­­Transcription of Interview

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

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**Sarah:** Okay, interview with [name]. Thank you for taking part [name].

**Participant C:** It’s a pleasure.

**Sarah:** Okay, before I start with questions about the online collection, I want to just get a general idea about you as a museum going person. Do you go to museums? Are you interested in museums?

**Participant C:** Yes, I don’t go very often, but I do like to go.

**Sarah:** To date, can you explain your prior experience of the Owl House, whether it’s being there physically, or things that you happen to know about it, or any experience that you’ve had of it?

**Participant C:** I’ve been there once, physically, probably eight or nine years ago. And I’d heard about it before from [Participant E], and I’d seen the book and I think that was…ja, I think before I’d been there, I didn’t know a hell of a lot of detail about it.

**Sarah:** What are your perceptions of the Owl House?

**Participant C:** From having been there?

**Sarah:** Mhm.

**Participant C:** I thought it was a very cool and very weird place, and…

**Sarah:** Cool, why? Weird, why? (laughter)

**Participant C:** Right, big words. I don’t know, from what I remember, I think I remember the garden outside more, because I think the inside creeped me out slightly, so I think I spent more time in the garden outside. But I found it fascinating I think, just the kind of…the number of things that she’d made and the amount of, I suppose, creativity contained in that house and garden. And the house as well, I remember the glass walls being…like really standing out for me, in terms of wanting to touch them, but not wanting to touch them. And that feeling of, it’s so sparkly, but it’s so spiky. It must be such a strange thing to want on your walls. And I found that…is it the Lion Room, her dad’s room?

**Sarah:** Ja, the Lion’s Den, ja.

**Participant C:** The Lion’s Den. I can’t actually remember what was in that room, but I just remember finding it super dark.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant C:** And fascinating. I just found the house fascinating, kind of you know, the fact that like everywhere you looked there was twenty things to see. So, ja, it was cool and weird.

**Sarah:** Cool and weird. Good. Okay, now that you’ve seen this little digitised collection.

**Participant C:** Ja.

**Sarah:** And speaking about The Long Bedroom specifically, when...I refer to the Owl House, because I decided to do a sub-collection contained in a space, just because it made more sense to say things. What are your perceptions of The Long Bedroom, after your engagement with the digital collection.

**Participant C:** It’s very busy, it’s many things. (laughter) I think ja, engaging with the website was also kind of reminding me of what it felt like to be in the house. So, the web...so I’m not sure...ja, I was kind of thinking about it as I went along, and like it invoked a lot of the feeling of being in the house, but obviously, I don’t remember the stuff that you’re showing, specifically, at all.

**Sarah:** Cool. No, that’s interesting. So how did it evoke that?

**Participant C:** I think the focusing on different...all the...like the light especially, was then reminding me of that experience of actually being there in the house and how you experience dark and light quite extremely in different rooms. The glass walls, it...I think I’d actually...I hadn’t forgotten about the glass walls, but I’d forgotten a little bit about the glass walls. I think the feeling of everything falling apart a bit, in the sense that everything...ja, I mean, as your pictures show, it sort of...everything’s very specifically of its time and captured at the moment. It’s like a snap...you know, the house is a snapshot as well, of the moment, and that’s quite...that was quite striking, in terms of just, you know, even the mundane stuff. Not that I’m sure there is any mundane stuff in the Owl House, but…

**Sarah:** There’s...I think that there is a lot of mundane stuff. But also, who like...Helen never wrote an inventory. What is mundane and what’s not, so…

**Participant C:** Fair enough, ja.

**Sarah:** Ja. And that was another...like all of the artefacts that I chose were very...you know, some of them were just little things, like stuff. And who’s to say what’s important and what’s not. So, I’ve given like a broad selection, and it’s been interesting hearing different people’s like responses to them.

**Participant C:** Ja, because it is interesting. It’s a sort of like, as I looked...picture, which I can’t...The sense of sort of, you know, it’s just a bedroom that someone lives in, versus...it’s so much more than just a bedroom that someone lives in potentially, it’s kind of…

**Sarah:** But it’s somewhere between a curated collection and a bedroom that someone lives in.

**Participant C:** Ja, and I can’t remember what the rest of the house was like, in terms of if it’s more or less curated or if it’s as ad hoc.

**Sarah:** The bedroom...The Long Bedroom is one of the rooms that is the most in-between the public and the private.

**Participant C:** Okay.

**Sarah:** Because it’s a room that she did sleep in the most. But it was still...like her...the whole house was an exhibit.

**Participant C:** Mm.

**Sarah:** But this bedroom was more specifically like half private, half public. Ja. Okay. I know nothing about the Owl House, and you need to describe it to me. Go.

**Participant C:** Go! Okay. So, based on the website I just looked at (laughing) the Owl House was the home and artwork of Helen Martins, who lived in a small town in the Karoo. Kalahari? Karoo? Karoo. And it is filled with – I feel like...it’s a weird...it’s a cool and weird place. It’s...she made a lot of art with concrete and glass and the house is...contains a lot of that work and there’s lots of – what’s the word? - images, or reference to far-away places, though she never actually travelled. I think it seems like a lot of the work she produced is based on places...other places, but without her having necessarily been there. Colour and light…and light, seem to be a very big part of the way she experienced and expressed. And ja, I’m not sure how else to describe the Owl House.

**Sarah:** That’s good, that’s good. Thank you. Okay, so back to this…The Long Bedroom Collection. How do you feel that the digital artefacts detract from their tangible counterparts, or enhance their tangible counterparts?

**Participant C:** I think that the way the digital detracts from the physical or real…is that you can’t…it’s not tactile. And I think that’s the only...or the biggest one, in terms of that space having so many tactile dimensions, potentially. I think that...ja?

**Sarah:** So, The Long Bedroom is one of the rooms in the house, where you can’t actually go in and explore. It’s roped off at the doorway.

**Participant C:** Okay. So, you can only see it.

**Sarah:** Ja, so you can’t actually go in and pick things up and touch them.

**Participant C:** Ja. But I’m not sure you’re allowed to touch things anyway.

**Sarah:** No, exactly. And also...because the first time I went there, when I was a kid, we could.

**Participant C:** Oh really?

**Sarah:** Well I mean...well, I don’t know if we could, but you know, there was no...

**Participant C:** ...we did.

**Sarah:** …there were no like museum experts there and so we did. Whereas now, it’s much more constrained and it’s much more museum-ified.

**Participant C:** Okay. Well that does change things. So, then I’m not sure that there’s that detract at all.

**Sarah:** No, but I mean...I’m all for criticise the digital. And in what ways do you think digitisation can detract from a collection of objects.

**Participant C:** I think that’s the main one, in terms of just being able to just see it three dimensionally, even if you can...like that being able to kind of walk around it. But I think that also, this collection does a very good job of showing things from many different angles and so you do get the kind of, you know...if I think of the deer, for instance, just like the fact that you can come a little behind it, as well as look in front of it. I think that what...I think the light as well, it’s a both sides thing, because the photos and the digital capture light in a way that really shows it. But you can’t be in it. So, it’s that thing of...I think that the digital can actually show what’s the light’s doing, in a way that you wouldn’t necessarily experience if you were actually there, which is a hugely...you know, which enhances it completely. But you might not get the sense of the overwhelming-ness of like being in that weird light. Because it is a weird light. The kind of...

**Sarah:** Absolutely, ja.

**Participant C:** ...the glass is odd. It makes everything eerie.

**Sarah:** Ja. And no space in the house, is there ever like, just pure light.

**Participant C:** ...normal light, ja.

**Sarah:** Ja, exactly.

**Participant C:** And I think even when you go outside, because it’s so filled with stuff, and again light reflecting on everything, it’s not clear. But ja, I think in terms of enhancing, it’s again the same thing of the photos enhance that experience of light from the other side, in digital, because you do get to see it in such a specific way, and you can highlight things that you wouldn’t necessarily notice. And I would never have looked at, probably if I were in that space of...you know, especially if I can’t go into the space properly, I would never have seen those items up close. And I wouldn’t have found out about what they all meant, in the real space. I think that that is a big enhancement from the digital. It’s kind of being able to interrogate and interact with all these different little bits and pieces, without...ja, which, I mean, I’d just be too distracted by everything, to actually sit and probably look, and find out. I kept wanting to almost be able to walk around. Like, do you know, to do kind of a...

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant C:** ...to...I mean, just...ja. It’s sort of a thing of like...I think the static pictures make me want to get into them.

**Sarah:** Ja. No, absolutely. I actually...I toyed with the idea of doing one of those three-sixty things.

**Participant C:** Ja.

**Sarah:** But it was just so, in that room, there’s all these like horrible museum things. Like poles with rope in between and things, you know, even if I like half dismantled them, it’s still...it immediately like...it was very obvious that they were there, you know, whereas...ja, I agree.

**Participant C:** But I mean, ja, it’s almost like you...this...it’s...you...I don’t know, I feel like you get...I get the sense of the space and I get the...this...but I actually get a much...I much more quickly get a deeper sense like I get more...it gets more detailed.

**Sarah:** Nice. Okay.

**Participant C:** So, it’s almost like the tour through here, rather than being a kind of a quick glance of reading space, it’s a much more detailed glance.

**Sarah:** Okay, nice.

**Participant C:** Which has both pros and cons.

**Sarah:** But would...but not necessarily a more immersive...

**Participant C:** Well, it’s not immersive with all the senses, but it’s almost more immersive in terms of interacting with all the elements, or a lot more of the elements in the space.

**Sarah:** Nice. How would you improve this digital platform? Like are there any glaring omissions? Is there anything...you’ve mentioned the 3D, 360 things. Is there anything else that you would change?

**Participant C:** I’d almost have the photos be bigger all the time.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant C:** I think. In terms of when you’re describing each element. I’m not sure...as I said, I’m not sure if...what that would be like, but in the sense of it...rather than being framed by white space, have them pop out, perhaps? I think the few images that I couldn’t see in the main image, the few objects that I couldn’t see in the main image, they confused me, because then I was convinced there was more to the main image.

**Sarah:** Oh, okay, fair enough, because the cupboard’s behind.

**Participant C:** Ja. Which I, you know, I figured. But I kept wanting to be like, but can I...scroll the main image to...you know, would it panorama me to those and those? I think...ja, I think that’s about it.

**Sarah:** Good. Was there an artefact in particular that interested you?

**Participant C:** I really liked seeing the picture of the glass walls.

**Sarah:** Right, okay. Why?

**Participant C:** Because I think that’s...

**Sarah:** Well you spoke a little bit about glass walls that…

**Participant C:** I think for me, because it reminded me of my own experience with going, being one of the elements. I enjoyed the fact that you point out that they would have been so much shinier, but now they’re dusty, because that...ja, that makes so much sense.

**Sarah:** I mean, Helen did love super gaudy stuff.

**Participant C:** Ja.

**Sarah:** And like, it was...and apparently, when she was there, it was basically like glitter. It was also really sharp. Like people would actually like hurt themselves. But it was also very, very impressively glittery and shiny and I think we’ve lost that, like and there...you know, there’s...time has just taken its toll of it.

**Participant C:** Ja. Ja, I think that was...ja, so that was nice to see, is kind of...be able to...I mean, because it’s striking even if it’s dusty. The...I suppose even just the kind of incongruity of it, of having glass on your wall in that way, in a shardy way, rather than a kind of, you know, mosaic. Ja. I think also, the image of her shirt was really...was sort of also quite...like that it...I don’t know, just...and the shoes and the story of the accidental amputation. It’s just kind of...what the hell? (laughs) I was quite...ja just interesting to sort of see them on the mundane...just person living life, stuff, side. I liked the wind chimes, in terms of the fact that you actually...you also hear them. I think that was...it was fun. And the...the nudes on the walls, but especially in terms of that it might have been her sister, and then kind of...but then the picture that...where you see that there’s a whole arc of them. There’s not just one isolated image, it’s actually a story. And I think what was nice about all the artefacts that you show, or talk about, or a lot of them at least, is linking them to, you know, that they were almost the precedent to the work that she created, it’s kind of that, nothing feels entirely random.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant C:** It sort of…

**Sarah:** But that...I think...and I’ve been learning that more and more.

**Participant C:** Ja.

**Sarah:** Is that...and all the Camel Yard is so directly linked to objects in the house. And it’s like she...and you can see like, she got a trinket from a friend who went overseas, and then she modelled sculptures outside on *that* thing, because she just loved that thing so much. And it’s really interesting seeing like the levels of simulation that she’s...that she created.

**Participant C:** Ja. I think it’s very interesting. And also, just like the different kinds of lamps, and light, and like just all these...so much stuff. Just so much stuff.

**Sarah:** Does a digital experience like this inspire you to learn more about outsider art, or Helen Martins, or the Owl House?

**Participant C:** Yes. So, I think like, Helen Martins, I find very interesting, but I’ve also...I’ve...ja, I don’t know, she fascinates me, but I’m not sure...I’m not sure I want to delve that much more into her psyche, but at the same time, I don’t...what I have known in the past, about her, I feel like I’ve clearly forgotten a lot of. So, it does kind of make...remind me that this character existed and she was very interesting. And outsider art... I don’t know, yes probably, I mean, I feel like inevitably I’d be interested in finding more outsider art. But actually, I think it...almost more than either of those, it just makes me quite want to go back there. It’s like that sense of, the sort of snapshot reminder of all...not even a reminder, like glimpse into the Owl House, I’d like to go be in it to...and experience more of what that is.

**Sarah:** That’s very good. So...and I know it was a long time since you were last there, but as a browsing experience, as a museum browsing experience, how satisfactory was the digital collection, compared to a real-life experience?

**Participant C**: I think it was a different kind of satisfaction button. Because if I were actually there, I don’t think I would have, in a way, the patience to look at everything as closely as I was looking at the digital. I would definitely be glancing, and experiencing the overall sense, more. The likelihood is, then focusing in on the details. I think the digital collection makes...ja, it just sort of homes in on various things. Which is...ja, which is cool. It’s nice to kind of be shown. But I think it does feel like it’s being, you know, you’re being shown the specific things, whereas you might not...I might not have looked at those specific things in that space.

**Sarah:** Ja, exactly, you might have chosen a completely different set of objects.

**Participant C:** Ja. And I’m not sure...so that’s, you know, that’s that. That’s that! (chuckles) I don’t know. I’m not...it’s not...I think that’s the sense of wanting to go back there and see more of the other stuff, it’s almost that. It’s like it...I’m not sure that...ja.

**Sarah:** Perfect. We are done.

**Participant C:** Ah! Very good.

**Sarah:** Yay!