­­Transcription of Interview

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

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Time: 00:45:37

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** But that...it’s a vase and a vase contains water, and the mermaids are close to water, they are always connected with water.

**Sarah:** And in the Camel Yard that’s...

**Participant E:** That’s right. So, she’s got these little tableaux going, all with the same theme, interior, exterior, because you know, you see the way her head’s thinking.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And you know, so it is appropriate that they’re close to a water source, the creatures of water. And it’s also quite interesting to look at the Owl House in relation to the elements, earth, air fire, water, you know, as a framework as well.

**Sarah:** Ja, okay.

**Participant E:** It’s another quite nice methodology, you know.

**Sarah:** It makes a lot of sense, ja.

**Participant E:** What are her fire elements, what are her water elements, what are her earth elements, [..].

**Sarah:** Ja, that does make a lot of sense. Because I’m...because it...for this project, for me, I mean obviously I did a lot of reading about Helen and about the Owl House, but I’m not coming at it from a...I’m not trying to decipher her or make sense of it, I’m just using this as an example.

**Participant E:** Mm. But that is something you can cluster.

**Sarah:** But that is a really nice point, ja.

**Participant E:** Librarian thing..

**Sarah:** Exactly.

**Participant E:** ..I mean, you’re thinking in categories, aren’t you?

**Sarah:** Exactly. And archiving that would be a really nice way of doing it.

**Participant E:** Archive...Earth, air, water, fire, you know, the suns are fire, that for example, you know, is an obviously thing. All the stars are fire. There’s a lot of water in a dream. Water’s always...and then you know you can cluster associations with water, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And then you start to, you know, break into how she was using those associations. She couldn’t have been using all of them, which ones was she using, or how is she using them, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** I mean, water’s always associated with flow, with intuition..

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** ..with...it’s an element of awes and an element of a paradise garden, because you can’t have vegetative growth without water, you know, so...And the Owl House has that element of the paradise garden.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And this vase has a garden...has garden imagery on it, you know, it’s a little garden. The vase is a little garden. It’s life...makes life possible, water. Okay, so now I go, ‘next’, what comes up? Mug. Where would this mug be in the..?

**Sarah:** This was on the far window sill.

**Participant E:** On the far window sill. I know nothing about this mug. I’m not...you know. You need to get hold of Jill Wenman.

**Sarah:** Yes, I’ve heard about Jill Wenman. But for now…

**Participant E:** Because Jill visited...ja.

**Sarah:** ..this...I’m..

**Participant E:** She might have a memory of the things like mugs, because she stayed with Helen, so she might have known...she might remember the mug, this sort of thing, if you want to.

**Sarah:** Ja. But for now, what...I mean, what I’d like you to do, is kind of...I’m trying to think. I’m going to ask you about your interpretations of the Owl House as a digitised version. So, what the...what is enhanced by the digital versions and what is...and what it detracted.

**Participant E:** Oh, okay.

**Sarah:** So don’t worry about giving me information...

**Participant E:** Okay.

**Sarah:** …about the artefacts, but it’s more just your general feeling about the platform.

**Participant E:** Well it does give people an opportunity to wander through, because you know, without being there.

**Sarah:** (sorting computer problem) Sorry. You were saying?

**Participant E:** (We can use this one. Maybe I’ve messed it up, so sorry.)

**Sarah:** (No, I’m sure you haven’t. Sorry hey.) Here. So you can either go to the next artefact using ‘previous’ or ‘next’, or go back to ‘home’, to see it in a…

**Participant E:** Okay, let’s go back to ‘home’. Right. Well you know, I think it’s great for people who can’t get there. It’s a great way of, you know…

**Sarah:** ...making it accessible.

**Participant E:** Ja. And will they have illustrations? Any of them have illustra...I mean, will there be little...oh yes, you ‘read more’, you do have...of course, you have to ‘read more’.

**Sarah:** Yes. So within the information page, there’s the...there’s providence information if there is any, there’s the actual physical dimensions and materials, and then whatever information I could find, and literature from you.

**Participant E:** Mm.

**Sarah:** And then the kind of archival picture, then a in context picture, and then for the ones that are dynamic, I’ve done videos with sounds.

**Participant E:** Mm. Press ‘next’, just go back to ‘home’.

**Sarah:** And if you want to scroll, if you use two fingers on the...ja, there we go.

**Participant E:** Lamp. [..] some things, lamp. The brandy glass. There’s a nice story...I mean, you noticed that she uses, elsewhere in the house, the kind of upside-down brandy glass.

**Sarah:** Yes, ja.

**Participant E:** This part of getting, you know, weird light effects, you know..

**Sarah:** How she just kind of re-purposed things.

**Participant E:** She re-purposed things. But she liked the other-worldly, you know, quality, the trans...that sort of trance-like kind of environment you can create when you do things with...the psychedelia of it, if you like.

**Sarah:** Ja. That’s nice.

**Participant E:** The psychedelia of it all. She did. This isn’t a light that comes on. It might catch the sunlight. It would catch the sunlight and cast green shadows. Transformations that happened in washes of coloured light. The spectrum of light. I don’t know why you think I’m going to be critical, I think it’s cool, you know, it’s interactive. And as you say, it’s like a library, it isn’t...you know, it’s just like a picture that comes alive.

**Sarah:** Ja. But it still is...I mean, it’s not...so I made the choice to just kind of select...I selected twenty objects.

**Participant E:** Mm.

**Sarah:** And I wanted to have kind of diverse objects, in terms of things that were definitely hers, things that just are there that people are unsure of, things that are organic, things that..

**Participant E:** Mm. Because that’s how the Owl House is at the moment, it’s a conglomerate, you know..

**Sarah:** Exactly.

**Participant E:** ..we’re dealing with a conglomerate. It’s a good, you know...(pause) Right, ‘home’. It’s a nice room to use, because it’s a kind of a panorama room.

**Sarah:** Yeah, and I mean, I find it such a fascinating room, because it is that kind of mixture between private and public. I mean all of her spaces were private and public, but this one seems like a much more intimate space.

**Participant E:** She slept here. She liked to sleep here.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant E:** And she lived in the house on her own. Because it got a lot of sunlight. There wasn’t a wall outside here.

**Sarah:** Oh was that building not there?

**Participant E:** It was built at a later stage, which is terrible, because it stops the flood of sunlight. So, this was really a warm room. And you try to be in a warm room in the Karoo in winter, you know.

**Sarah:** Yes, ja, ja.

**Participant E:** It was like the sun porch room.

**Sarah:** Nice.

**Participant E:** You know so, you know how important the sun was to her.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** But a lot of the old houses had a room like this that trapped the heat in summer...I mean, in winter, ja.

**Sarah:** A good one to click on, would be the wind-chime, because there’s a video of that.

**Participant E:** Okay.

**Sarah:** And then ‘read more’. Scroll down a bit, ja.

**Participant E:** (wind-chime tinkling) It’s beautiful, it’s beautifully done.

**Sarah:** Thank you.

**Participant E:** What a lovely little animation touch. (chuckles)

**Sarah:** I think it’s so nice to have...I mean to make the most of the digital format.

**Participant E:** Yes, that’s right.

**Sarah:** But there isn’t...most of the things in there are static, but...

**Participant E:** Yes.

**Sarah:** ..I think if this was actually a project, then we would come up with more options.

**Participant E:** Yes, you see, even the wind is an important element for her, you know. Sun, the sun is, but you know, the wind is too, actually. You know, the breezy sound..

**Sarah:** I mean also, yeah, going back to the elements, then air...

**Participant E:** It’s air, it’s an air element, isn’t it?

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** You know, wind is an air element.

**Sarah:** Ja, and the birds play into the garden of paradise, [..].

**Participant E:** And birds are an air element or link air and earth, you know, they’re creatures that live in that zone of...they can fly. And their connection with spirit, so is wind, it’s always...it’s the...you know, it’s always connected with spirit, isn’t it?

**Sarah:** Ja, absolutely.

**Participant E:** Mm. (chimes tinkling) And then, in a way, the Owl House is like a great spirit trap, like a great big dream catcher or something, you know, it is.

**Sarah:** That’s a lovely way of putting it.

**Participant E:** Because I mean, it’s what she did with the sunlight or the starlight, you know, bending light into rooms and everything, that was capturing the outside. One part of the spectrum of outside sensation, you know, sound is another. You know, transformer...a place of...a transformer’s house. I mean, you know, imagine it as a transformer, you know, you bring in one of the elements and it transforms, you know, I mean it makes it visible, or it...

**Sarah:** Ja, that...it’s magic, ja.

**Participant E:** I mean, she was playful, you know, and she was a magician. I like that word for her, you know, a bit of a magician, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja, that’s lovely.

**Participant E:** Mm. I mean, that’s what interested her, you know, she was...I think you know, sometimes [..]. You know, [..] I won’t say that, but I’ve...this...the element of how she arrived at things through play is important, ja.

**Sarah:** Right.

**Participant E:** And that she was very sensual, as a personality, she was very sensual. And so it’s...I love what Peggy Delport says about her in my book, which I can show you a copy of, because I had on [..]..

**Sarah:** Oh, the new one?

**Participant E:** Ja, the new one.

**Sarah:** Oh, divine.

**Participant E:** You must come to the...did I send you an invitation...

**Sarah:** Yes, you did, I’ll definitely be there.

**Participant E:** You know, Peggy Delport, in an interview, she said to me, she was almost fuller than a person could be, and she talks about her sense of vanity...

**Sarah:** So did you go and do more interviews and do more research?

**Participant E:** No, this is not the book that’s been out for a long time, it was my first book. And I...and then I updated it, in an introductory chapter.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant E:** But I like it, because it’s got a lot of original interviews.

**Sarah:** Nice, nice. I’ve been using your ‘Journey through the Owl House’ a lot.

**Participant E:** Ja, ja. And this has been out such a long time.

**Sarah:** Very nice layout.

**Participant E:** It’s beautifully done. It’s a beautifully...manuscript.

**Sarah:** It’s really nice. Like a round...edges also.

**Participant E:** Ja, ja. Marius is a great book designer, Marius Le Roux.

**Sarah:** And...Shame, you can press ‘home’ again and we can stop there.

**Participant E:** Alright, good. Charming. Of course, somebody’s going to get you do all the rooms now. (laughter)

**Sarah:** When I first started the project, I thought, oh, I’ll do...you know, the whole Owl House, and then I said no..

**Participant E:** It’s a lot of work.

**Sarah:** ..I don’t have seventeen years to do a post doc, this is..

**Participant E:** Mm. And it’s part of your librarianship. Is that what you said, your librarianship?

**Sarah:** Yes, yes, so it’s an M.Phil in Digital Curation, through the Library and Information Studies Department.

**Participant E:** Digital Curation, divine!

**Sarah:** Ja. Ja, it’s nice, and it’s...I want to get into museums.

**Participant E:** Yes.

**Sarah:** And this is...ja, I feel like this has been a really good fit, just for...ja, kind of that..

**Participant E:** Yes, yes.

**Sarah:** ..inbetween the archives and art. It’s been good, ja.

**Participant E:** Ja, ja. (pause) It might be useful to include a mirror somewhere, because there’s a lot that can be said about mirrors.

**Sarah:** Ja. I have thought that in hindsight too.

**Participant E:** Ja. You’ve got your coloured glass here with your bottles, so you can, you know, kind of say general things about coloured glass, and the way she lined it up so that the light will come through it. Just like she’s lined this up, so the light...like green upturned vase so that the light will come through it and create trans...you know, washes of coloured light, just like the sort of effect you get in a cathedral.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** With...through stained glass. She’s creating her own kind of version of a rose window, you know, stained glass.

**Sarah:** Ja, absolutely.

**Participant E:** So that...you’ve got that item going. But you see, the mirrors are so interesting because they always multiply space, they confuse, they disorientate. Especially...because I mean. the size is huge, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja, they are [..].

**Participant E:** If you might take a hand mirror, like at the back here, and make it look gigantic, you know..

**Sarah:** And like you were saying earlier, bringing the outside inside.

**Participant E:** Bringing the outside inside. You know, but part of her work is kind of like this like psychedelia story, and all this kind of...almost getting into, you know, this trance state stuff, you know. So to confuse the senses, to confuse the reality, is part of her purpose, in places.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And the big mirrors do that too, you know. Where am I? How big am I if the mirror is bigger than me? I mean if the hand mirror’s bigger than me, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja. Like alice in Wonderland, actually.

**Participant E:** You know, am I inside or outside? Up or down? You know, inside or out...you know, whatever. So...and the mirrors are also always an indication that there’s an unseen world too somehow, okay, that...they’re also always a...something that you can’t reach. It’s an illusion. They’re always...it’s that idea of deception and illusion was also...was affiliated with mirrors. I think the mirrors are a very nice image to bring in somewhere, you know.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant E:** And probably more meaningful than some of the...the thing is, to look at each object and see how much can be said about it. [..].

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And how meaningful it is in the full swing of things. The rainbow, you know, curtains and all the colours and geometries of the ceiling, you know, painted room. And the way she does her walls. I mean these are like, you know, like fractured light patterns in a way, you know, like barcodes aren’t they?

**Sarah:** Ja, absolutely.

**Participant E:** But...so she’s...I mean she’s interested in...we know now that she’s interested in the dispersion of light and stained lights, you know, refracted and reflected lights, and what happens. I mean, a lot of the Owl House is a study in light. So something that...where you can talk about light, is also not a bad thing to...you know, to settle on. I suppose you put here, here with these bottles, you know. The kind of...like the heady sensuality of the place, you know, all the colours and the glitter and the...everything, the theatricality of it. Something where you could talk about, you know, like the theatricality, the stage set aspect of what she was creating.

**Sarah:** Mhm.

**Participant E:** You know, the living stage set. Both alluring and dangerous. You’ve got there...like the adornment [..]..

**Sarah:** But you know, you...let me launch straight into questions while you’re there. Let me grab my...

**Participant E:** Ja. You want to video soon, you see I know nothing about that. So if, for example, you can’t...maybe you got [..] information out of...assuming from Uruguay [..] video. (pause – setting up) I think it’s not correct to say that Helen did not travel extensively.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant E:** I think it’s from the time that she arrived...I know that Sue Ross [..]...From the time she settled back in Nieu Bethesda to look after her ailing parents, she didn’t travel extensively. Before that, she did, you know.

**Sarah:** But not out of South Africa?

**Participant E:** Not out of South Africa. Well you know [..] once mentioned she might have done an overseas trip. She might have, I don’t know.

**Sarah:** Oh really? Really? I’ll..

**Participant E:** But she was very well educated and well informed. And she travelled extensively in South Africa. For a time she was part of a theatre group.

**Sarah:** Yes. I remember reading about that. Okay I’ll remember that.

**Participant E:** So...but this is...you’re just quoting Sue Ross, so that’s just fine. But when you see...‘Alida Seymour travelled a great deal, it seems that she introduced the exotic into Helen’s life through gifts and postcards’. She did, she did introduce the exotic and kept Helen in touch with the wider world. So that is true, ja. But this might have been, also just an object that came on a local...imported object. I mean an imported object.

**Sarah:** Ja. And just..

**Participant E:** On a suitcase, or this, or that, who knows? So what must...what were you moving into? What were you going to..

**Sarah:** I’m going to ask you some questions.

**Participant E:** Okay.

**Sarah:** About digital collections in general.

**Participant E:** Okay.

**Sarah:** But if it’s fine, I’m recording this.

**Participant E:** Yes.

**Sarah:** So if you can...okay, when did you first go to the Owl House? What were your first experiences of it?

**Participant E:** Mm, I was about...I was very young, I was a university student and I was travelling through with another Art Student in a Volkswagen...my old beat up Volkswagen, on the way to Lesotho for a holiday and our art lecturer, Peggy Delport had a home there. And we’d asked if we could stop by and see her. And I had heard about the Owl House through someone I was sharing a home with, Glynn Houston, he was a friend of Jill Wenman’s. So I mean you know, they’re all the circle of connections, the web of connections that always happens. And so we drove into Nieu-bethesda one evening and failed to find Peggy’s house, we had bad, mad directions, but we found the Owl House, because that’s easy to find, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And we just...I just like...that was it, you know. I didn’t do anything with having seen it, I just tucked it away at the back of my memory. I mean, I just...I was just amazed. It was the year Helen died, that’s how far back it was.

**Sarah:** Oh wow, okay.

**Participant E:** So that was 197..

**Sarah:** It was ‘76?

**Participant E:** ..6. That’s right. And there was long grasses growing between the statues and they were so...they looked soft, and they merged out of, you know, out of these grasses. We stood on a barrel outside the moon gate, on an old oil barrel that happened to land...tried to avoid getting, you know, pricked by the moon...the cactus plants, you know, the queen of the night cactus plants, which were in bloom and looking beautiful..

**Sarah:** Wonderful.

**Participant E:** ..and so perfumed. And it was sunset and it was quite entrancing, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja, I can only imagine.

**Participant E:** Geez! Who would make a place like this? This is interesting! You know. And it just seemed so ecstatic in a way, I liked the ecstasy element. A lot of the work is...this...even in this Long Bedroom, is...has an ecstasy element, you know, the...staining the light, all that is all part of an ecstasy language, you know.

**Sarah:** Absolutely.

**Participant E:** So I thought, ooh, I’d like to come back here and years later when I was doing an Art History Honours, I made an excuse to come back...to get back there, by choosing Helen as an example - just like you’re doing a thesis now – as an example of a woman artist who had been neglected.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant E:** And you know, and at the time she was not an...at the time she really was, you know, nobody else had really looked at her work.

**Sarah:** Ja. And since then? I mean then...when did the first...when did your book first come out?

**Participant E:** Ah, this original book came out...it’ll say in the beginning, but it must have been like twenty-five years ago, or something, a long time ago.

**Sarah:** Ja. Actually I’ve been [..] it.

**Participant E:** 19..

**Sarah:** It was 1997.

**Participant E:** ..97.

**Sarah:** I should know that, yes.

**Participant E:** So that is about..

**Sarah:** Ja, twenty years ago.

**Participant E:** Twenty years ago?

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** Okay, mm.

**Sarah:** And so it’s something that you keep on returning back to. And I mean, you’re part of the..

**Participant E:** No, that second one came out 1997. This one would have been out about 1990, I think.

**Sarah:** Oh, yes, that’s true, ja.

**Participant E:** 1990, ja.

**Sarah:** You’re now on the – what do you call it? - a Board, the consultants for the organisation.

**Participant E:** Yes, there’s a...Yes, yes. I’ve been very involved with that. In fact I probably...I mean I was responsible for setting it up. The old Board appointed me as an Honorary Director. And when I saw that things were going badly wrong in Nieu Bethesda, with the Owl House...not only with the Owl House, the Owl House was a...what was happening at the Owl House, was a catalyst for a Nieu Bethesda *war*. People practically killing each other...

**Sarah:** I’ve heard little bits about that, ja.

**Participant E:** ..over small and large matters. One of the matters was where the new entrance should be, at who’s coffee shop should it spill out. You know, that sort of thing. So a lot of self-interest...a lot of people not understanding the Owl House, and much decision making being made for dubious reasons and reasons of self-interest. That was what was going on. The village...other members in the village were up in arms, partly because they’ve...sometimes because they thought their coffee shop was being, you know, sidelined, but sometimes because they genuinely saw that the trustees were not acting in the best interest of the Owl House. So, there were mixed motives for the opposition too.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** But things came to a stasis, you know, how do you end a war in a small...a damaging war, in a small town. And a war that had sort of brought all the restoration to a standstill, because it came to the point where the Owl House Board were too scared to make any move, in case the heavens collapsed on them. You know what I mean? In case there was a riot. So it...I suggested to Terry Winship, at the time, that it was time to get professional, to think beyond, ‘local is lekker’, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And that the Owl House kind of deserved and was ready to move onto a professional way of operating, and to do that, one would have to put together a professional team. Perhaps they could come in as an Advisory Board, but perhaps the first step was to get together a group of individuals who could put their heads together and come up with a way forward for the Owl House. And a way forward to putting it onto a professional footing. So it was actually through my contacts in the museum world, I managed to get a lot of names of people to approach. There wasn’t much in it for anyone who came onboard, I mean, in relation to financial reward or *anything*, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja. Kind of for the love of it.

**Participant E:** Ja, for the love of...The team who we did get, were...they ended up mostly being people who...not all, but mostly people I knew, because they did it out of goodwill and friendship to me. You know what I mean? That’s how these things work, you know?

**Sarah:** Ja, absolutely.

**Participant E:** And a lot of the very important museum experts who we approached, you know, they didn’t have the *time* for it, or they weren’t *doing* things that weren’t paid...weren’t going to get a proper reward. We got...I insisted that everyone should get at least their expenses paid and a small stipend.

**Sarah:** Mhm.

**Participant E:** Which created, you know, an enormous uproar in Nieu Bethesda. How much money was being spend on, you know, redesigning the Owl House. Meanwhile you got top people for peanuts, actually, you know, for peanuts.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And that team met for about five days in Nieu Bethesda.

**Sarah:** Wow!

**Participant E:** Some of them had never seen the Owl House, so they needed to familiarise themselves with the Owl House, and we went through an intense programme of looking at every aspect of the life of a museum, and relating it to the life of the Owl House, and how the Owl House was being run, and could be run. And we created vast flowcharts of interconnecting thought and...you know, right from what, you know, the overarching philosophy should be towards restoration, whether it was an...you know, like...and what the appropriate museum practices were for that philosophy. I mean we did decide, for example, that it was not of the sort of museum where you kept everything exactly as it is, because what’s more important to keep the spirit of the place from it, and the atmosphere of the place right. Because you can never...at what point...the other approach is just...makes no sense for the Owl House. It was a living environment at the time Helen was there, it, you know, it changed daily, it...she was in the process of changing it when she died, you know, and on and on. She had plans for it, you know, for painting the sculptures and moving it forward in a certain direction. So what was trying to capture...and also, you know, at this stage, it’s a very deteriorated environment.

**Sarah:** Absolutely.

**Participant E:** So what do you do with a deteriorated environment, do you faithfully sort of conserve it and stop the clock? No, it makes no sense. So the other approach is to really attempt to understand the meaning content of the place, and to do everything with that in mind. And in a way that’s appropriate to the meaning content.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And of course it will depend on interpretation, and interpretations will vary over the years, but that’s rather nice, it will give it kind of a living, changing element again, to the Owl House. You know what I mean?

**Sarah:** True. But I mean, to what extent do you think that the Owl House should be preserved?

**Participant E:** I...you know, I never thought it would last as long as it’s lasted.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant E:** Because it is a fragile environment. And that’s why I wrote the first book, actually, because it was a way of preserving it. It was one of my chief motivations, writing this book, it was a way of preserving the Owl House on paper, you know, in the days before digital preservation.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** You’d...going one step further. (chuckles) And I do think it’s an interesting artwork for South Africa, which is a good reason to preserve it. It’s interesting because it’s accessible, and doesn’t frighten off a lot of people, the way, you know, maybe going to an exhibition of abstract art would frighten off a lot of people, because they would...you know, people who don’t know about art, sometimes feel fooled by that sort of art, or they feel that it’s an intellectual...it’s all created for an intellectual elite, or it’s an in-house story, or...you don’t really...you know what I mean? But the Owl House is user-friendly, you know, and you can come to it at a lot of levels. You can know nothing about art and walk through and have fun, you know, and see all the little...the lovely little cameos of...and children can enjoy it, and old people can enjoy it, everybody inbetween. And you know, you can make connections of biblical stories, you can see the lovely little cameos of a woman leaning out of a church window holding a lamp, lighting the way, you can...it’s full of anecdote. And all that is very friendly and accessible for…

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And at the same time...I mean that’s on the surface of...it’s full of anecdotal...there’s a sort of a deeper story happening along the way as well, which is extremely interesting if you want to pick up on it. And the deeper story is fathomless, actually, you know, it’s...because it’s a mystical...it has mystical intent, the Owl House, you know, it’s...Helen had this sense of creating her version of the Holy Land, you know. Very eccentric Holy Land, full of Buddhism and Mecca structures and you know, the whole of the world’s religions under one roof, and all the rest of it. But nevertheless, it was a...it was a search, it was a search for her version of divinity, if you like. For her version of what makes like meaningful of...and it’s partly what gave her this tremendous sense of purpose towards it, you know. Because that’s really one of the things that chiefly gives people purpose in life, isn’t it? Is the divine quest, if you’re on it...if you’re on it.

**Sarah:** Absolutely.

**Participant E:** It seems to saturate life with a rich kind of sense of meaning. So I think it’s really what motivated her. And when people say to me, ooh, she was very wounded, very unhappy, all the rest of it. I think, you know, who isn’t really. Ja, of course she had bad experiences, like so does everybody, but she had found something priceless through her work and through her quest, you know. And she was having a fine time, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** You can see she’s having a fine time, you know.

**Sarah:** Absolutely. But I get frustrated when people reflect the Owl House as being a depressing...

**Participant E:** Yes. No, it...the thing…

**Sarah:** ...because I think..

**Participant E:** …it’s got that rep...and it’s unfortunately Sue Ross’s book played into that.

**Sarah:** Oh really? I’m not surprised.

**Participant E:** It’s the agony of style, you know, it’s like Helen was the subject of incest, which I don’t actually support that interpretation of what happened, or that it happened, you know. And that she...her work was fuelled by hurt. I think it might poss...some of it might have been fuelled by hurt, and a lot of it was fuelled by the calling of the divine, you know. She was a sort of latter day Shaman. You know what I mean? She was working in a Shamanic way.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And having a huge amount of fun doing so.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** Of course she was living in an isolated town and it was very lonely for her at times. Of course she felt all those sorts of painful emotions of being...of living alone and not being understood, but she put her purpose first. She could have dropped her purpose and you know, and been understood. You know what I mean?

**Sarah:** No, absolutely.

**Participant E:** But she chose to pursue her path. And it excited her, what she was doing and she was very well informed for her day, very educated, very...so she could bring in snippets of thought from many corners of the earth, actually, you know, into...and build it into her work, you know, and personalise it.

**Sarah:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Participant E:** So she, in a way, was, if you like, writing her own bible, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja. I wonder what Helen would do, if she had a blog. (chuckles)

**Participant E:** I don’t know. I don’t know what she would do.

**Sarah:** But no, but I really...

**Participant E:** But she’s totally eccentric, and that’s what...that’s [..] also what appealed to me, is that she’s totally eccentric, I love eccentric people, people who can think out of the box. And I think that’s part of why it should survive, is because, I think places that help people to understand that there isn’t one way of thinking, are very useful for humanity, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** That makes us more tolerant, it opens our eyes, it sees how we’re all connected, you know.

**Sarah:** Absolutely.

**Participant E:** And it’s inspiring. And a lot of people are inspired by the Owl House. That’s another reason, you know, that it should...we should try to preserve it. Because it also says, you know, it’s made out of rubbish, you know, or very cheap materials, or you know. It also says you can be creative. If I can be creative, you can be creative, anyone can be creative. And you don’t need to have money to be creative, you only have to have imagination.

**Sarah:** Absolutely.

**Participant E:** And that’s an inspiring message for people, you know.

**Sarah:** Absolutely.

**Participant E:** It’s not an exclus...creativity isn’t an exclusive domain, you know, we can all just take any old rubbish and make things.

**Sarah:** Ja, so on that...so the accessibility of art…

**Participant E:** Yes.

**Sarah:** ..what do you think of this collection being digitised, and also in terms of other collections? So if it’s...what do you think of collections like this, outsider art environments being digitised? Do you think it is overall, a good thing, or a bad thing?

**Participant E:** I think it’s going to happen, so there’s no use judging whether it’s a good or bad thing, you know, it’s going to happen, it’s the way..

**Sarah:** What would make it a bad thing? And what would make it a better thing?

**Participant E:** Well some of the things I was touching on with you, I think what makes it a...it can be intelligently done. And when it’s intelligently done, you stop at the...at carefully selected objects, that in themselves can network to a whole web of meanings that are pertinent to the place. So it becomes the...you’re talking about the macrocosm, microcosm story. This is a microcosmic setup that you are digitalising, and all the little microcosmic objects network out to the macrocosm, to the overview, to the big picture.

**Sarah:** Ja. Absolutely. Like if the Camel Yard was also done..

**Participant E:** I mean, that’s an intelligent way of doing it.

**Sarah:** ..then the mermaids would be next to the other mermaids and the..

**Participant E:** That’s right, ja.

**Sarah:** Okay. But so you’re saying that if it’s going to be done, it needs to be thoroughly researched.

**Participant E:** Yes, again I think you can allow people to enter at their own level. Maybe they can be...you know, not everybody is interested in the aspect of mysticism we’ve been talking about, the esoteric thought, that interests me, you know, but...or art interpretation. So you could have a button where you go into the philosophical or the art historical mode, if you wish to, I suppose. And then a button if you want, you know, little stories. If you want the story about how her father annotated the family Bible with comments. That sort of...you know, snake in the grass. Yes that’s you Koos! You know, all that.

**Sarah:** Ja, I love that story.

**Participant E:** You can do anecdotes.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** So, you can have options I suppose, for people, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja, ja, that’s actually nice, like philosophical anecdotal provenance...

**Participant E:** Yes, that’s right.

**Sarah:** Yeah, that...So in order...so...and correct me if I...I don’t want to put words in your mouth. So if one was to digitise the Owl House in its entirety, it would take much more than just one person, with no knowledge of the Owl House, going in and digitising it.

**Participant E:** Yes.

**Sarah:** It would mean a lot of consultation.

**Participant E:** Yes, that’s right.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** I think it would, actually. Yes, if one’s going to do something like that. Well...mm. And there’s quite a lot you can pull out of the current literature.

**Sarah:** Ja, yes.

**Participant E:** One person can pull out of the current literature and research.

**Sarah:** Ja. Do you feel that the digital versions of some of the artefacts, enhance the artefacts in any way, or do you feel like it was more of a detracting from the artefacts?

**Participant E:** Well, here we’re talking about that divide between real reality and simulated reality. Sometimes simulated reality’s often...is more glamorous. But it was also...it has much less information, because well, the real thing always has more information. Objects have vibrational qualities that some people pick up. They have auras that some people pick up. They have...they can be seen...you know, they can swivel and you can see them from all angles, you know. Or I mean, you can...but you could probably simulate that, you can give it 3D version.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** But somehow, it’s also why I always prefer to actually be in somebody’s space talking to someone, like I am with you now. If we were having this conversation over skype, I wouldn’t be saying the same things.

**Sarah:** No absolutely.

**Participant E:** It doesn’t happen.

**Sarah:** Absolutely.

**Participant E:** You don’t pick up somebody...what you think somebody’s going to understand as easily. One’s not in their field, in their vibrational field. I mean I know you might think I’m talking a bit hokey-pokey, but I, you know..

**Sarah:** Ja, I hear you, I agree with you.

**Participant E:** ..I actually think there’s no substitute for the real thing. But a lot of people can’t get to the real thing, it’s expensive, so maybe it’s a good second best, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja. No, that’s a good way of putting it.

**Participant E:** Yes.

**Sarah:** Ja, and especially in terms of accessibility.

**Participant E:** That’s right.

**Sarah:** But I mean, do you think that with this platform, people could interpret and experience and perceive the Owl House as it is? Or do you think it’s completely different? Do you think there’s space for a digital collection to be an immersive one?

**Participant E:** Ja, I do. Of course they can, of course they can. Just like I can, you know, buy a book on Gauguin’s paintings, that I’ve never seen a real one, and I can...the real thing, you know. And of course I’ll miss a lot, but...not seeing the real thing, but I’ll get a lot too, you know.

**Sarah:** Ja, it’s better than nothing.

**Participant E:** Better than nothing! (laughter)

**Sarah:** And then a formal-ish question. How satisfactory was this platform as a browsing experience?

**Participant E:** Well, you see, you’ve given it to me, and I know a lot. (phone interruption)

**Sarah:** I’m going to ask you to sign a consent form if that’s okay.

**Participant E:** Ja, sure, sure.

**Sarah:** I’ll very happily send you the transcript, and...

**Participant E:** And you know, don’t think that you can’t call me, or we can’t have another chat. I’m really happy to, you know.

**Sarah:** Thank you.

**Participant E:** (signing of form) It’s delightful talking to you, and I think you’re really smart. And..

**Sarah:** Oh, it’s so wonderful having you onboard with this. I really, really..

**Participant E:** And ja, if I can be of help, I’d love to be of help.

**Sarah:** Thank you so much.

**Participant E:** Okay.

**Sarah:** Thank you [..]. And I’ll see you next week at the launch?

**Participant E:** And see you next week at the launch.

**Sarah:** Thank you for coming to my place.

**Participant E:** It’s such a pleasure, Sarah. Maybe you should also...it’s also important, because it wasn’t made by one person, it was a collaborative artwork.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And crossing the colour barrier in a day when maybe that was not as usual.

**Sarah:** Absolutely.

**Participant E:** But it brings...it’s a unifying place. It’s not only unifies the world’s religions, it unifies the races of the world, if you like.

**Sarah:** That is a really important part of it, ja.

**Participant E:** It’s about cooperation, collaboration, creativity...all those things, you know. Affirming things really.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant E:** And I...that is...it also has higher purpose. I mean we spoke a little bit about, you know, her personal transcendental quest, that’s higher purpose. So it’s really...it’s an artwork that...some people go and they get it and they don’t know they get it. But it changes people.

**Sarah:** Mm, absolutely.

**Participant E:** Ja.

**Sarah:** I’ll definitely be in touch with you. (oh sorry)

**Participant E:** Okay.

**Sarah:** I’ll definitely be in touch with you with some more things.

**Participant E:** Okay.