­­Transcription of Interview

# Participant D and Sarah Schäfer (interviewer)

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**Participant D:** [..] the Long Bedroom. From what I read, as an intro, as a complete outsider, complete newbie in here. No idea how good it feels to be a complete like newbie to this. Everything I know about [...] for instance, Jess basically has taught me everything. I noticed that part of the biographical information, is that she loved to clutter things up. It’s, you know, it’s Art Deco, sometimes things weren’t always very practical, but she had to have them there. And firstly, you just.... on an intimate level, that speaks to me, I’m a clutterer myself. And I get how it happens, and why it’s very much a part of, you might call, the ongoing artistic process. This being a bedroom, locates the intimacy of it. And the objects that I’ve been focused on, through the frames...I know there are other things as well, but I love being guided through these frames, because I can pick up patterns. And from afar, I have an experience now of this bedroom, that draws me into the moral universe. Moral universe, is a literary term, the inner world, I suppose, of the artist. Without questioning the artist, the room kind of makes me just accept what I’m given, without too many questions. So, for instance, although there were a few things that I missed, but I’m also guiding you as to how my eye caught this room. I love the colours. I love this mix of the natural and that which plays with, and bounces away from light. There...I can see where the light sources are, like where the most natural lights supposedly would have come in, and it’s great for illumination. But I’m also curious, because she’s got a big thing with light, what this looks like in the dark, and the way the entire complexion of the room, and the space, would change…. A lot of my comments is just about that, it’s about the feeling and interaction. I’ll leave it to the actual two artists in the room, to know about things. Like Jess will know more about the Plaster of Paris, than I would. So, the artefacts and their origins, already have a lot. But I’m just going on it like...I’m being a child, because I think that’s what she was half of the time…The...she kind of makes the geography of the room. Everything she puts in there, becomes something kind of permanent. And that permanence, is very much a part of the creative process. And I do think it’s a part of outsider art. Outsider art happens when you make mistakes, in music for instance, and then suddenly your Atonality becomes your new direction. Whereas the purist would play everything in the Western mode…And I find this here...I love the way she’s using space and she’s playing with inside outside, on a few levels. She is outsider art, but she is also playing with interior and exterior. So, I notice the girl firstly...let me just quickly refresh what I read about the hostess, or the *meisie*.

**Sarah:** Ja?

**Participant D:** I think it characterised the room, that being the first thing that caught my eye. There’s an innocent femininity to it, it makes the room friendly, it does reference the handmaiden or the figure of the handmaiden, but that in itself, speaks to a kind of intimacy. So, it speaks to a feminine welcoming of...what I’m going to say, is a feminine space. And there’s something welcoming and warm about it. The kooky colours. All these things, because you have the handmaiden - so I’m going to call her that, die *meisie* - with outstretched arms, it feels like you’re being welcomed. And you’re being welcomed *over* the two beds. So, you’re being welcomed over this threshold of intimacy already. And it’s an extraordinary gesture, in that, as a visitor from afar, I already feel welcomed in the space...Then that took my eye to the Madonna and the Child. So, my eye jumped, I didn’t necessarily go in order, but the Madonna and the child, you know, it has its historical, and you know, religious and iconoclastic references and rootedness in history. But it’s a universal...but I think the image of the Madonna and the Child is also open to your interpretation, especially as my prelude to that, was die *meisie*, inviting me into the room. And you can read the Madonna and the Child in numerous ways, you can read in the classic Christian iconography sense, or you could read it just in the sense of nurture, and that art is a form of nurture. Madonna and Child is a famous art... artefact as well, if I have to put it that way. And two, you know, two symbols I link to femininity, are welcoming me into this space that is half an outsider artist, and half a girl who just didn’t want to grow up. And I say that in the best possible way. Because that’s the welcoming aspect of the room.

**Sarah:** And also...so to put outsider art out into a little bit more context…

**Participant D:** Mhm…

**Sarah:** ...and also...I mean, I can’t speak for Helen, but in terms of many outsider artists and what – and feel free to jump in, Jess – it’s very much something that they’re named, after the fact.

**Participant D:** Ja, it is a [..] ja.

**Sarah:** Like you don’t fit into this...ja this genre and so we’re labelling you, outsider. So, it’s kind of like an aculturality that, you know, it’s like an acultural thing. And like philosophically, just by naming it, you know, we’re just trying to fit it into our Western convention of naming it...

**Participant D:** Yes, we are.

**Sarah:** ...but it’s not, you know, it’s not necessarily...Helen didn’t go out to say, I’m going to be an outsider artist and create this collection. She just kind of did whatever the fuck she wanted.

**Participant D:** Ja, right.

**Sarah:** And then she was, after the fact, named an outsider artist.

**Participant D:** Mm, mm, mm. No I do appreciate that, and I’m very much aware of the fact that I’m in my comfortable space of, you know, everything’s a name. We name something before it even happens now. So, I am in a way, practicing that. But there is something kind of kitschy rebellious. I’d read some theses on kitsch in this very time-frame that we’re dealing with here, and kitsch in South Africa, and in Afrikaans, and the kitsch here, and the way that works. And there is an element of rebellion to kitsch, whether it’s about the way the country’s culture development was shaping itself, there’s a knowingness to kitsch, even if it’s just somebody’s own personal kitsch. And again, it’s comforting to me, because now I’m easy to label it outsider art. Again, I totally agree, it wouldn’t have been called that. But it’s...there’s that there’s a girlish rebellion in that, which I’m very, very fond of.

Now we get to include interesting things. I’m going to find a juxtaposition here. I initially skipped over the springbok hide, but I had another look at it, and I thought well, springbok and all the symbolism of that. It was the first marker of her relationship from this room to the outside world, having the outside brought in there. And as I said, it looks to be almost an impression of a springbok on the one window. I’ll get to that. The springbok being the symbol of the outside and how it’s hide being there, obviously, in our 21st Century context, would be like, no you can’t have that there. But again, for her time-frame, it’s fitting, it usually does belong indoors. But of two things I spotted, that welcomed me indoors, there’s a sign of the outdoors. And that leads me to the next sign of the indoors, and that’s the red lamp. And then you can go *bos* with the idea of lights, because there’s the overhanging green light there, there’s a natural light by day, and I’m hearing from...I’m reading in the bio information, that she loved candles and she would take hours to light the room. Some thoughts on that, but I really, really...it’s just very welcoming. So that red lamp, again, it’s a stylizing of the interior. I think knowingly, she would have known the symbolism, the decadent symbolism of a red lamp, but I think it’s...part of that is giggly rebellion, it’s her space, she can do with it as she pleases. And it’s just a beautiful feature. The red against some of these greens, is the best possible combination for me visually. And I just think of the way know red and green to be used. So, there’s another marker of the inside, after, you know, I spotted the springbok hide. And then the next thing I spotted was the enamel jug, and I love the information I got there, in that she’s...there’s element of creation in there, the creation of a paradise garden, so a jug carries water and she’s watering things. So, it’s...the jug is placed in the inside, that she’s creating any form of garden, you know. Paradise garden, we can debate what that’s supposed to mean. She’s showing an agency to move outside. So obviously, whatever the outside space is, which I’ve yet to see, that will speak for itself. But she locates it, in this very intimate bedroom space, the device by which she’s going to show that agency, to grow her paradise garden. So, this external paradise, and so much about ornamentation of the garden exists in South African history and cultural development and literature. Most of my two theses I wrote, were about that pageantry and ornamentation. I love that I see this device, by which you can create a garden, but I don’t yet see the garden, because it’s located here in the heart of...to me, her space is this long bedroom. And bear in mind I still have to see the rest of the space. But I’m starting with this bedroom, and it’s an amazing intimacy, that does much for me…. I needed something random after that, so my eye fell to the belt. And that’s of, apparently, her sister Alida, and she, you know, was a fashion model...not *a* fashion model, it was *her* fashion model, she kind of bounced it off of *her*. And of course, I would want some clothing, fashion accessory in a woman’s space, to be hanging there just randomly. In my [10:20] I get, I had to go decorate her...this rock chick, decorate her wall, vinyls and panties and cassettes and all these things, and guitars. It straddles the kitsch and the intimate. And it’s something wearable, it’s something that’s going to go on a woman’s fashion, it’s going to go on a woman’s body on the outside. So, it...there has to be a reminder of that, you know, the lady’s comportment and all of that…Then the oil lamp. And this is where the information really, really opened my eyes to, just the magic, the enchantment of the space. Now the period that we’re dealing with here, is a period that, as South Africa was far removed from the very kind of Western modernity that influenced South Africa, that Western modernity, centre-periphery studies, if you will, was also influenced by South Africa. And part of that transaction – I won’t bore you with all the details – but, it’s something I’m deeply fascinated by, this late 19th Century transition, or mid to late 19th Century transition to the 20th Century, had a lot to do with enchantment. People were getting high on science and progress in Europe and the UK, and they actually were so impressed with themselves, they started to bore themselves, and they needed to believe in fairies. Just a quick case in point, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who wrote Sherlock Holmes, dabbled in fairy stories, because he wanted to get out of his head. And people didn’t believe that he existed, people believed Sherlock Holmes existed. And what made the Sherlock Holmes stories work, was the sense of enchantment, that there was magic, until the end, Holmes explained everything to you…In South African studies on kitsch and ornamentation, the same happens, we want magic. So, she’s growing a paradise garden, but on the inside. The amount of time she invested in lighting the space, was to make it magical. The light was a safeguarding against depression, you couldn’t be depressed if you spent that much time working on light. So, the artist’s darkness that she carries - and as an artist, I do relate to that - she’s also actively working against, and the space then, doesn’t allow her to slip away like that. And she’s creating, as the bio information tells me, a fairytale experience, which I think, this is an agent of enchantment. She wants to be enchanted through the very process of her making it. And people entering the space then, have to be enchanted. And I think it’s a private inner thing, she’s not going out there to show the world this, but she’s having fun, getting all this random detail on fun…I move onto the tin, the cake or the biscuit tin. Hospitality. Anybody in this time and era had to be a good host. She’s locating all these tenets of good culture, of good growth, and things she buys into, things she does buy, and it’s all I find in this one room space. I love the concept of hospitality. Loads we can talk about that…Then the windmill. Another reference to the outside, specifically to Europe. I think there’s another movement with her sister bringing her something from the outside. So, I’m finding reminders of the outside. I mean, windmills are all around South Africa too, but she’s specifically referencing European windmills.

And then a sense of adventure follows on from there, my eye fell to the shells. So, she would wonder through the treacherous woods to get to the beach to collect shells and place them in the room. And shells naturally would be next to bottles. But the shells [..] sense of adventure. That was how much she would go outside. I’m reminded so much of the way Olive Schreiner felt, trapped in the Karoo and the way she also had a sense of adventure. ...The blue bottles against...it’s colourful. The fact that they were milk of magnesia bottles, very evocative, if you were a child, you’d know what that tasted and felt like, and she kind of traded with children, they would get paid in sweets if they got the bottles. So, I love the transaction of that, because children are usually the consumers, not by choice, of milk of magnesia…And then ends on mermaids, which I would say is...to me, it rounds up the study of the entire enchantment of the room. If you can have a mermaid in there, you’re telling me everything I need to know about how I’m supposed to be lured by this space. Mermaid sirens, etc.…So that’s my thoughts on the room, based on what I’ve seen. The other things that were highlighted to me. Other things like, I see what looks...I don’t know, there seems to be an impression traced out in the one window. I don’t know what it is. At first I thought it was a *bokkie*, and now I have no idea what it could be. If it was a *bokkie*, it was a bit too modern. It looks like a *bokkie* on a...

**Sarah:** Is it the one on this side here?

**Participant D:** Ja.

**Sarah:** Ja. That used to be a sun. So, like it’s a big round...this has all gotten worn away, but it’s a big round sun with the rays. But there is actually a little *bokkie* on the window in this room, around about here.

**Participant D:** Really?

**Sarah:** That she...and it’s a copy from the old SAA Logo.

**Participant D:** Ah.

**Sarah:** And she uses that a lot, all over. She brings that image in.

**Participant D:** So, I’m in love with the room, I love what’s happening with the ceiling. It’s like an intro... it’s almost like she wants you to think she’s somewhere else, she’s going to go expressionist. I’m just thinking of the shape and the angle and the colours, like that, that. You know, it’s pre-empting a kind of expressionism.

There is the mirror that reflects some of the other objects, which...I don’t want to get too deeply into, because then you’re getting into a mirror theory, and I’m going to get all Lacanian, and I’m going to just walk myself out…There are chests there. I’m wondering what’s in them. I think she would have had them to be there, but also to be functional. I love the busy table, of which only like looked at the two artefacts on there. The curtains are crazy, looks like something she would have worn as well. The chair at the window with the shells and the milk of magnesia, it’s distance from the table and it’s at the window. It, to me, it just locates the idea of being indoors, but looking outwards, or bringing things in from the outside. And things on the outside, add to the magic and the enchantment of the room. So that’s my thoughts on the room so far.

**Sarah:** Thank you. To quickly contextualise this for me, and for the sake of the interview, are you a museum going person? And can you explain your museum going habits?

**Participant D:** I feel guided in a museum, but also lost at the same time. So, I...in terms of our local museums, I feel that familiarity, you know, if you’ve been there enough, sure, but when you’re a first timer, you don’t know what your priorities are. Are you going to look at rock art first, are you going to look at, you know, fossilisation of things, are you going to look at marine, aquatic life and studies thereof? It gets all a bit mixed up, and because my practice of art is in a different way, when I’m in these kind of spaces, museum spaces, I actually don’t mind to be lead. This is the difference between having arrows point your way, and you don’t have to, that doesn’t mean that museums have to be prescriptive, it means it’s a guide for somebody who could use it, and the rest can do their own way. And that’s what the Louvre is such an overwhelming space in Paris. I spent three hours there, and I only covered an eighth of it.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant D:** And it’s great, but I don’t want to be that tired. So, I begin to find what I look for in a museum, through the digital process here. It just leads my eye, but when I pull back I can also see more things. And does it wet my appetite to actually enter the space? Yes, it does.

**Sarah:** Okay. So that is my next question.

**Participant D:** Ja.

**Sarah:** So, you...have you ever been to the Owl House? This is just for the record.

**Participant D:** Never.

**Sarah:** Are you...so are you more interested in going now?

**Participant D:** Yes, I am.

**Sarah:** Why?

**Participant D:** If I could be enchanted through the screening of it, through your computer screen, and the carefully chosen focus points, then I actually want to breathe in the space, I want to stand in the space. And it’s different to the standing in the museum, where I might be overwhelmed. Now I’m prepared for this space. And the sense of preparation gives me an eagerness and a confidence as well, because I’ll approach the room like a detective, it would be like a hen hunt.

**Sarah:** That’s...I like that. So, what are your perceptions of the Owl House, and of Helen Martins? So now this...so bearing in mind that The Long Bedroom is one room within the Owl House, and the Owl House comprises of the house as well as a magical outdoor area called the Camel Yard.

**Participant D:** Oh gosh!

**Sarah:** So, this is one tiny little slice of the whole experience. So, what can you tell me about your perceptions of the Owl House?

**Participant D:** Well my perception is that the...there’s a restlessness in Helen, and she just has to pitter-patter potter about the place. And constantly shifted, but I don’t think she chucks anything away, I think she realigns. And there’s a magic in that shifting for me. Restless creative spirit, if you will. But the artist is all over the space. And it links to things that I hold dear in my own studies of local culture and things like that, hospitality, hominess, home making-ness. There are people who took these levels, [..] separate spheres of domestic culture, which is more a Western thing, separate spheres, the woman’s space, the man’s space. There are people who actually worked that into an art form, but a very prescriptive art form. And I think she is playing with the notion of that as an art form. Possibly not taking it seriously, but in doing so, creating art. So, this is what’s keeping her busy. And to me, that very process, is her creating art. And that’s what I would...why I would go to the Owl House, because if one room can captivate me this way, then I think the rest of the house is going to do exactly...

**Sarah:** Ja, I think you would probably spend hours in there.

**Participant D:** Ja.

**Sarah:** Do you feel that the digitised artefacts are...enhance...do you feel that they enhance their tangible counterpart? Or do you feel that they detract from their counterpart?

**Participant D:** No, I wouldn’t feel that they detract. I say that as I sit next to a screen printer, who had to do PDF resolution scans of her own work. And I just wonder what that feel like to her. (laughter) But we are in that world now, this is by necessity. Let me, again, you’ll have to excuse me, but I have to borrow from the world that I know. Now, when Jess came to my space, I was playing an LP on a record player, and the disk...

**Jess:** The Beatles.

**Participant D:** The Beatles. And it was struggling, right? And I also have a cassette player in there, and sooner or later, that will struggle too. Why? Because this is now a relic, and a nice kind of hipster artefact that I have there. I grew up in a time when that was all you had. And now, people would be like, oh, but those things were better. Like, no, when we had those things, we wanted digital. And my producer was old school, on my album it says this, he was like...I thought he was a purist on things, he’s a purist on amps and stuff like that, I get that. But he said, when, you know, it was in the 60s, people were using tapes and tape loops on pencils, standing all around a room, and it was a bit ridiculous. Now a button on a computer can get you all of that and you want to be a purist and say that other stuff was better? …So, this is just where we are. I think this makes the Owl House more accessible. If you make it more accessible, if...I wouldn’t want somebody and they just send it to see this on a phone, but anybody entering on a minimum budget, you know, perhaps a student from a more struggling area in an internet hub or something, who actually wants to be in the world of art, has this accessible to them. That student is from the Western Cape, not the Eastern Cape, so that’s a million miles away. But this draws them there. When they...when you don’t have this, then art and privilege meetings get conflated and it’s a tricky messy conversation. This is for accessibility, and I would be all for that. And I don’t feel it demeans, I think it trains the eye. And I am an... you know, I’m an outsider amateur into this kind of field...medium of art, if you will, but I’m drawn in, this way. And I just think somebody with a more advanced sensibility than me, they might have some criticism and such, but they probably want to go there and criticise the real thing then. So, it draws you to the space, and it, to me, it encourages interaction.

**Sarah:** And I would also really like Jess to answer that question.

**Jess:** No, I think, you know, what I’ve seen of the site, it by no means seems to usurp off the original. It doesn’t try to stand in for anything. I really feel it is a point of accessibility. It’s meant to educate. It’s a space of knowledge, and I do feel...I mean, I’ve been to the Owl House several times in my life, and I’ve been looking at, just that sun, for instance, I was actually quite surprised at how much it had deteriorated since the last time I’d seen it, and more recently in December. And it’s actually...it’s so necessary to have some kind of, you know, digital archive. And I mean, this does act as an archive, it’s not only a port of information, but it’s archiving. These things are going to disappear and wither away with time. It’s in Nieu Bethesda in the Eastern Cape. It’s a very dusty, very dry town, and all the artworks, they’ve been made of things like cement and plaster and glass, and although those things are more durable, they also do weather with time. So, there will come a point at which, you know, the things that we see here are also going to disappear themselves. And it’s so necessary to have these platforms where you can still go back to them. And even for yourself, just to compare, and see the space and experience it from a different angle, I think it’s so necessary. And even if you are that purist, and you decide for yourself that, no, you know, I would only ever want to go back there, I’d only ever want to experience it for itself, and the feeling that comes with that space, that’s fine. But at least for those who don’t necessarily have an opportunity, that this platform does exist. So, no, I think the website does a wonderful job of giving you that option, at least.

**Sarah:** That’s great. That’s cool. So, do you think – both of you – do you think that collections similar to this, like inaccessible, especially...well ja, outsider art collections, but also just inaccessible collections that are not traditional art, not things that you can hang up on the wall, do you think they should be digitised in general? And how do you...and what do you think that process should look like? Is there one way that you can go about doing it all?

**Jess:** It’s your interview, so you start and I’ll follow... (to [name])

**Participant D:** Okay. Yes. I mean, for one, it’s...it is a question to ponder. Because one must split one’s time [background noise] sweeping thing, and throw all art in there, etc. But I think I’m nothing, if not, you know...I don’t know, kind of a shopboard socialist I suppose, in that I want people to see what actually belongs to them…And now, this is a big one for me, I’m speaking to two people of the Eastern Cape here, right? And I’m Western Cape through and through, and it’s pretty bloody dull. So, this is a view and this is like...the two Capes are next to each other, right? But this is a view into something. And I still have the means to just jump in a car and go to the Owl House without having seen this. But I think again, of this hypothetical student who is getting supported to, you know, do art, but still doesn’t know where the nodal points are, what to look at. This is a great guide and I think it then does expand to other forms of art. Because, yes, it’s still great to be in the space, but this doesn’t ruin the space for me. It whets the appetite, it calls you to the space, and it makes you research the space’s context. So now I just heard from Jess, what the actual location in the Eastern Cape now looks and feels like. Okay, I’ve been in the Eastern Cape enough, I get that, feel that. That tells me more about the artist and her position, and what was happening there. To me, dry and dusty, it speaks to a lot of nothing, but a lot of nothing, usually always good...well for art. It brings in art, like...again, Olive Schreiner, she had *nothing* happening on...for her in the Karoo, and she wrote a novel about nothingness, Story of an African Farm, while sun tanning naked on the rocks in the Karoo, because only lizards were going to be looking at her. Phallic. Nothingness can do a lot for the artist, and I don’t think the space could have existed in the Western Cape, because the Western Cape was too corrupt in its own pageantry. Whereas the Eastern Cape, has a natural mysticism to it, there’s a kind of a magic realism to it, because there’s a quiet respectfulness of nature. I think all people in the Eastern Cape...why we in the Western Cape, think you guys are just pretty chilled all the time. And we’re too busy being performative. Look at Cape Town, I mean, you know how I feel about the city, it’s beautiful to look at, but everyone gets caught up in the hype of its performance, and that has been Cape Town’s illness since the 19th Century.

**Sarah:** I really like that you’re bringing in context reality of the geographical space.

**Participant D:** Ja.

**Sarah:** Because that’s something that I toyed with, and I decided not to. One of the reasons being because I get rich data when there’s more critique. But it is...like the Owl House and Nieu Bethesda, are...you can’t take them away from each other.

**Participant D:** Right.

**Sarah:** And so ja, I really like that you brought up that contextualisation, yeah. Even though you don’t know Nieu Bethesda well.

**Participant D:** No, not at all.

**Sarah:** So, you...even with that, the tiniest little bit of knowledge, you’re suddenly like, okay, now I can place it more directly.

**Participant D:** Ja. See now I... if...this is for me – sorry Jess, [..] - I have, you know, a wanderer’s knowledge of the Eastern Cape, but most South Africans are a lot more [..] than I am, and they want to know more about other parts of their country. You know, somebody from Paarl might want to know about Umtata, and what’s happening there. So, I love that we have a hunger for knowledge about our own country, that is how we move art. And here, art is allowing us to move to it. So, the space contextualisation, now the art student sitting here, is like, hey but actually I have some family in the Eastern Cape, so let me just make a big go of it. Because now it gets closer and closer. So, the intimacy - which funny enough, I think it’s practised by our artist here, our late artist, Helen - spills over to the relationship people have to this space. I really feel an intimate connection, because I love clutter art, it...clutter art and kitsch mean a lot to me. And I sense the [..] artist, but now I also put it in its geographical context, I’m really interested.

**Jess:** No, I’m very glad that you did bring up that question in context, because I think having been to Nieu Bethesda and knowing the community, or some of the community that live there, a lot of artists have actually come to live in Nieu Bethesda, and partly because of the Owl House and the kind of space that it’s created itself, and it does...it draws a certain kind of person. I mean, there are people that have been living there their whole lives, but a lot of people have actually moved there since, because they want that lifestyle. And there is, there’s something so enchanting and so engaging about that space, that you know, you feel that you can establish yourself as an artist and then [..]. And... but then again, other more established artists have also come into it in later years. So, I think you know, going back to the question, I think yes, there’s definitely a necessity to digitise, or to make more accessible, you know, what we call outsider art, for the reason that...and then also bringing in the...sort of the context, the geographical location, and there’s...you know, what a site like this might mean for other people that have started, you know, creating in that space, is that it also becomes a great platform for them. Certainly, people do choose the lifestyle, they want something more private, something more isolated. But then again, you know, I... every time...again it...just locating it to this specific site, you know, I always feel very welcome there. And the artists there, they’re always willing to share their practice, they have open studios. So, I think...I don’t think they would shy away from having more visitors who are perhaps more aware of the space now, through platforms like this. So, I think, you know, these sites could mean a lot for other people, and not necessarily just those, you know, invested in this particular site. And also, you know, as we’ve said, that the term outsider art, that’s something that’s, you know, noted in hindsight, or it’s something that’s labelled at a later stage. So, you know, you won’t necessarily have artefacts like these, or spaces like these, really available at somewhere like Iziko, for instance.

**Sarah:** Yes, exactly.

**Jess:** You know, it’s denigrated almost, outsider art. And it’s only very much later that it becomes popular. So, I’m thinking of someone like Séraphine de Senlis, she was...she’s a really well known French outsider artist, and her work is...it’s so popular. But at the time and even, you know, it’s only very recently that it’s become so famous and so credibly drawing for so many people. So yes, I definitely think a platform like this, it does open up opportunities for so much more than just, you know, that space itself, and the people immediately connected with it.

**Sarah:** Nice. Thank you.

**Participant D:** If it helps you, I’m not sure how much help it might offer, but I do recall one of our MA students writing on kitsch culture.

**Sarah:** When you mentioned that earlier, I would love to get my hands on something like that.

**Participant D:** Sure. I don’t know how good her thesis might have been, but her sources, definitely. So, I’ll dig it out for you, it should be on our electronic archives, I’ll...

**Sarah:** That would be great. Because one of the...one of my sources...there’s not a lot of literature on Helen, but a woman wrote her...it was her PhD in Fine Art, on Helen Martins, so I got a lot of my biographical information from her, Sue Imrie Ross, and she said that Helen created ‘a cult of the kitsch’.

**Participant D:** Right.

**Sarah:** And that she did...she just...but she was like a magpie, she liked shiny things, she *loved* it. And ja, I would love to... I know very little about that, especially in the South African context. And I can’t begin to imagine what it must have been like to have known Helen then, because that must have been completely wild.

**Participant D:** Ja. I have some friends, you know, Stellenbosch student types, PhD Master students, who write about, you know, South African women writers of the same period and just the general wildness, it’s there. The fact that they’re, you know, transgressing what a good well brought up, you know, folks would have supposed to have been, there’s wildness, there are queer affairs and things that only came out in letters, many years later. All of these things, can just shed different light...and kitsch it the one thing most of them have in common. So much so, that when these young women doing the research now, my own friends, they live the same kind of lives. I think of my one friend who is a missionary’s daughter, she is all about that kitsch, she’s all about how rebellious these women were, who she’s writing about. They have these things in common. Even now, one student’s PhD that I’m supervising, it’s about somebody more recent, like who’s more recently passed, Reza de Wet, the playwright.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant D:** The same wildness is there, because she knew kind of what she was inheriting. And it’s something that...it’s specific to a certain kind of lifestyle in South Africa, it’s going to be a dusty kind of place, that kind of thing, and then indoors, you have been sharpened.

**Jess:** But it’s strange, now we can call it kitsch and outsider art, but then it...they called madness, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja, exactly.

**Jess:** A completely misconstrued freak.

**Sarah:** Ja. Was there one artefact in particular that held your interest?

**Participant D:** Mm. Very last one I spotted, would be the mermaid. And the bio...had all to do with, you know, how it was made, and I think, Plaster of Paris, and all that comes into it. To me it just looks...it’s a mermaid. And it’s in a room where she would spend three hours on the lighting alone. Like the lighting was initially the thing that struck me, and all the kind of activity that goes to it, the way she’d spread the light, and the way it fought depression. But the symbol of the mermaid holds it all together. Because it was the last thing I saw, and I was like well, that’s a perfect full stop, to my tour of this room…Again, you think of the handmaiden, and that’s where I started and I end with the mermaid, both feminine figures, and they speak to a certain kind of imagination, and it’s a rich playful imagination. The...it punctuates the room as a safe space, a somewhat safe space. And if your eyes are willing, then it’s a safe space for you as well. If you’re like over critical or [..], then you’re missing the point and this person wouldn’t have wanted you there in the first place.

**Sarah:** That’s very nice. And ja, there are so many of those identical mermaids around the house.

**Participant D:** Oh great.

**Sarah:** She had the little plastic mould. And then in the Camel Yard, you see the mermaids again, in her sculpture and the same...the form of her bust is over and over again, she replicates it, but in different ways. And it’s...ja, it’s very cool.

**Participant D:** It’s a feast for the eyes.

**Sarah:** Okay. And then final formal question. How satisfactory was the browsing experience of the digital collection?

**Participant D:** I would say very, very satisfactory. I initially, you know, had my technical issues with the mac, because I’m a, you know, I don’t have a mac, I should, so that’s got nothing to do with it. If this were on my computer, I’d...you know, it wouldn’t have been a problem…No, I liked it. I liked the way the ‘read more’ was there, I had a choice if I wanted to read more or not. It wasn’t forced on me. I love...there was a non-intrusive nature, sure, my eye was guided, but even there, when you have little frames guiding you, the inner child in you also looks at everything outside of those frames. So, I felt I had choice, I felt I had the time to do it. And then somebody sitting in their own space, would have even more time, you know, sitting there with their glass of wine, and chilling. Or even in an internet café, if they bought an hour and it’s R5 for an hour, in the mid-town here, then they would have time to look at this. And it’s one room, so again, I think of the potential thriving art student who sees this, and then is hungered enough by it, to want to make plans. And this is the kind of thing they can take to one of their mentors and say, this is the way I read it, can you help me get there. And this kind of underpins that conversation. So, I do like the layout, I think it’s friendly, I think it’s non-intrusive and very, very helpful.

**Sarah:** Thank you. Yay!

**Participant D:** Can I get some wine now please?

**Sarah:** Now we can get some wine.

**Participant D:** That was fun.