­­Transcription of Interview

# Participant F (interviewee) and Sarah Schäfer (interviewer)

Date: 6 November 2017

Venue: Gardens, Cape Town

Time: 00:11:28

**Sarah:** Yay! Hello [name].

**Participant F:** Hello.

**Sarah:** Thank you for doing the interview.

**Participant F:** Pleasure.

**Sarah:** Okay. So, before I ask you about the website, I want to ask you about yourself.

**Participant F:** Okay.

**Sarah:** And you, as a museum going person. Are you a museum going person?

**Participant F:** I like to think so, yeah.

**Sarah:** Yeah? Why do you go to museums?

**Participant F:** I mean, old things, I mean, you tend to see stuff you don’t see anymore. And you get to see how people lived in the past, and the contrast from now and then. It’s so intriguing to see.

**Sarah:** Right.

**Participant F:** Yeah.

**Sarah:** Can you tell me...I know what your answer is, but tell me for the recording’s sake, if you’ve had any experience with the Owl House before?

**Participant F:** No.

**Sarah:** Have you heard about it?

**Participant F:** Not until I spoke to you, no.

**Sarah:** Okay. So you’re now speaking to someone who knows nothing about the Owl House.

**Participant F:** Okay.

**Sarah:** Can you explain it to me?

**Participant F:** The Owl House. Martins. It seemed like...I think she needed an outlet of sorts. As it stated in your writing that she never travelled a lot. And it seemed like everything was like just dull and grey to her, and she needed a bit more colour in her life. So she decided to do something about it. And I think she actually just picked up everything that she liked. (laughter)

**Sarah:** Ja, exactly.

**Participant F:** Everything. And I think a lot of people miss that point actually. I think she knew who she was and she knew what she liked, and she knew what...probably what most people would appreciate. Maybe not everyone, but I think she did what she wanted, and hoped that somebody would appreciate it. And it just turned out that way. That people did.

**Sarah:** Ja. No, absolutely, she did do what she wanted and she didn’t know that it would be a museum.

**Participant F:** Mm.

**Sarah:** She didn’t know, and I mean that all happened after she died.

**Participant F:** Ja. I think...I find that fascinating, actually, it’s quite inspiring actually. Because we tend to like do a lot of stuff without giving it a lot of thought, and sometimes it’s fruitful and sometimes it’s not. I think it’s just a matter of just taking the chance, right?

**Sarah:** Ja, exactly. Would you like to visit the Owl House?

**Participant F:** Ja.

**Sarah:** Ja? After seeing this website?

**Participant F:** Absolutely, because I think...okay, I’m an architect, right? And one thing that you can never escape, is architecture. You’re encompassed by it. Like right now, we’re in a building, and you’re experiencing it. And seeing it on paper, makes you want to...actually not on paper, on screen, you do want to like actually experience it for yourself. Because she plays a lot with light. And in my field, we tend to do the same. And it would be kind of interesting to see what she’s done there. Something I think you need to experience.

**Sarah**: That’s a really cool point, from an architect’s perspective, ja, light was her thing, like that was her..

**Participant F:** Ja, I think that was..

**Sarah:** ..obsession.

**Participant F:** Ja. I would love to actually go there.

**Sarah:** Right. Okay, so, what are your perceptions of the Owl House, or The Long Bedroom. So this is just one room in a whole house.

**Participant F:** Ja.

**Sarah:** What are your perceptions of The Long Bedroom, after you engagement with this digital platform?

**Participant F:** She had an interest in objects. My favourite one, is the little golden coin looking thing...

**Sarah:** Oh like the…

**Participant F:** ...that she got from Uruguay.

**Sarah:** The bell? Oh, the badge thing, okay.

**Participant F:** The badge thing.

**Sarah:** Okay, ja.

**Participant F:** I think that’s the first thing that popped out. I don’t know why, but...And it’s just one of those things, maybe your grandmother would have, but you don’t know how she got it until she tells you the story. (laughter) So yeah, man. It’s like...everything that she has...like, apparent...and that red lamp as well, it stated that it’s not functional, but the glass itself, even like just the image of it, it’s actually eye catching. And you wonder.

**Sarah:** Mm. Ja, and that was the thing...like even...I mean, there are just so many objects in this room, I just chose a small collection. But like, for example, like this here.

**Participant F:** Ja.

**Sarah:** This is a…

**Participant F:** I don’t know why that wasn’t on there.

**Sarah:** This is a brandy glass, and she just hung it upside-down with fishing wire, so it would catch the light from the window. Like everything she did, was purely for...

**Participant F:** I know. Imagine...because her windows are north facing, imagine the light catching that, and the reflection it’s going to cast on the…

**Sarah:** ...on the mirror, right.

**Participant F:** ...on the mirror right there, ja.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant F:** That would be nice to see.

**Sarah:** Ja, light was her jam, she loved that. Okay. (Let me actually quick...) I know that you haven’t been to the Owl House, so, you haven’t seen these objects in real life, but how do you feel that the digital versions of the objects, detract or enhance their real-life counterparts?

**Participant F**: I feel they make you more curious.

**Sarah**: Okay.

**Participant F**: I think now that I’ve seen the detail, it makes me want to go there and actually experience it for myself.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant F:** Because it’s visually pleasing, just to look at, it’s just like scrolling through Pinterest or something, and you’re actually identifying what you like and what not.

**Sarah:** That’s nice to know.

**Participant F:** But it’s...actually the whole room is striking. It’s got like this bohemian feel to it.

**Sarah:** You should definitely go there. You would enjoy it.

**Participant F:** Yeah.

**Sarah:** Do you think that collections like this, like outsider environmental collections, should be digitised? And I ask that, because it’s...it’s a very transient thing, you know. It was like it was while she was alive, because she was creating it, and then she died and it became a museum.

**Participant F:** Mhm.

**Sarah:** Do you think that we should try and preserve it by digitising it?

**Participant F:** Definitely, definitely. Like you stated as well, I keep on referring to it, because you wrote that piece quite well.

**Sarah:** Thank you.

**Participant F:** Well, everything has a lifespan. At some point, this [the Long Bedroom] will never exist. And right now, the only source of posterity is actually capturing what *was*, just in a digital format. And, I think it also attracts people. If I was to send a link to somebody else and they will see it and probably someone else would appreciate it, they’re more inclined to visit, rather than reading about it.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant F:** Ja.

**Sarah:** No, that’s very...So it’s also a matter of accessibility.

**Participant F:** Yeah.

**Sarah:** Like this...and also Nieu Bethesda is...it took me eight hours to drive there last time. Like it’s a super, super remote place. So, there is a big aspect of accessibility that...

**Participant F:** Exactly, yes, yes, definitely.

**Sarah:** How would you improve the digital platform?

**Participant F:** I’d like to see more. I think...I don’t know if you were restricted to showing more?

**Sarah:** I mean, in terms of time and budget, yes. But this could easily be, you know, there could be a hundred objects to see here.

**Participant F:** Yeah, that’s true. That is true. [..] you a question? My mind just wonders. It’s like it’s so cluttery, it’s like I’m just...it’s something I would like to recreate.

**Sarah:** Nice, nice. In terms of the digital format, so there were...I had two kinds of pictures, there were the archival pictures and the pictures in context. There were videos where they were possible, and text. In terms of the digital formats, was there anything that you think worked particularly well, or didn’t work particularly well?

**Participant F:** Agh, I think you did a good job. I mean, I want to go. (laughs) It...everything worked. Just...like the first time I...when you gave me the computer to actually have a look through it, yeah? I read the text and I just looked at the room. I didn’t even notice that you actually had like the little blocks there, like you zoom in and stuff.

**Sarah:** Nice.

**Participant F:** That actually gives like an extra sense of feel, like a sense of like being there.

**Sarah:** Nice.

**Participant F:** It helped, a lot. Actually I think I’m lazy. (laughs) So I think it’s actually very convenient. Very, very convenient.

**Sarah:** Convenient is a good word, that’s great. Was...okay, you did speak about the badge, was there any other artefact in particular that interested you?

**Participant F:** Ja, man the glass-work. Glass is like how she’s actually taken common household things we take for granted, and she’s just tweaked them, and given them an expression. Like I didn’t know that was a brandy glass. At first, I’d be like, ooh that’s a very nice looking chandelier type of thing. Not...but..

**Sarah:** Ja, and the glass is her...like I mean, every single wall, is just glass, there’s just glass everywhere.

**Participant F:** Ja, man. The room itself is just striking. It’s like...that’s the first thing you notice about it. Like everything, just that image alone is just the room itself. The way she’s painted it, just to compliment all the little objects that she has in there. It’s quite impressive.

**Sarah:** Mm.

**Participant F:** I don’t know why they call it outsider art. I know it doesn’t conform to like...but in itself, it’s...it is art.

**Sarah:** Yeah, absolutely. I agree. But I think outsider art is very much, you know, for the sake of those of us who prescribe to the Western cannon, which is everyone in academia and in the Western world. We want to name things, you know, and Helen didn’t fit into a particular genre while she was creating the Owl House.

**Participant F:** At the time, ja.

**Sarah:** So yeah. And so as an afterthought, people like, oh cool, she fits into this genre of outsider art, which is actually like...it’s just a little niche for people who don’t...

**Participant F:** I just don’t like labels though, yeah.

**Sarah:** Yeah, exactly, but...exactly. So people who don’t like labels, end up getting labelled..

**Participant F:** Yeah.

**Sarah:** ..as outsider artists.

**Participant F:** Because this is quite expressive. Even the way the picture was taken, the angle of it, it’s quite expressive. It’s beautiful.

**Sarah:** Mm. And a slightly more formal question. How satisfactory was this platform as a browsing experience?

**Participant F:** Satisfying. Ask Gail. Want to buy it?

**Sarah:** Did you find it easy to navigate?

**Participant F:** Ah yeah.

**Sarah:** Did it answer any questions that you had?

**Participant F:** Actually it...there were little surprises like I said, these little call-ups. That was like a nice surprise. Like I hadn’t noticed it at first, until I actually like...I really looked at it, I’m like yoh man, I can actually zoom in. Because you had like, gallery, where you can scroll through. And I was wondering, what is this? How...did she make it herself, or..? Then you got like a little [..] right up, and...

**Sarah:** Nice.

**Participant F:** The platform is brilliant.

**Sarah:** Thank you. Well thank Patty actually. (laughter) Perfect! Any last comment?

**Participant F:** When are we going? (laughter)

**Sarah:** Perfect. Thank you so much.