting that. What does that mean? What does history mean?

Maybe, what I just spoke about a minute ago, about that notion of things being preserved, or being static. There can sometimes be that tendency to think of history as something that is fixed. For my own interests, I am really fascinated by

the notion of history not as a singular, but as a plural notion, and as a shifting thing. How histories are constantly being rewritten and re-imagined, and hidden histories re-emerge, or suppressed histories can come through at certain times. Equally, new suppressions can take place. It's a constantly evolving and often very contested area. I think heritage is absolutely bound up with that.

I can't really sit here and give you a definition of what I think heritage is, but it is definitely around this feeling of, you know, if I could say anything about it, for me, it is about not being something that is static and preserved. It is absolutely about sort of constantly questioning and revisiting histories, and drawing out different perspectives.

**I2: It's interesting, what you said before, about how the site had impacted on your work. You talked about contested histories then. You are taking those contested histories, in a way you have explained, and are recreating them in a different way, and addressing the sort of imbalance, in a way.**

R: I think, trying to, yes. Obviously, I can't make any grand claims for the work, and that might not always come through in an obvious way. It might be subtle. It might be more abstract. Or, it might be just a sense of it, or something. I mean I often talk about things in my studio practice. Some of the work I make that is more traditionally abstract art, I often talk about this feeling of sensed geographies. That is a term that I use in my statement of practice.

I really like that notion of sensed geographies, because again, it is a sense of that poetic thing about the sense of a place, and the experience of place, is, in academic terms, a phenomenological relationship to landscape. But, it's also about a kind of sense of history, and a sense of geography, which isn't always explicit. It is often implicit. It is often embodied, or hidden. It is there, but it is not revealed. I like to just scratch away at that a little bit. I don't, necessarily, want to be really blatant about things always. It might not come immediately through the artwork.

But, if you are interested in the artwork and you want to know a bit more about it, then these other things might come through. Or, they might come through me doing a talk about it, and then adding another dimension to the piece itself. Yes. I think, definitely, all of those things, and that sort of circling around history is really important to me.

Even actually, with this one, it is interesting talking about these kinds of hidden histories of women in science and botany, and our feminist histories. There is also another element to this project, for me, that is really interesting, within the plant collecting scheme of things, which is to do with colonial histories. That is a much darker history. In a way, when I was talking about her, "Why couldn't she go and collect these plants? Why couldn't she do that?" But, that then is still involved in another type of history, which is an exploitative, colonial, extraction of plants from one place to another, the renaming of them, the sort of exclusion of the original, indigenous naming of those plants.

That's a kind of history, another layer of this history that fascinates me. Which, maybe, isn't sort of so obvious to Gibside. But, I think it does bring Gibside in as a site to these much bigger, broader colonial histories of nationhood. Again, I don't want to overload it, but for me, those things are really interesting.

**I1: That's really interesting.**

I2: I think it is really interesting.  
I think that's it.

I1: **We have covered a lot of that.**

I2: **I think we have covered quite a lot. I mean you have talked about your previous engagement of other sites, like at Tatton and other places. I think that's good.**

I1: **Okay?**

I2: **Yes.**

I1: **Thank you.**

I2: **Are you happy?**

R: Absolutely. It is fine, yes.

I2: **Some of those were quite...**

I1: **Okay?**

I2: **Yes.**

**[End of Recording]**