­­Transcription of Interview

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

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**Sarah:** Okay. Hello [name], thank you for doing this interview.

**Participant B:** Hello Sarah, I’m so happy to be here with you guys today. Shout out to all my homies.

**Sarah:** (chuckles) Okay. So, before we talk about the website, can you explain your prior experience of the Owl House to-date? I know there have been a lot, so you can put it in a nutshell.

**Participant B:** Could you be more specific on the question? So...do you mean like, my initial experience? Or do you mean like my involvement?

**Sarah:** Your involvement.

**Participant B:** Okay. So, I travelled to Nieu Bethesda as part of a visionary team, at the request of my relation aunt Ann Graaff/Emslie in 2015, for part visionary team, which was set up in order to reenvision the Owl House and how it’s managed and best practices for museums and archives, as that’s what I did professionally back in the States. And I had taken a little career hiatus from that work, to seek corporate glory and private sector funds, and this, I thought, was a perfect opportunity to get back into that space, so it was super serendipitous and beneficial for both. I was looking for a project to sink my teeth into, to get back in the game and the Owl House had a many a projects, that needed to be done. So it was perfect, ja.

**Sarah:** How well do you know the Owl House?

**Participant B:** On a professional level, incredibly well. But on a...from a museum professional’s perspective, it is an evolving exhibit. So one can never truly know the space as well as one should, because it does change as the seasons change, as the time of day changes, as the visitor numbers alter, as other operational decisions are made, everything changes, which...the Owl House is a unique space, where all of those decisions actually change the space itself, but not just from a...we’re changing the space because we’re making rational decisions, you’re affecting the exhibit, and you’re affecting the interaction of it, which has a ripple effect that a lot of people may or may not understand. So, when you see the Owl House two years ago, it is a vastly different space than what it is now. So I do know it from the last time I was there, but you know, tomorrow, you never know. Every day is an adventure. On a personal level, I feel I understand an aspect of the Owl House, but I only understand the aspect of the Owl House that I’m personally viewing it with, because I believe that the Owl House and the Camel Yard and Helen’s world that she’s created is a spectrum, and you look into it and it’s a prism where you look out and you see something different, based on how you’re looking in. So when I go as a...when I first saw it as a thirty-two year old married woman with no children, that was looking for something to sink her teeth into, in Arts and Heritage space, I saw work, I saw potential, I saw a lot of dust shaking that needed to happen, and revitalising an environment. And I saw opportunity for progress. And an opportunity to make something great, even greater. But when I go now, as a thirty-four year old married woman with no children, I see a different space, because I’m in a different space in my life and I’m not looking at it now with an engine room type of – what’s the phrase I’m looking for? - gusto. I don’t look at it with like with a gusto approach, I look at it now, as okay, we’ve made a lot of progress, but there’s still a long way to go.

**Sarah:** That’s nice, you put that really nicely.

**Participant B:** Thanks, I tried.

**Sarah:** Do you think that a visitor to the Owl House needs to have a good understanding of outsider art?

**Participant B:** You know, yes. My initial reaction would...my initial response would be no, but now that I’m thinking about it and now that I’ve experienced a lot of visitors coming through the Owl House, with the perplexity on their face and in their words, they’re often very confused by this. And I think one could sit there as, you know, representative of the Owl House, or as a person of the community, or someone that cares and is trying to give additional feedback and knowledge to place the space for the viewer, the easiest thing to say is, outsider art is a unique space in the Fine Arts world and it is regarded as a visionary environment stage. And so when you look at it in that framework, you see a lot more, ahh, I get it now. And I think that’s the fastest aha moment to put for a viewer. But at the same time, you don’t want to take away from the viewer experience, that Helen, as the original curator, essentially intended. She wouldn’t have necessarily viewed herself as an outsider artist. So should we see the spaces she created as outsider art? It’s like a curatorial question that one should ask.

**Sarah:** But so many philosophical questions come up with outsider art, even just as a concept and as a word, and as a...ja.

**Participant B:** Exactly ja, because the connotation of outsider art is negative, it’s derogatory. It’s like, oh, so you’re ostracised from whatever community that you’re in, or you’re an outsider, you’re fringe art. And then you get into the space of like almost deviance, which..

**Sarah:** Ja. And you don’t set out to be an outsider artist.

**Participant B:** Yeah, you don’t wake up one day and say, you know what? Today I’m on the inside, tomorrow I’m going to be an outsider artist. Just kidding, like forget the inside art, I don’t want to...Like what is this? Like the difference between like an inside cat...indoor cat, and outdoor cat. It’s...there’s no marked difference and it’s a label that we put on it, post-artist, we put...art historians put that label on, which makes sense, because you have to classify it, otherwise you’re not able to look at it with the right lens. But with...you know, what I was saying about the deviance and...that’s a really important underlying theme, with Helen Martins as an artistic figure and with the Owl House itself, because it got labelled and brandished as this deviant space. So her community kind of labelled her as an outsider, and then she kind of self-segregated herself as well, and said, okay fine like I’m over here...You know, look I’m not sure which came first, chicken or the egg, and who initiated the deviant logo process, but it became...the Owl House became synonymous with deviance in Nieu Bethesda, and then Helen therefore became synonymous with being a deviant and there’s a lot of like themes about that politically, socially...there’s gender, it’s...people thought...like some people say she was a witch. There’s like anti-Christian sentiments. There’s a lot of deviance that was happening, but not necessarily deviance as a bad thing. She was just deviating from the norm. And that was kind of how she became outsider of Nieu Bethesda, which led to a lot of struggle and strife, which perhaps made the outsider artness compounding interest, and...

**Sarah:** Ja. Ja, that’s a good way...yeah.

**Participant B:** ..it’s you know, she rolls downhills. Sorry Helen, she rolls downhill. (chuckles)

**Sarah:** Okay. Now about the website that you first looked at.

**Participant B:** Yes. The beautiful photo au fait, beautiful photography.

**Sarah:** What are your..

**Participant B:** [..] photography to [..].

**Sarah:** (laughter) What are your perceptions of The Long Bedroom Collection? So this website?

**Participant B:** The website is very object intensive, which is really cool. I think a lot of traditional Owl House material, that...like secondary material like either photography, marketing materials, reproductions, whatever, it’s very panoramic view, square framed, traditional, and it’s capturing a room, but it’s not necessarily capturing the objects in the room. So it’s a really cool fresh look on the Owl House as a museum, and not just a flipping old house, which is what a lot of...I think the photography, traditionally, can get to, and there’s been a couple photographic publications that are really good, and especially [participant E’s] book about the cam...like on the Camel Yard, they get very good with that. And the photography that Smith Rainers has of the Camel Yard is just fantastic. And a lot of the old photography from other curators, other professionals in the past, even some of the Sue Ross photos that were there, it’s very grid-like architecture photography..

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant B:** ..which doesn’t...I mean, just for me, as a viewer, doesn’t really do it for me. I want to know...I want to see the windmills then, you know. That’s my initial feed[..]back.

**Sarah:** So as [name], the person who knows more about the Owl House than the rest of us...

**Participant B:** No, no.

**Sarah:** ..will you explain The Long Bedroom to a visitor? So if I’m a visitor and I’m about to look at this website..

**Participant B:** Uh-hu.

**Sarah:** ..and you need to explain The Long Room to me, will you do it?

**Participant B:** So, part of working in the Owl House or working for the Owl House, whichever you want to call it, is...there’s a bit of theatrical element to it. There’s a bit of engaging with the psychology of your viewer and putting on a bit of a show, and so if you were a man coming into The Long Bedroom and I want you to have an enriched experience by looking at it, I’m probably going to point out the static, obvious points. I’m going to point out about how, yes, you are right noticing that this is clearly an added construction, because that’s what men are generally picking up on, and they want to engage with like the concreteness of the space, and not the abstract. Whereas, if you’ve got somebody coming into The Long Bedroom physically, in the actual Owl House itself..

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant B:** ..and their eyes are darting and they’re seeing different things and for me, my instant tell, is if the person looks up, they’re interested in totally different material. If the person is looking at the windows and they’re surveying the space, like four points like a beacon, then they’re interested in the concrete cement, brick and mortar of the space. If they’re looking up, they want to know about the geometric figuration, they’re interested in object choice, they’re interested in the space as a meaningful space, and not just the concrete. And then the people that are taken aback more, or struggling to engage, and just kind of a bit frozen, I find that they respond more to notions of the abstract.

**Sarah:** Mm.

**Participant B:** So if they’re a bit puzzled or paused, while they’re in the space, and looking, they’re looking for something...it’s a bit uncomfortable probably, and a lot of people are very uncomfortable in these spaces. And so when they have that block, that sort of wall between them and the space, pointing out an abstract notion that their eye seems to fixate on, is the best way to get them to engage in the space, by saying...pointing out for instance, like the bluebottle. Oh yeah, do you recognise the bluebottle, milk of magnesia? Yeah, oh yeah, my grandma used to have a lot of those. Oh, cool yeah, well look, she collected a lot of that stuff. So you’re engaging in the abstract in a polite way, and then drawing them in. Another abstract notion where, if people are looking up, but they’re still paused, when we get into like major meta abstraction and then we would...you know, then we can start talking...you know, like the mystical geometry behind things, or the eye catching light in the different space, in different ways. And then sometimes, if all else fails, I will just point out the time of day, and how the shadows are casting.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant B:** I just can’t read a person, I’m like, you know what? Morning sun hits this room special in this way, there you go. Afternoon sun, come back at three. Same price for admission. Thanks for coming.

**Sarah:** Nice. On the website, how do you feel that the digital artefacts detract from the tangible counterparts? And how do you feel that the digital artefacts enhance the tangible counterparts?

**Participant B:** So enhancement and detraction?

**Sarah:** In terms of the digital format.

**Participant B:** Mm. I mean the video and the sound is very cool. And that’s really catching and pulling in, and drawing.

**Sarah:** So do you think that that makes it a little more immersive?

**Participant B:** Ja, I think it adds to an immersive experience of the space. It can, because it starts automatically, it can take away from me reading the text.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant B:** So...especially if it’s longer text, I’m like wait, shhhh, be quiet, I want to read. But I’m, you know, that’s me.

**Sarah:** That’s nice.

**Participant B:** Just as I...go...individual viewer, so it’s more about the presentation of the immersive experience, that may detract. But it enhances it once it’s playing.

**Sarah:** Okay cool.

**Participant B:** Because it’s very cool.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant B:** The photo quality totally adds to it, and totally enhances it, because the Owl House suffers from a lack of high quality imagery and high quality replication. It just does not have that. And part of that is...part of that is charming and it does add to the quaintness of the Owl House, like you can’t really get beautiful photos of current day Owl House. It’s just...I mean, you can’t zoom with nice new book coming up…Journey to the Owl House, 2017, Penguin Books. You know, so you get that, but you can’t...it’s a time capsule, and that adds to, and that adds to like the curiosity and the sort of, weird, locked-in-time mysticism of it. But it doesn’t...it takes away from what we’re used to, so it makes it more foreign. So this quality of photography, makes the objects more accessible to what I’m looking at as a every day interpreter of visual life. And the fact that I’m used to seeing that level of quality images in everything else that is accessible to modern life, but then I have to look at something that looks like a...a Kodak 24 print...you know, get it...put it at the drug-store type photos from 1985.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant B**: It just adds to a foreign element to it. So it’s...it makes it even more outsider art. It’s like...it’s just completely foreign, ja.

**Sarah:** That...ja, you put that really nicely, ja.

**Participant B:** Ja, and then the...yes, so the quality of the images, and then also the...the ones that were more artistic and styled, I think are in the same vein of Helen being a curator, and Helen...because I always thought that Helen’s the original curator.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant B:** And this...it pays tribute and homage to her style, which speaks to like the language of the Owl House, which makes...which enhances the experience, whereas I feel a lot of traditional archival museum photography, just looks at something, takes a picture, you’re capturing your materials, you’re capturing the measurements, you know..

**Sarah:** Exactly.

**Participant B:** ..tag and bag it.

**Sarah:** It’s archival.

**Participant B:** Right, yeah.

**Sarah:** But I guess it picks up on details that you might not notice in...

**Participant B:** Ja, it adds to the nuance, it’s the nuance language of the Owl House that a lot of museum stuff...it’s very difficult, and even as I’m cataloguing things, I’m like agh, how can I like...you can’t capture this, you can’t, it’s impossible. But like, the sewing kit, the spindle, I guess I’d be like, I want to order that, that looks amazing. Like I want that thing, that beautiful object in my life and in my space, and now I see why Helen would want the same, because she wanted beautiful things in her world. And so you’re showcasing the nuance beauty of the Owl House in that...what is that nuanced language of the Owl House, which doesn’t get captured often and it’s very hard to do with photography. Which probably shows the person taking the photos love the Owl House and loves the space, so it just...it adds to it, like you’re..

**Sarah:** That’s a really...thank you, that’s a really quotable thing to say.

**Participant B:** Yeah, I..

**Sarah:** That’s a really nice point.

**Participant B:** Yeah, it’s not tag it and bag it, and ship it down the line, which is so often museums...they work like pathetic.

**Sarah:** Yes, exactly.

**Participant B:** So...but just...go back, I want to talk about the detraction.

**Sarah:** Yes, oh yes, yes, yes, ja.

**Participant B:** So the scrolling, not having more captions, it makes me...but just because I’m a super detailsie person, I’m like okay, what else am I looking for? Because the zoomed out images are like so large and there are so many things going on there. I’m like, what else am I...am I on a scavenger hunt? What else am I looking for? What else is there? Because there’s so many interactive elements already, and I’m like where else shall I click? What else should I be doing? What am I missing? I don’t want to miss, you know, I want to get everything, I want to read everything. So it’s...it just...it’s like what?

**Sarah:** Okay, okay.

**Participant B:** But that might be for a newer viewer, or..

**Sarah:** No. That’s really fair, that’s great. Okay. Should collections like this, be digitised?

**Participant B:** That is like personal / professional. So I have two responses for that...I have three responses for that actually.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant B:** So from an archives and museum point of view, yes, it should be digitised. Collections like this, my automatic response to all that is, yes, they should all be digitised.

**Sarah:** Is that for preservation purposes?

**Participant B:** Yes, and that...yes. So then we get to...for preservation and for operational purposes, the rate of decay, deterioration for many of these objects, is so high, and we are hitting a critical tipping point where the number of visitors are going to directly negatively affect the stability and the continuity of the objects within the Owl House. If we keep having the same number of people in every year, it’s going...these things are going to fall apart. People also...the Owl House itself is not secure, in terms of like a stable space, so people are touching, people are moving, it’s very difficult, you can’t control the space. And unless the museum is going to make changes in order for that to be more secure, then they have to digitise.

**Sarah:** Mhm.

**Participant B:** So my second response is, yes, it should be digitised, but not necessarily presented in a digital collection online.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant B:** Reason being, something like this, that is the tourism, it is the...an entire micro economy revolves around the Owl House itself, and I would say, when you digitise collections, you should selectively display in a digital format. (dog barks)

**Sarah:** Nice.

**Participant B:** And when you - yeah, Jackson agrees, yes, woof, tell them - because you don’t want...you want to stimulate the desire to go to the original, not make it so detailed to the point where you don’t have to go. Because people...many people having been there when people are visiting, there’s one person in a group that really wants to go and the rest, not so much. So you don’t want to give the other two people in the car a reason to tell the one that really wants to go, they’ll...we don’t have to go, because it’s online.

**Sarah:** That’s a great point.

**Participant B:** And then it’s...you’re detracting from like, the micro economy.

**Sarah:** Ja, that’s a great point.

**Participant B:** And so it’s...and you also want to...you want to ensure - excuse me Jackson, just push him out - with digitising this stuff, you...it’s also...we get to the point of like, what’s the point of digitising it, if it’s not going to be there, and it’s going to fall apart, because then it’s not part of the exhibition. And then we’re actually..

**Sarah:** And if the Owl House actually doesn’t exist, why should a digital Owl House exist.

**Participant B:** Right.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant B:** And then it’s like, okay, we’re making this simulacra of the original, but if the object deteriorates and it’s no longer part of the exhibition, which is the Owl House, then why are we digitising something that’s no longer part of the collection? So it’s...so professionally, my second response is, it needs to be very carefully determined what the purpose of it is, because you’re bridging in from an experiential museum, to a historical museum. And then it’s...you’ve got to make a clear defining mark. And I think with something like a digital collection, and making objects digitised to the point where...you don’t necessarily need to display them anymore, is fantastic from a preservation point of view, but when you do that, you’re changing the ethos of the purpose of your museum professionals.

**Sarah:** Yeah.

**Participant B:** And if there is not unilateral transformation and like mission statement for what you’re doing, it’s not going to work, and then you’re just going to end up with a bunch of raw images and no one knows what to do with it, and by times people make...by the time people make a decision on what to do with it, the medium and the data is going to be defunct and you’re going to...you will have wasted all of your time.

**Sarah:** Mm, mm.

**Participant B:** And not [..] from personal [..].

**Sarah:** The...another interviewee, made a really nice point, which I would like to know your opinion on, and she said, when she went there two years ago, she knew very little about it. She had read in the guide book, what it was, and her boyfriend had kind of explained it. And she was completely like, perplexed by it.

**Participant B:** Ja.

**Sarah:** And she said if, for example, this kind of content had been on an app, that she could use while she was at the Owl House, and like, oh at the end of that room, I can see that object, and now I know something about it.

**Participant B:** Mhm.

**Sarah:** She would have found the visit more..

**Participant B:** ..engaging.

**Sarah:** Exactly, more informative and more engaging. Do you think..

**Participant B:** Ja.

**Sarah:** ..could you see something like that potentially working?

**Participant B:** Definitely. There is some great software out there. There’s...I mean there’s free apps available for exactly this. The issue is more implementation, and it’s also...it’s a decision. Part of...you have to frame the Owl House in the context of Nieu Bethesda. And that’s something that Phillip Tydress told me - who’s also part of the visionary team – and he said this one night, completely off the cuff, we were talking about something totally different, and it just had such a universal application, that I’m like, you...wow, you’ve hit the nail on the head, like you can’t just look at it at the Owl House, you have to zoom out.

**Sarah:** Absolutely.

**Participant B:** And Nieu Bethesda is not going to have an app. Nieu Bethesda doesn’t have street lights. Nieu Bethesda doesn’t even have paved roads.

**Sarah:** Yeah.

**Participant B:** And part of going to the Owl House, is your journey to Nieu Bethesda.

**Sarah:** Absolutely.

**Participant B:** So if you...the fact that...once you get on that turn-off, your phone don’t work no more. That’s like, you’re welcome. Hello, welcome to being out in the middle of nowhere. When you take that turn and you see these like big rock structure formations, and you’ve got the tour in there, and the farm land...I mean, it’s this whole like, wow, it just like hits you, you probably arrive in the afternoon, it’s this like really powerful, hello, welcome, like spectacular...it’s like a cruise-ship dance line, like *Hello! Welcome!* Like the Rockettes kicking their legs, I mean it’s this whole like...this is...you are here, you are driving and then your car hits that dirt road, and it’s like rattling you and it’s like this dust storm. It’s like you...whatever you thought you were coming to, is not what is about to happen.

**Sarah:** Absolutely.

**Participant B:** And it’s this...it’s a tactile experience, that you’re seeing, hearing, feeling...your vehicle is reverberating, everything is...nothing is working anymore, it’s like you’re going to space, basically. And that’s part of it. That’s part...it’s...and how do you put that on an app, you know.

**Sarah:** Absolutely. Oh, app-solutely.

**Participant B:** And it’s, I think, an absolutely fantastic idea, and there’s been discussion about an app for the village, where you can walk around with like QR codes and look at the heritage homes and get more information. And it’s just always met with such dissension, and such like resistance.

**Sarah:** Ja. Well I mean, I’ve met many of the Nieu Bethesda locals and I..

**Participant B:** Yeah, and you can see why.

**Sarah:** ..I can see why, completely.

**Participant B:** You can, a hundred percent, see why. And like, I get it, I do, having basically lived there in and out for like two years now, I’m also like, yeah, no apps, I don’t want an app. I mean, I go there to not use my apps, like that’s great, I don’t want apps. I mean if I have to...if I have to live like I live in Cape Town, in Nieu Bethesda, I don’t want to go anymore, forget it, like...I don’t want to go. And that’s the appeal for a lot of people. And so we’re getting into this space where, are we making decisions for tourism and for economic stability, the village which is pillared entirely around Owl House? Or are we making decisions for a few viewers that might have a more enriched experience? And so, as a person, as a Nieu Bethesda resident, I’m going to get selfish and say, no, I don’t want an app. But...but, I think the real comment, is that there needs to be more information, and we’re not sure how, and I’m...obviously this is a profess, but there needs to be more contextualising information about what you’re looking at, and that can be a better video, when you intro to that. That can be a better tour guide. That can be better pamphlets. That can be placards perhaps.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant B:** Or an audio tour, or something that is not disrupting the space or the experience, but is accessible in a non-disruptive way. So ja, and then there was another question earlier, and I had a response. The previous one.

**Sarah:** Digital artefacts detracting from original, tangible counterparts, no?

**Participant B:** Ja, and I was like...I have a personal response for that, because I had two professional and one personal.

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

**Participant B:** Okay ja, so personally – and this is where I get really off the wagon here and off the bus of like museum people, by force, they’ll kick me off – I do not think anything there should be preserved. And that, I will be set on fire for saying, probably. But my reason being, is, I fundamentally think that if we can preserve space as an experience, that’s the purpose. That’s what it was intended for. And maybe I’m getting too...and I think it’s...that’s a personal attachment, because I’m not making it...I don’t believe that, as a museum professional, I believe that, as a person that’s into what Helen did. And that is into what it’s supposed to be there for.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant B:** That’s why I think we should put new things in. We should take out the old rotty stuff. She did not live a life of like rot and decay.

**Sarah:** Yes, she wouldn’t have surrounded herself by things that are falling apart.

**Participant B:** No! She would be horrified by that, most likely. She was...you know, she put fake fruit out, because she wanted to look opulent and she would put money scattered around...you know, coins, to look like she was this woman of like great wealth and grandeur. And had silk hanging from the ceilings to create an exotic environment.

**Sarah:** I’m sure that Helen would agree with you right now, like..

**Participant B:** Ja, and she’d probably like, get this stuff out of here. This is nasty, I don’t even want to be here. It’s terrible. It’s like...but it’s...ja, because it’s like, we’ve got all these historical artefacts that actually are not part of what the Owl House experience is, or should be. But then, who are we to make that decision, because there’s not like a game-plan that she left.

**Sarah:** Ja.

**Participant B:** She didn’t leave a Will where it’s stated, this is my...you know, five page plan on how I want the Owl House run and managed. Like, you know, thank you very much, there’s not some secret society where we like pass secrets on to each other of what this is, and how you do that. It’s just, you know, you try and make it work the best you can with what you’ve got, and...But I think personally, a lot of that stuff was meant to have a natural life cycle, and that’s..

**Sarah:** Because I mean, I doubt...well I wonder if Helen even looked ten, twenty, thirty years...It was all in the moment, and it was in her lifetime and it was a thing that was her own.

**Participant B:** Exactly ja. It’s like that’s such a good point to think about. Like it...there’s a temporality to it. It’s...there’s like a temporal framework that she envisioned Owl House, and if we are not able to capture that *moment*, then what’s the point. It’s..

**Sarah:** Exactly.

**Participant B:** Ja. But, yeah, it’s...don’t tell people I said that.

**Sarah:** Well it’s on record.

**Participant B:** Oh no, great, ja. Please just tell them why I think that.

**Sarah:** So as a museum’s expert and an outsider art enthusiast and expert, I’m going to say..

**Participant B:** Oh no.

**Sarah:** ..if...

**Participant B:** ..appreciator.

**Sarah:** ..appreciator, okay. If the opportunity to browse other outsider art collections, that are as inaccessible as the Owl House is, to most of the rest of the world.

**Participant B:** Mhm.

**Sarah:** ..would you visit them digitally?

**Participant B:** Because I’d seen the Owl House, or..?

**Sarah:** Because...going on this website experience. So as a potential example of a digital outsider art environment, if you had the opportunity to look at another one...in the middle...that’s..

**Participant B:** Would I click link?

**Sarah:** Exactly.

**Participant B:** Ja, for sure! Why not? Absolutely. Like I mean, the one that’s in Kansas that I went to, the Garden of Eden, the Dinsmoor space, it’s not digitised, it’s not a digital collection, and it’s fantastic. It is beautifully restored, it’s got like state-of-the-art cement restoration technology work there. It’s fantastic. And it’s super creepy, how similar these places are. And there are several other places. I mean, the Midwest in the United States is like a Mecca for Outsider Art. Kind of...ja.

**Sarah:** It’s bizarre how many..

**Participant B:** Yeah, they get [road...] out there. Why not? They’re like what else are we going to do?

**Sarah:** (laughter)

**Participant B:** You get snowed in, in the winter, for like three months, you’re going to get a little freaky I’m sure. So...(chuckling) I would. But I mean, I say that being chased by gators is a [..] like they probably look at us like we’re creepy. But to...to not...to see the similarities, and to not be able to see that comprehensively, is limiting the study, and is limiting that space of research.

**Sarah:** Mm.

**Participant B:** I mean, I’m by no means an outsider art expert, *at all*. But being an appreciator and someone that knows one space, I’m super interested in what other people are doing. Not just from a...oh, how are you guys like doing your cement samples, point of view, I’m interested, because I want to understand what...how did everyone get these similar ideas being connected in no possible way, shape or form. But there’s something in the human experience as an artist, that is replicable in different places, continents, languages, genders, time...they’re in no way connected. There’s a single possible strain of commonality, except they’re creating these visionary environments out of their bare hands sometimes, and cutting themselves with glass shards, for the sake of creating a space. And I would love to know more about how they got there and what ties them together. For instance, Dinsmoor was also a teacher, Helen was a teacher. There’s...and there’s like similarities in a lot of the life experiences of these artists, which is sadly more accessible, because of historical facts, as opposed to seeing what they made in like high digital resolution quality images, which is sad, because I know more about like Dinsmoor’s life, and his facts and his history, and I mean I know more about this space because I’ve seen it personally, but before I went there, there’s no way that I could have understood the magnitude or the similarities to these spaces, had I not physically gone there myself.

**Sarah:** Okay, wow.

**Participant B:** And like to...you know, when you see his body...because there’s a mausoleum there, with his body.

**Sarah:** Really?

**Participant B:** Yeah, you can see his body.

**Sarah:** I didn’t know that.

**Participant B:** It’s so weird. I mean like, I look at that and I think to myself, how creepy is that, why am I looking at your body that’s a hundred years decaying now, or however years, I can’t...off my head. But yeah, and you can see his decaying body. But the reason why, is because he...when he died, he had a very, very young wife, that he was...this...you know, past frequent marriaging...so he had a very young wife that he was widowing, and he wanted her to be able to have a stable source of income, so in his Will and with his legal bodies, he made it the case, that no one should be able to view his body for less than a dollar...alright it might have been two dollars. Either way, it was some ridiculously cheap price for the time, but it was high at the time actually, but it was ridiculously cheap. Like we look at this now and think this is kind of comical. But like it’s so cheap, it’s actually funny, but it wasn’t cheap back then. And he saw...his purpose was to create a stable source of income. Now when we look at Owl House, we have a completely different approach to this. It’s not just a visionary environment for possible profit, or economic stability. Helen was not making decision for Nieu Bethesda, to think, hey guys, I’m going to make a tourism mark on the map here, and I’m going to make you guys this great space. People are going to drive five hundred, six hundred kilometres...you don’t even need to pave that road girl. I’m going to make this place so banging that people are going to fly from Europe. People are going to come from Australia. People are going to come from Germany, the United States, they’re coming from all over the world, just to see this place. You’re welcome Nieu Bethesda, [..] Helen out. Like that did not happen.

**Sarah:** (laughing)

**Participant B:** So she made this space entirely for herself, whereas Dinsmoor did something so similar, but clearly for other purposes.

**Sarah:** That’s fascinating.

**Participant B:** And the onl..

**Sarah:** That’s really fascinating.

**Participant B:** Yeah, and it’s like, you can look at that and read the facts and look at the history, and sort of read the text and the research that’s been published on these spaces, but you just don’t *get* it, unless you *go* there. And you think to yourself, you know what? I would definitely pay two dollars to see that body. Like you’re just...you’re not going to get that, unless you see an immersive experience of the space, and because of time travel limitations, and we have a massive teleporting net/app, how else are we going to do it?

**Sarah:** Yes, I like that.

**Participant B:** Ja, we haven’t...ja, it’s next week.

**Sarah:** Exactly. That is that’s fascinating.

**Participant B:** Next week on coffee with Sarah and [name]. (chuckling)

**Sarah:** Exactly. Okay, how would you improve this digital platform?

**Participant B:** Mm, I would surround it with Nieu Bethesda. It needs some Bethesda flavour. It’s got a...and maybe the site should crash half way through, like a power out.

**Sarah:** Do you think something like at the beginning, where you press ‘read more’, there could be more about Nieu Bethesda, more pictures of the town, more background history information?

**Participant B:** Yes, but that’s been done.

**Sarah:** Okay.

**Participant B:** And that’s the thing, is that like, everybody takes these like...like if I see one more picture of a sunscape windpump, I’m going to vomit. Like I don’t need to see that anymore. I see that...like we’ve all seen that, and in fact, it becomes so generic, and like replicated, it’s this like...it is the simulacra, it’s like the thing of a thing now.

**Sarah:** Ja, absolutely, ja.

**Participant B:** It’s like this meta..

**Sarah:** And [..] is all over the [..].

**Participant B:** *Ja*! It’s like it becomes this like meta replication, where the imagery is no longer synonymous with the original, and it is like a marketing thing. Like people, literally will just...it’s like the episode of Portlando...Portlandia, oh just put a bird on it...like just put a windpump on it, it’ll sell. Like it’s..

**Sarah:** It was a trick, that’s.

**Participant B:** Ja. And it will. And it...like it’s silly, but it will. But I think the...what I think is really cool, the potential of like a digital collection like this, where you’ve got interactive elements and audiovisual...you know, people aren’t putting video of windpumps sparkling in the sun, for not videoing that drive in, that transition. That’s the...that’s where like, a space like a digital collection can really enhance the framing of the place, and an understanding the place, to see the significance of the space, which is unique, of course, but it’s a transitory journey. It...you’re...you are going there, you are not just visiting, you are going. And that, I think, could really enhance...Like if I was going to put something different or make a change or something, I would like zoom out a little bit more, and then put some grit on that.

**Sarah:** That...that...no, that’s fantastic. I really love that.

**Participant B:** Ja, ja, and power outs, don’t forget.

**Sarah:** Yes, and power out.

**Participant B:** And the page needs to fail, because the internet spying, ja, don’t forget.

**Sarah:** Like a...stranger things, flickering of the..

**Participant B:** *Yes! Yes exactly!*

**Sarah:** …we can talk about that later, but okay, talk about that later.

**Participant B:** Yeah, the flicker of the site, or something, or...even like randomly, while like you’re looking at the objects, because the objects would be in the house, there’s no reason it can’t just like make another random sound, of like wood creaking..

**Sarah:** I’ve got lots of recordings of that.

**Participant B:** Ja! There...I mean, because that’s what the experience *is*, it’s this like ethereal...I might have said ghostly, but it’s...there is a..

**Sarah:** There’s a spookiness.

**Participant B:** Yeah, there’s a...like a forth dimensionalism to it, that I think, a digital curation is the best chance of capturing, for spaces like this.

**Sarah:** Lights drop.

**Participant B:** Ja.

**Sarah:** Okay. Was there an artefact on this digital platform, in particular, that interested you in terms of how it was digitised?

**Participant B:** I love the bluebottle photo with the shells. Like that’s still percolating.

**Sarah:** I really like how you appreciate some of the photos for their aesthetic quality...

**Participant B:** ..aesthetic signature, ja.

**Sarah:** Ja, I think that’s really great.

**Participant B:** The...the windmill was curious, because...not because of the movement, but the movement did insite the curios [..] for it, but because it’s such a unique windmill. It’s like it’s got this Tahitian cosa...hut...I mean, I don’t even know what the...what they’re going for there. I don’t know, was Mike in the Philippines, I have no idea. But it’s just...it’s the...because I...I mean, I’ve seen that windmill a hundred times, I’ve never been that interested in it before, but now I’m like, oh God look at the back and the side and.

**Sarah:** Ah, that’s really interesting.

**Participant B:** ..ah! It’s like..

**Sarah:** So...an aside, which maybe...I don’t know, I’ve been recently...I’ve been actually...I’m not going to say this now because we’re still recording, I’ll tell you later.

**Participant B:** Okay, okay.

**Sarah:** Okay. Final question.

**Participant B:** You don’t want it on the record? It’s a secret? Is it a State secret?

**Sarah:** It’s going to bore the transcriber.

**Participant B:** Oh my God, it’s a State secret.

**Sarah:** Okay so this...A State secret, definitely.

**Participant B:** President’s Keepers. Helen’s keepers. Yes!

**Sarah:** I wonder...Sh!

**Participant B:** Delete this, redact it. Okay.

**Sarah:** This is a very oversimplified question.

**Participant B:** I love it.

**Sarah:** And you can answer it simplistically if you want to.

**Participant B:** Okay.

**Sarah:** Okay. How satisfactory was this browsing experience, as opposed to a real life experience [..]?

**Participant B:** Extremely satisfactory.

**Sarah:** (laughing) No..

**Participant B:** Ten. Ten out of ten! I want more. I want more of it. I want like...I’m like, what else is happening there?

**Sarah:** Thanks.

**Participant B:** I want...yeah, like ja, it was very satisfying and I want more. Thirsty for more.

**Sarah:** Woo! Thank you very much [name]. Done.