

# Helen Cammock and John Bloomfield in conversation, Frieze 20...

## **SPEAKERS**

Kate MacGarry, John Bloomfield, Helen Cammock

### **Kate MacGarry**

Hello, Welcome everyone. I'm Kate. I'm very happy to introduce artist Helen Cammock and John Bloomfield, curator at Wysing Art Centre. Wysing Art Centre is in Cambridge. It's an 11 acre site that builds experimental residences, exhibitions and events. And Helen had a residency earlier in the year and an exhibition at Wysing, which of course closed in March for lockdown. And today, the exhibition in the gallery which is on for two more days, by the way, and it's very much an extension of what Helen started at wysing. So john and Helen are gonna talk about the exhibition. And it features Helen's film They Called It Idlewild, which was made at wising, and it's being shown alongside other works, which were made before, during and since lockdown. I think john and Helen will talk for about 40 minutes. At which point we can take questions in you chat function. So I'll hand over now. Thanks to you both.

### **John Bloomfield**

Thank you Kate. And Hi, Helen. Thanks for the invite to do this with you. How are you doing today?

### **Helen Cammock**

Yeah, good. I'm good. Thank you.

### **John Bloomfield**

So I wanted to start by asking whether you could begin by just briefly talking about the works in the exhibition. Just for the benefit of anyone who is unable to see the show.

### **Helen Cammock**

Yeah, no, absolutely.

### **Helen Cammock**

I think we're going to try and have a little bit of slideshow going while I'm talking about it, which will hopefully illustrate something of what I'm talking about. Okay, great. So, as Kate said, the film They Call It Idlewild. While it's relatively short, for me anyway, and was made at Wysing. And it's a film I guess, it's about the politics of idleness. The film is probably the core of the exhibition. And it's something that's been most of my life, not something I've engaged with, really this idea of idleness. But particularly over

the last couple of years, I've been aware of thinking around idleness, but it's almost strange because it's been the busiest time of my life in many ways. So I arrived at Wysing and sat in the archives then breathed in the stillness and the activity that had been stored there over 30 years. And, and looked out the window and I just began to write. I look at the space for creativity and what that means for artists and writers in the films. But I guess also for all of us. So as a starting point, it moves from this kind of personal reflection to a much more structural analysis of how tropes around idleness are kind of woven through society if you like. I look at who is deemed idle. And I pose a challenge about this, I guess based around class and race and of course, labour. And this idea that idleness and laziness is connected to labour and in the society we live, this cannot be separated from wealth and therefore privilege, I suppose. It's around the myths that are perpetuated, in order that power is maintained by those who need to retain it. So the idle black person, the idle, poor person, kind of individually and collective for me, I suppose it's, it's a battleground. The piece includes poetry, poetic texts, prose and song and as often, as is often in my work, there are both different registers of the voice. So this idea of the poetic voice, the whispered voice, the spoken voice and the sung voice. And there's also this idea of the multiple voice so my voice is joined by Audrey Lorde by Mary Oliver by James Joyce, Jonathan Crary, Chris Davis, Johnny Mercer and Kristoff Wiekowski. And this kind of conversation or this dialogue that I hope I've constructed across across the film. So it moves across these different voices in these different registers and it's layered with different forms of sound, most of which were taken from Wysing from the kind of landscape and the detail of Wysing but also sounds that relate to the research so that that I've kind of taken sounds from from online. So the film is shot Wysing's landscape micro and macro there's a lot of detail and close up photography, and the film is quite photographic. It feels to me like a kind of photographically short film as many of my novel it's clear that I'm sharing my view, I hope my time wandering and inhabiting the sight across three months, kind of an autumn and autumnal period, a kind of a year ago to now and so you experience the light changes the weather, the environment, and I hope the sense of my idleness or this space that seems and feels and was quite new to me coming through. So the fixation on a fly, like the sound of the wind, my feet on gravel, the rain has commuters break the rural soundscape in the rain, the small details that actually became my life. So that's the film and that's probably the core, as I said of the exhibition and then you move through into the main exhibition space. And then you have a series of larger screen prints that sit alongside a new body of screen prints. So the large screens prints, pose questions and activate the ideas in the film. And at the show in Wysing, they were large roadside banners, like the one that's behind you, John, sitting behind you that were designed to interact with the commuters to and from Cambridge, morning and evening and asking the questions. Can you remember when you last did nothing? And when you last did, nothing? Can you remember how it felt. And we were laughing with John about the fact that cars were slowing down and you know, teenagers were looking out the window and trying to read them. So on some level, there was this interaction that wasn't about the gallery space. But that was about the work and the work that was in the gallery space. So this kind of activating of the ideas in different landscapes, I suppose in different spaces and areas.

### **Helen Cammock**

So the film installation at Wising was larger, and so with the billboards, and here we've scaled both down, it's about, I guess, responding to the architecture of the gallery, but also about the reconfiguration of both. Both the film and the billboards with this new body of print that were made in and around lockdown. So we start here with a diptych, we share the colour of thought, which is really

about the multiple voices at play in all my work. But it's also about the idea of dialogue and connection. And actually, it was made when a friend, a friend and curator had in this bit, had a birthday and was also very heavily pregnant during a lockdown. And we couldn't see her and celebrate her birthday, so another friend and organisers to send something. So I made this part of this diptych as a message to her. But it's really this idea of connectedness. So it kind of links into my practice, but also what I'm talking about in the film, and then the reality of my life during a period of lockdown. And this is that Yeah, something that I come back to this idea of connectedness across time and geography. And then we move to another print fault line, which was a work made directly in relation to the film. So this is about blame culture that has come out we've experienced blame culture, different sections of the population of being identity, for identify for blame at different moments in time. And, and this is not a new thing about COVID. This is historical as we know so. But it's also about how fissures, the fissures and the fault lines that were appearing, around whose life were of worth, whose labour was considered of worth, who was seen to be active who was passive, who has agency and responsibility and you know, in connection with the film, who is allowed, enabled, considered lazy, and who is allowed enabled and not considered lazy. This moves on to another print, which is in it. Well just wait to click through, here we go. It is the activists doing nothing, not the passiveness of working without question that we should cite our song. So again, it's about the questioning and unquestioning it's about action and passivity. And and really this in this one sentence, I'm it encapsulates a lot of what the film is trying to talk about. It's a shame because there's something I think that's really lost in online viewing of the prints because they're really sumptuous. They're really tactile, there's a kind of chalkiness to them, but there's a warmth to them, and you kind of want to touch them. There's this depth, but then there's also this kind of really clean crispness to them. And this matters to me a lot about how they're then read, you know, this kind of balance between the warmth and the crisp, the cold and the and they're kind of I guess something about abstraction, I don't really want to use that word. But there's something about the play across the form in them that doesn't really come across on the screen. Then there's the fabric banner, I decided I want to walk, which gives the show its name. And I guess it's a departure for me working in fabric, a new medium, but it's also about the process of protest. And that's where the name comes I decided I want to walk. So it's about risk taking, shifting, moving doing something differently, but it's also about the pace of it.

### **Helen Cammock**

And it's about this idea of Yeah, process, I walk out, I stand up and I walk because I'm using my body. It's the embodiment of taking yourself from one place to the to the next and that's about agency. So that's I guess that's what what the banner is about and there are motifs from the film. So there There's the recurring material spoken motif about the light shafting, and the studio space. It's not actually a window is the studio space, but it's the idea of the aperture of the frame. And then the wall as I'm singing lazy bones in the film, we have a kind of circular red brick wall, which I found absolutely beautiful and why seeing in the grounds, and then lazy bones is kind of ghosted into the blue of the sky. So it's there. And it's much more clear if you walk up to it, but it's it's kind of ghosted and intentionally to be the same, or very, very similar colour to the sky. And then the stitching is hand stitched, hand stitched, handstitched wall, but using a font that I use often in my screen printing. And then the turquoise outside is a wireframe, which is something that references again, the screen for me in terms of Film Editing, it's a wireframe that I would use in video and photo editing. So there's something about process that I'm trying to talk about as well in this show. That for me, is quite new. And then finally, are

the watercolour drawings, which are made during lockdown, they were never really made with the intent to show them they are kind of intimate. And they were made when I was ill with COVID. And I felt tired and not so well and kind of uninspired to pick up a camera, or even think about new projects. And it was a moment where I read about now I'm going to pronounce this wrongly arcadia. I can never pronounce it. So an ancient state that monks wrote about Arcadia also in ancient Greek, but basically a state of listlessness or torpor, kind of not caring, but also sort of restlessness. So I felt this a lot in that moment. And the only two things that I could do were to draw with watercolours and to write poetry. And so it felt interesting to me to bring also these into the conversation because I was being idle for for very different reasons. And anyway, that's the show. So that's a kind of introduction or overview to the show.

### **John Bloomfield**

Thanks, Helen. Yeah, I was lucky enough to see it last week in London, and I was really struck by how the prints are really different to to the billboards, even when they're coming from the same, you know, they feature the same text, particularly as the billboards became more weathered during the wising show and now as objects start to change, and so, you know, the I guess the show kind of includes work that was made before the lockdown, during lockdown and after lockdown. And I think it's very tempting, and perhaps it is generative to view to view the work through the prism of lockdown, and the pandemic. But before we do that, I've thought it would be good if we could rewind to what was perhaps a much simpler time. 12 months ago, so according to my notes, you came to wising for your first for the first part of the residency in early November. I wondered if you could remember what you what kind of things you were thinking about when you when you came to wising sort of what was what was going on?

Well, I guess the invite initially from from you was to make a piece of work of any kind to have time and have a residency time and space to make a piece of work in response to the archive. So I came with that in mind, but I think I also came and you know, we talked about this a lot, I came completely exhausted. I felt like I'd had maybe two years of kind of really full on a kind of activity of, you know, being abroad for you know, in Italy for six months, then, you know, the show at Whitechapel and then going to Italy for the for the show in the workshops in the performance there. And then the Turner prize, nomination and then everything that I needed to do for that and then the installation of the show. So by the time I came to waiting for for the start of the residency, I think I just felt quite tired. And I think I felt quite frazzled really and a bit like, right, okay, I'm not sure what this residency will hold for me. And so I came without lots of ideas. And I think sometimes what happens is I start to generate ideas. As soon as I know, I'm going to do something, I start to think about ideas, I start reading, I start doing research. And because I hadn't really had time or space, I just sort of turned up and that was that was really unusual for me. And then you'd made this space in the archive which was up some stairs it was it was kind of going to this little very, very, very private space with a desk that just looked through skylight onto the trees. And I think I sat down and I felt bit in shock. And so I just for the first few few visits, I was there, I think I sat and I looked and I listened. And there were different sounds. But there was a kind of silence and underpinning of silence that was interrupted by, by different sounds that were creaking trees and the sound of a server that was in the corner in a cupboard. And then people kind of fall away on the site. And very quickly, I got into this space where I was, I felt still, for the first time in in quite a

while. And by about, I guess, by about the second day, I just started to write in that stillness. And those were the kind of more poetic test texts about the space. And then the more I sat, and I wrote, and I was still, the more I started to look at what was on that shelf, or what the material of the table was made out of, or what was going on, in some wrapped up boxes down to the left hand side, I started looking at the labels on the filing cabinets. And so that was how I approached my research was, which was very, very different from me. Rather than me kind of using my head and going, right, I'm interested in or, you know, and letting my mind and archives unravel, but giving myself parameters, I left it really, really, really open. And so the way that I've engaged with the archive is is very, very different to how I often engage with archives.

### **John Bloomfield**

I mean, it's quite, it's quite rare for us to invite somebody to do something at wysing that's so centred on us and our activity and it was really because of the anniversary that we did that and I think it was absolutely fascinating. I remember one of our first meetings where you started to describe what the work could be about and he said, okay, it's going to be about idleness and we were really surprised because you know, as somebody that works at wysing, it feels like the busiest place on earth to me and there's always so much going on. We've got these programmes, the music festival. And then also, I guess, the history of wysing is that it was formed at a point, a point in history when the world was really beginning to speed up, it was 1999, which was kind of a landmark year in the development of the internet, a few years after the Big Bang, and the deregulation of the financial markets, and all this kind of stuff, which is, you know, where the world just began this this process of acceleration that really only stopped a few months ago. (for some people) so, yeah, I mean, we found it found a really fascinating. I guess the the process you described really kind of fits the form of the film for me. So I've been watching the film recently and just trying to sort of get my get my thoughts in order for this conversation, I was really struck by how, how closely the form of the film approximates a kind of daydreaming. I guess formally the film seems to be crafted like two different things or travelling in two different directions. You've got the images which are very centred around Wysing, which even for people that no site really well manages to kind of show things in a completely different light. And then the soundtrack just goes everywhere else. And it's sort of It begins with you sort of responding to bits in the archive, and then it just takes us in this like, very, very different terrain. I mean, how, how conscious of that, were you when you were kind of making the film? Did you feel like he was going too far away from the thoughts of just let it go?

### **Helen Cammock**

I guess I must have thought it hadn't gone too far. Otherwise, I wouldn't left it. I wouldn't have left it there. That's a really interesting question. Because I think it is sometimes hard to know how, how much to allow yourself to wander. But I think my wandering has kept me in the parameters of my practice. And so that's, I think that's what the kind of container for it is. So the wandering the meandering, I can never just stay with myself. So you know, those are the openings in the Daydream in my experience of being there in the view. And just to go back to what you just said, this is really interesting that you talk about this idea of idleness and then how active wysing is and that of course epitomises what the film is talking about, is this this this distinction between activeness and passiveness in idleness, like One thing being laziness. Another thing being idleness. One thing is passive one thing is active when we think we're being active when actually we're being passive. So that's the conversation and one thing that

Wysing offers, and I know this from many of my peers is that it offers a space in a very active way for an artist to go and have time and space to be creative. So to be active, but in a kind of way that it could from the outside maybe be experienced as idleness. So you might say, come and have three months, explore whatever you'd like to explore whether it's your work, whether it's dialogue with other artists, which I know has happened many times, but certainly with some of the artists who have been on residency most recently, and so there's this there's this space that you offer, which is without the kinds of constraints that as artists we normally work under. And so whilst I came to you and said we'd like to make something about idleness. It was also about the offer of Wysing, so as much as responding to the archive, it was responding to what Wysing represents to me as an artist, but also other artists, and curators that I've talked to. So so that's so that's that thing. So now I've gone off on a tangent and I forgotten where I was before I went back to what what you'd said, What were we talking about?

**John Bloomfield**

My question was about going off on tangents?

**Helen Cammock**

quite clearly, I'm quite comfortable getting off on tangents.

**Helen Cammock**

I mean, I think, for me, research is about going off on tangents. And I have different approaches to research. So sometimes if I have a commission, where I am asked to look at a particular archive, then I will give myself some parameters and some constraints. And I will probably have some ideas. When I reach that archive. Other times, somebody might say, please come and have time to make a work, or we'd like you to make something for this. But there are no other constraints or parameters. And therefore, on some level, I have to create my own, but they're quite wide, and they're quite loose. And they probably sit much more with my practice than the space or the place or the idea or the commission. So it makes complete sense to me that I'm using multiple voice. And that I allowed myself to move. And of course, I had ideas I had, I had read already some things so the quote from Audrey Lord in the film, I had obviously read already. So that wasn't new research. But it was a starting point. And then I had a conversation with somebody and I was thinking about Mary Oliver. So I had a look at something that Mary Oliver had written then I bought a book and then I read the book. And then I found a quote that I needed from Mary Oliver. And then I started thinking about Ireland, having worked in Northern Ireland, and then I found this book called, what's it called? "Lazy, idle schemers". And there were lots of texts in it by James Joyce. And, and also I, you know, I use some of the things that James Joyce have been interested in thinking about, particularly around the politics of being Irish. And, and that around the lazy, the lazy Irishman or the, you know, the lazy fool. And then the idea of the black, the lazy black man. And then that took me to the 1930s in the depression, and then the song lazy bones, which my dad used to sing to us in the mornings when we couldn't get up. So this, these kinds of, we might call it daydreaming, we might call it I don't know, thought webs, whatever it is this idea that you allow your mind to, to do something, knowing that it's in within the constraints of what you're, you're, you're generally interested in having conversations about. And so, yeah, there's always a space for tangents.

**John Bloomfield**

I love that, you know, you can you can see that in the film with the research because there are these amazing, amazing references and some which like, well, actually quite a lot of them you sort of you take care to cite and you mention in the text, who, the quotes are from but in a way that doesn't feel academic, but it's very careful. I get the feeling that there was already sort of two sort of two approaches as the most sort of active form of research where you're kind of going out and you may be like looking for references and work around a certain theme. And then there's evidence of something much more kind of passive, so even like the title where you start with references and an Everything But the Girl Song, and that that feels like something that would just kind of slip into your mind because it's almost it's almost, you know, inappropriate to come into your mind when you're thinking about, say, James Joyce. That's not how it's supposed to work, but it is how it does work quite often. It feels like there's two strands. And I guess the kind of an interesting effect of all these quotations is it kind of allows the film to take this longer historical view. So you go from talking about Jonathan Crary and his kind of descriptions of very futuristic and dystopian experiments, to then, you know, bursting into song which evokes a different time period and one with different social constraints. I just wanted to tell how important history was to you when thinking about the film.

### **Helen Cammock**

Generally, in terms of my practice, history underpins everything I think about or everything I do, as an, you know, as an artist, but also as a as a human. You know, that belief, I suppose that I talk about that. I believe that histories are multiple, I believe that histories are structures where power is maintained, there were narratives of power are replicated, why there are cycles that keep coming round and coming round and coming round. And they either do more damage as they come round, or they do less damage, you know, or they move and shift as the cycles change. So I think of histories as cyclical, I think of them as active, I think of them as live, I think of them as current. I think of them as catalysts, I think that if we are, if we detach ourselves, from what we consider to be history, as though it is irrelevant, as though we are the newest thing, we have the newest ideas, we do things in the most evolved ways. If we can't let go of those notions, and we're not open to what's come before us, we have no idea of who we are now, or why we're here. And then what we can do, or what the impact of our actions or our belief systems or our our kind of processes or ways of living norms and values how how they will impact on the future. So, for me, histories, they underpin everything,

### **John Bloomfield**

you can definitely see that in the form of questions around the politics of idleness resonated, resonate at different periods and kind of mean different things. But unfortunately, under the same the same power structures, the discourses around around this power structures end up coming, more sophisticated and shifting. So you end up moving from, you know, stereotypes of the, 'lazy black', as you've described to discussions around who can who can kind of claim benefits and who can't. And then

### **Helen Cammock**

and then right is the systematic murder of black, black, the black body, you know, they're all I suppose, iterations of the same structure of mythmaking the same because that's what it is basically, that you you construct or miss are constructed around worth, and they replicate and replicate and replicate. And that one is no different. Yeah, sorry, I interrupted.

## **John Bloomfield**

And we've just seen all of that just over the last few months. The question, Who gets to be idle just just exploded over the last few months. Okay, so I want to talk a little bit about about lockdown. I'm personally glad I got to spend so much time with these works before lockdown, because these questions became like really, really important over the last few months. So we opened the exhibition at wysing in late February 29th of February. And then by the 18th of March, we had to close it. And then we found, as did most organisations, that our lockdown measures needed to be very, very abrupt. And so months later, the show was, was closed, but the billboards was still up. And then I just really loved the idea of these kind of just staying up as the world came to a standstill. One billboard asked 'Can you remember when you last did nothing'. And the other saying 'when you last did nothing, can you remember how it felt'. All of a sudden everyone across the country was supposed to kind of reflect on different forms of inactivity and to kind of understand the differences between them.... tp call into question, the imperative towards productivity for the sake of being productive to rethink how we value different kinds of labour, including, of course, creative labour. I was wondering if you, if you kind of thought about these billboards over over that period, and kind of whether their meanings sort of shifted for you?

## **Helen Cammock**

absolutely. We had some conversations about whether to leave them up or to take them down as the show was closing. And I think the conversation we had was, let's absolutely, let's absolutely leave them up. Because I do think there is something about I mean, this is, this is the thing that's, that really interests me about language generally. And I know this isn't just about language, it's about an idea. And it's about an you know, an action or an activity or not. But this idea that the meaning changes around who's saying it, who's speaking it, but who's reading it, but also the context within which it's read. So obviously, the meaning of the billboards was was very different. If you were driving past, in a moment where you weren't supposed to be out, or you weren't supposed to be having contact with other people outside of your family, you weren't really supposed to be necessarily going to shops, but you might want to just go for a drive or a walk, because you couldn't stand being inside any longer for your kind of activity or sort of sports or your health activity. So everything, everything changed in in that moment, just as any kind of context or change that happens on a collective level changes meaning of different things that are said or done. And so yes, I did think about it. And then as kind of locked down eased and you know, I was thinking about the show, and how knowing that I wanted to show they call it Idlewild online, but knowing that I wanted to show it in a gallery space, because it does make a difference. Again, the context within which you, you see work, I really wanted the billboards, those those texts to come back. And I didn't really know how to bring them back in a way that would activate the film in a different way or activate it in the same way, knowing that it wasn't able to be shown in the same way. For example, you know, the drive past wysing, you see the first billboard in the morning, and you see the second billboard in the evening on your way home. So you have this space between and in a gallery space, you don't have the opportunity to do that. So it was about thinking what the other prints could do in order to activate the two billboard prints and to make sure they didn't sit alongside each

other. And to and in order to think about the changes that had happened over the months since those billboards were, were first shown. And I yeah, I guess for me locked down was a was a tricky time, because I, I was ill, and it was right at the beginning of lockdown. And, you know, I'd had I had quite a long tail illness so. So my life kind of changed in a way that I couldn't do as, as much as I would normally do. All my projects were postponed. And I was kind of in this in this space, again of nothingness, but in a very different way to when I made the work. And so yes, I absolutely thought about the different the different reading of it, but also, what I could do alongside the billboard images and the film, to try to say other things that were kind of about both the film but about the moment and the politics of what was happening and still continues to happen around this period of the pandemic.

### **John Bloomfield**

Yeah, particularly the banner and the exhibition title seem to kind of speak to that moment or speak to the events of the summer. And I guess, with with the title, 'I decided to walk' it feels like a departure from from some of the concerns of the film maybe and that it's it's sort of it's kind of calling calling for action. And you mentioned to me very binary sort of a protest banner and feels like a nod to Yeah, to the the protests that followed the tragic murder of George Florida.

### **Helen Cammock**

Absolutely. I mean, I you know, and being on being on the marches was an activator for me. And this idea of marching for me to march to be in a kind of mass situation like that, it has to be, you know, I have to feel like I have to be there, you know, and, and that was the beginnings of the idea as well of the idea of the protest banner. I mean, I feel like, in many ways, this idea of resistance is, you know, again runs across my practice, perhaps in Uh, I don't know if it's in a quiet way, or if it's in a loud way, but it's, you know, for me, it's always there. And, you know, the banner itself doesn't necessarily look like I didn't want to have the banner with a, you know, the poles in it, there was something about not trying to replicate the form of the banner, and hoping that the idea that it's a kind of fabric, a fabric tableau, I suppose that relates to the ideas in the film, that the politics of that and the idea of protests would come in a way that was about drawing it out from the viewer, as well as me talking about it. Because that's really important to me in my work, as well as that, that, that not everything is stated, but that it's, it's there, so it's present. But it's, it's as much about you as a viewer, to be able to hopefully, to be able to read some of those concerns that that underpin the work as well. I guess I feel like they're quite clear, but I don't know, you know, whether that's that's always the case, actually.

### **John Bloomfield**

Just as the final reflection on the show it really feels like like a diary of the last year with these different sort of different kind of entries there: one from late autumn, winter last year. And then this and then was the the watercolours which we talked about earlier, and you can kind of see this question of idleness just resonating in different ways as your life and as the world has changed so much over 12 months.

### **Helen Cammock**

I mean, yeah, I mean, I think I'm hoping that I mean, I can see it when I stand in the space and I look at the prints and I look at I watched the film and I look at the watercolours I can see my own journey, obviously and particularly with the watercolours I see a moment of intimacy and a moment of making that's about colour and form. And there's, there's something that I know that's about the kind of palette

of colour that I fall back on a lot. And what I realised once we had the show up was that there was a palette that really drew all the prints together even though different parts of the project were made at different times even the watercolours sit within the palette of the rest of the show with the prints and for me the watercolours are quite emotional. I think for me I can see my emotions in there rather than my intellect right you know, if I were to separate those two things, which is hard to do, but definitely there's there's more of my feeling in the watercolours and and is usually in my poetry, then maybe in the in the prints.

### **John Bloomfield**

Let's see if there are any questions from the audience.

### **Kate MacGarry**

We've got one here for Helen. Helen, have you have you done residencies before and how was your output different?

### **Kate MacGarry**

Okay, so I have only done so this is my third third residency ever. So I did one residency in in Barbados for a month and out of I guess out of that month residency, I made two films 'A Hole in the sky part one' and 'A Hole in the sky Part Two listening to James Baldwin' so and that was the first time and and I went to that residency not having any idea really what I might, what I might make. So I just took my camera and I filmed and I used the museum there and the the National Archives in Bridgetown, and I came home and I made these two pieces. And then the second residency was when I when I won the max mara Prize, and I had a six month residency and I went to six different cities over six months. So I had a month in each city. I had six weeks in Venice, but I had a month in Rome, a month in Palermo a month in Florence, a month in Reggio Emilia, a month in bolonia. And yeah, and and I came out with a kind of three screen installation, which was a very long film, a very long work an hour and 20 minutes and six metre screen print, a kind of a mural, I suppose, a frieze and some an etched book, which was which had was text and drawings and a huge kind of research space in in the in the exhibition and what else to have. Oh and Line Au Prince. So I think when I, when I am allowed the space to work, I, it becomes a very, very productive space. I think I run a run with whatever time I've offered because I think I've lived for many years, probably, I don't know, working between 50 and 60 hours a week doing different jobs, whether that's teaching or running projects, or facilitating or, you know, work facilitating workshops, so many different things. So often I find myself making work in the evenings or at weekends. And that's been my life as an artist for a really a lot of years, probably till the last sort of couple of years. And so residencies weren't really an option. And, and so I've had these moments, where I've had residencies, and I've just, I guess, run with them. Because I felt I needed to, and I could,

### **John Bloomfield**

I guess with a lot of those residencies and a lot of residencies, it's part of a commissioning process. I was wondering how much of your work kind of comes about from responding to those specific invitations and how much just comes about from being in the studio, sort of whatever that is, and, and working?

### **Kate MacGarry**

I mean, that's a really interesting question because it's, it's something that I'm wrangling with at the moment of how much how much studio freedom I have to work and research and think in the studio and it's something that I want to change because I think I I work more I work much much more to commission and I have done and that's probably because I've had to so initially I was applying for Commissions and when you apply for commission, there's always a framework that you need to work within, because there's something that the institution or the commissioner wants out of that. But within that I never actually feel hugely constrained because I'm quite interested in the world and I'm quite as we talked about my tangents, my tangent dental thinking, but I think, you know, I can move from one thing to another thing, even when I find myself in a situation where I'm not overly inspired, or it's something that I don't have great knowledge of, but I mean, you know, when Mary Cremin commissioned me to make the film 'The long note', you know, we we talked about a short film, maybe 20 minutes that was going to look at the role of women in the Civil Rights unit and civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. And once Of course, once I got to dairy, I realised that I wasn't going to sit in an archive. And I wasn't going to just look at all footage I needed to meet people like it was people were alive, and the history was alive. And so the whole project became much larger than the commission conceived. And I think that happens a lot. Another film that I made by necessary passage, and a call in a curator commissioned me to make a film work looking at emigration in the 19th 18th, and 19th century, so from from the UK out, and I trawl through all these kind of documents that were in the women's library in London, and I couldn't find anything, anything that I was excited about until I found this book of letters that were written by people who had been conscripted to go to Southern Africa and to work as governesses and servants and and so it was about it, there's always something that will begin the kind of pattern of thought going even if you don't know what you're looking for. So sometimes I really know what I'm looking for. And a commission is very clear, and I think okay, well I'll do my own thing anyway. And I'm interested and and often people commission you because they know that what you're interested in generally is what they're also interested in in that commission. So there's also a kind of synergy that happens but having said all of those things about always being able to find my way I would like more studio time that's not attached to commissions and I, I don't know how and when that will happen, because that requires you to be able to manage financially in order to take that time to turn down commissions or to to kind of work without, you know, layers of different projects all happening at the same time. And I think that will be my life for for a little while yet but I'm, I'm trying to open up a little bit more space to just sit and be and you know, allow myself to think about what I want to make work about completely from the beginning.

### **Kate MacGarry**

One from Anna. Hi, Helen. Can you expanded with multiple voices in the film? How do you go through the process of selecting points? And how do you?

### **Kate MacGarry**

Okay, so, um, so I probably do it in every I think I probably have done it in every film. Not every film I've ever made. But probably most films, I can think of about seven or eight films, where this idea of the multiple voice happens across them. And it happens in different ways. So in this film, as John said, I referenced directly in the script, I reference who said it, and I have some films where I do that. And then I have other films, and also particularly in performances, where I don't reference who said it. And there's something about this questioning of authorship. And you might only know that somebody else

has said it, because you might already know that that quote, or you might sense that the language comes from a different time, or I shift the way that I say it, I read it slightly differently. But what I'm interested in is, is this, what happens, what shifts in the meaning of language, when different voices speak it, so this idea that all these voices are coming through me, so I'm kind of embodying the voices. I quite often use this example that in one film, I use the Enoch Powell rivers of blood speech, my father was a teacher in 1968, in Wolverhampton when the rivers of blood speech happened, and there was an effect on my father, as you know, in the school that he worked in, and he would talk about this impact. And he would, he would directly relate it to the rivers of blood speech. And, and so I made this this film, which it uses, I suppose, our family as a catalyst to talk about race equality and the experience around race, and belonging. And I suppose the idea of, yeah, the idea of who belongs and who doesn't belong. And historically how that has, has happened in this century, my father was born in 1924. So this idea across this century of how that's shifted and changed, but the idea that I speak Enoch Powell's, speech, a section of it in that film, completely within the context of that film, so it's about context, but it's also about me, the subject position of the voice speaking it, that completely changes the meaning of that piece. And so I'm interested in that I'm interested in pulling different voices together, weaving together different voices into conversation, which I hope is somehow trying to have the conversation I want to have around about histories and about geographies about how intersections of experience are clearly there, they're clearly there across from I don't know, let me think Walter Benjamin, to something my father might say, to kind of, kind of a piece of poetry written by, I don't know, let me think of somebody else, Audrey Lorde, or, but this idea that there's an intersectionality to our experience, and that's something that the multiple voice does as well. So it's not just about this idea of subject position and authorship, it's also about the intersectionality of human experience, and what is uncomfortable and where the tensions lie, when we mesh these voices together? I'm not sure if that answers that...

### **Kate MacGarry**

I've got another. And touch and a sense of touch is very evident in the film, showing your hand and showing the detail of things. And you say something about this.

### **Kate MacGarry**

I guess, because I'm in, I am very interested in in all the work that I make in the senses. So the idea of different kinds of registers of the voice, so that and the different ways that I lay a sound and I think sometimes that's not really obvious, but often I, I take the soundtrack from one piece of film, and I lay it under another, and you might not notice because it's very subtle, but it's about this shifting. And sometimes that's about shifting geographies, or sometimes I might take some sound off a piece of archival footage, and I put it underneath a piece that I've shot. So it's this, this interplay that's happening, and that's about how we hear things. And then obviously, visually, it's about how we see things. And then for me, it's about touch. So I am interested in that in the haptic the idea that we can touch. We can touch experience, we can touch something that has come before us, as well as something else that's happening that's outside of our experience. And so this idea of touch is not just about getting your finger and touching something when I guess I was talking about that with a prince but yeah, you're absolutely right. The idea of touch is about being able to feel like you can connect it's

about connecting with something through the senses. And there's something about Tina Camp writes about photography, and the haptic. So Dr. Hartman talks about the haptic in terms of archives. And for me, that's one of the most exciting things about archives really is, is this idea that you can touch something that you can touch something that's been made by somebody else. But it's also been read by other people, it's also been archived by other people, before it comes to you, then you touch it, and you pass on your touch as well. And without knowing it, it is again about this intersectionality and this interplay, and it's, it's about Yeah, it's it. Yes, that's enough.

**Kate MacGarry**

Another one. Helen, it was interesting what you said about slowing down and looking for yield and not always being driven by the urgency to capture. I'm interested in these basic rhythms that proclaim themselves in different forms. Can you speak to how they changed since your residency?

Hmm.

**Helen Cammock**

Well, you know, the way they've changed, I think, is because of the pandemic more than anything else, because projects have changed. And what I have found that I've slowed down to do is to think, and I think I can, or I, in many ways, have thought of myself, as I think quite quickly, I act quite quickly, many of the people in my life who know me, and would say, I'm not the most patient human being either. And so I think one of the things that has happened since the residency is an experience of allowing myself to slow down and almost forcing myself but being in a space where, you know, being at Wising definitely was it was about you know, you're in the middle of the countryside. And there were grounds, and then I was in the live work space, which is a very bare space, because it's a working studio as well for all the different kinds of artists who might come and work there. And so I didn't have all the things that I normally fiddle with. And so it was it was about focus. And so that's one of the things that I think was shifted for me while I was there, then the pandemic has happened. And so that's, that's, that's remained, I think, and I've prioritise different things. So throughout, you know, lockdown, I was walking for two hours a day, and it became almost a meditative space, a survival space. And, you know, it enabled me to think about different things. So now I have these spaces. Before my thinking space was either on a train or driving in a car, because they were the only spaces where I wasn't doing anything. And now what I've realised is I, I want and I need and I require the spaces for slowness, in order for me actually, to be more creative, and probably more productive in the in the long term.

**Kate MacGarry**

I think we've got time for one more. Continuing on the question about working on commission, as you've worked on a lot of projects that were centred around social issues. If you get the chance, would you ever make a work again, as personal as the collaborative work you did with your father as his cane for a very personal place? I guess that's changing. Yeah. And that's something you'll explore again,

**Helen Cammock**

You know, I actually feel like this they call it Idlewild, I actually think is much more like changing room. Much, much more like changing room. It's, for me, it's a very personal film. I know I have all these other

voices, but actually in changing room, I also had other voices. I think that was the first time I worked with Walter Benjamin's text, Franz Fanon is in there. So I think I, for something to be to be, I am a social being, we are social beings, and I can't, I will never be able to separate myself, from everybody else in the world. And so everything that I that I make is it is, is a kind of reflection of who I am, but also who that were, who the world is, and that that changes and shifts and structurally I have my own understandings and they shift and change over time as well you know, as, as different kinds of dialogues are happening, what's happening in my head or who I see myself as on my identity shifts and change or how I describe myself or how I think of myself those things change. So everything I make, even if there seemed to be about social issues are really very personal works. But I suppose changing room and they call it Idlewild our works that begin with a looking in Kind of revealing of something inside that's happening that then becomes external. Whereas something like the long note began from a kind of premise that I knew this, this is not about your experience, Helen, this is about. So this is about other people's experiences. And so the tone changed the way the script was written, changed the way that I platformed other people's voices over my voices, I use mine as a way to, I suppose, talk about, in some ways talk about my, my being somehow on the outside, but then in also being on the outside the conversation, certainly that I had with Bernadette enabled us to make those connections. So she started to talk about the black civil rights movement in connection. And then we were talking about Nina Simone. And then so you know, this, I suppose this is what I'm talking about is that when something feels like it's on the outside, there's always a way for you to find your way in if you're open to it. And it's, for me, it's about being mindful about who you are in the dynamic. Because without that mindfulness of who you are, you can never kind of meet people in a way that's kind of honest and has integrity. But it doesn't mean that you're not welcome in the dialogue. And so, yeah, so some, some works kind of begin from an internal place. Other works begin from an external place, but I'm always in there. And it's important for me to acknowledge that.

### **Kate MacGarry**

Thanks so much. That seems like a really good place to end. And thank you, John, as well for sharing not only your wysing exhibition with us as well, but and, yeah, as I said before, the exhibition is on for two more days. because things are going well into tier two, whatever. We are asking people to email us if you can let us know when you are open, tomorrow and Saturday, and we're giving you both a virtual round of applause.