

Conversations Over a Brew

Season 2, Episode 4 – Hugh & Lou

Transcript

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LW – Lindsey West

H – Hugh Wareing

L – Lou Chappelle

24:58

[INTRO MUSIC]

LW - Hello and welcome to Conversations Over a Brew. I'm Lindsey West from Heart of Glass and we are an Arts Organisation based in St Helens, Merseyside. Broadly speaking, we support artists and communities to go on creative journeys together and make art. Conversations over a Brew is a series of intimate recorded conversations exploring the stories of the people we make art with. This podcast is about the power of listening and conversation, and how making art can bring us together and create change. In this episode, we hear from artist Lou Chapelle, also known as Laurence Payot and Hugh Wareing. Lou is an artist who works in collaboration with people and communities to create collective rituals and objects that question and re-invent our sense of belonging. Last year Lou led 'You Make Me Feel Good', a project which explored feelings about human connection during and after the pandemic with members of St Helen's U3A and Heald Farm Court. Hugh is the chair of St Helens U3A and contributed to the 'You Make Me Feel Good' project. So sit back, relax and enjoy the conversation.

[THE SOUND OF A KETTLE BOILING FADES IN, THE CLICK OF THE SWITCH INDICATING IT IS BOILED, WATER BEING POURED AND THE CLINK OF A TEASPOON STIRRING TEA IN A CUP]

Lou - Yeah, so I first met Hugh on Zoom.

Hugh - Yeah.

L - Which we all seem to be doing at the moment. We met virtually a few times. We wanted to work on a project together, inviting people to talk about human connections, this precious connection we've lost lately.

H - Yeah, it was during the pandemic, which was why we were on Zoom to begin with and it was, it was quite awkward using Zoom, but I'm afraid to say probably become quite used to it over the length of time that it's been going on. The project was basically to try and bring people together once lockdown was easing and I think we had some success.

L - Yeah. Because we initially, initially planned to do all the workshops over Zoom because we were not too sure if people would want to meet in person and in the end we decided to actually meet in person outdoors. And it was really lovely, wasn't it, to just -

H - It was.

L - Speak face to face.

H - And it was good that we got people together outside in the rain with a gazebo over them, and it only blew away once.

L - Yeah, we didn't actually get rain, we got quite a bit of sunshine.

H - We got a lot of sunshine and we were moving out of the gazebos. But it was, well, I was pleased that people came. I must admit I was also rather disappointed with the number of people who came. It got a lot of advertising from me, but there was a lot of reticence. I don't know if you noticed it in the people who did turn up because they all said "I can't draw."

L - Mm.

H - But it didn't matter, did it.

L - I was impressed by the amount of drawings we created at the end of each session. I was scanning all of the drawings and we created so many, we've got so much content.

H - Yeah.

L - Do you think it was tricky for people to go out as well? Because I know that was the first time since lockdown down that U3A was proposing, proposing something face to face. How did you think people feel about that?

H - I think it was difficult for some people and in a way, it's a problem that the project has ended because people are gradually getting more and more, and I'm sure if we did it again at some point in the future, we'd get a better take up from people.

L - Yeah. I feel like human connection is something we take for granted. I think we've all had to re-evaluate what it means during lockdown and how, how important they are and how much we miss them and just little things. Going to the shop and seeing people in the streets, you know, it can be the really small thing that we realise how important they were. The project was to aim to give form to this, this precious thing and invisible thing. And so we explored it by doing some drawings. We also did some poetry, with Scott Farlow. We invited Stacey Atkinson, who's a dancer and choreographer, and we explored movement and we also did some little animations with Laurence Park.

H - Yeah.

L - Just animating our drawings. I just wanted to go back on the drawing element, because it is really interesting how a lot of adults say they can't draw. And it's it's a nice challenge isn't it, and some people have said to me they have not drawn since I've been to school, like 70 years ago.

H - Well, I've actually followed up on that in just with the Committee of the U3A, because when we're in meetings on Zoom, you can see them scribbling away.

L - Ah, doodling.

H - Yeah, doodling. And I've asked them to show the doodles to the camera at the end of the meeting, some won't because, well, who knows what they've drawn.

L - Oh.

H - But some are quite happy to do so. And I think it belies the myth that they can't draw because they're quite happy to doodle. So if we did it again, maybe we should use the word doodling rather than drawing.

L - Yeah. And also something else thought about afterwards. We could have done things like Pictionary would have been quite fun.

H - Yeah.

L - Turning it into a game a little bit more.

H - Yeah. Yeah.

L - How did you think of the drawing? Do you draw?

H - I, I draw quite a lot because I, I like sketching landscapes.

L - Ok.

L - I like drawing maps, and I've always doodled cartoons but never very well but they mean something to me so I'll do it.

L - No, they look great. Actually the designer who created the newspaper loved all of yours because you kept pointing at his favourite drawings and saying "Oh they're all by the same man." And you did this beautiful hug which was I think it's one of the favourite drawing.

H - Oh, that's good.

L - It's like a little head and two big hands surrounding it, and it's yeah. It's such a nice metaphor for a hug. So we did draw quite abstract things didn't we? So yeah, we drew like hugs and feelings and also we created like maps of connections. And again yours was quite good because you did use the different times of your life didn't you?

H - I did, yes.

L - Could you tell us about it.

H - It goes back to what, I'm dreadful with names, were saying about her Uncle Jim and the fact that I had worked with him in Liverpool, but I'm no longer in touch with a lot of people that I've worked with at different times in my life because I've worked Zambia, London, Cornwall, the Midlands. Then for Ofsted, it's, you can't keep in touch with everybody, can you?

L - Yeah, so your maps were changing so, because you did the map of you when you were young as well, so you had no hair did you? Baby, baby age and you so...

H - I'm getting back to that. [LAUGHS]

L - Oh yeah. Yeah, so you had a middle one with loads of hair and the beard.

H - Yeah.

L - Yeah. [LAUGHS] and your connections have changed and yeah, so the people who were important when you were young were your family and mum and dad and now the U3A has got a big part of your network isn't it.

H - U3A, the ramblers and, well, still some siblings but not all of them. Lots and lots of great nephews and nieces but whereas in the middle part of my life it was much more work, I think I hope I can't remember what I put in, but I hope my then wife and my kids were in there at that time. But no, it's interesting how they change and it was interesting how some people represented things differently. Because I remember Susan talking about the links in her life and she did it pictorially, was it her children were her sun and her husband was the moon, was that the way she did it?

L - Yes! And her drawing looks like she's a sun so she was, she was in the center like a smiley face in the middle and all the connections coming out of it, like rays of sunshine that was really beautiful, wasn't it.

H - Yeah, it was, there were other people did it much more using words and links to the words. But it was amazing, the variety that you saw.

L - It's amazing what you can see in a drawing. I think that's why drawing is so nice. You can really read a lot in some people's drawings.

H - Well I must admit, since doing that, I have looked at, I've got some pictures on my walls at home. Many are landscapes because I like that, quite a few are motorcycles but I have some abstracts as well and looking at abstracts, when you've been looking at other things in different ways, makes you appreciate that there's other things within that picture that you've had on your wall for 40 years now. And perhaps it's not quite what you originally thought it was.

L - So it gives you a new way in?

H - Different, different ways in, yeah, it's very, you take a lot more back from these sessions than you actually realise.

L - It's the doing isn't it, the doing it yourself.

H - Yeah.

L - Yeah. You know something else we did, which was one of the highlights of the project, was when we did the dance session. We had to have a conversation through movement, so quite an abstract conversation. So Hugh was doing a movement and then I had to respond to that movement by giving him another movement. And we kept going like that. So there was no preconceived idea of what we were going to talk about without words. But we went on a journey, didn't we? We did indeed. What did you, what did you make?

H - I remember. I remember I was doing the assembly. And I know you went to, you were at the disco weren't you?

L - No you know when, when we were doing the one you were you, it looked like you were rocking a baby and we, the story to me, anyway, that's how I saw it to be about growing up, and then-

H - Yeah.

L - Getting bigger and bigger and people disappearing and bringing people back.

H - Yeah. I was all there but I'm having to remember it as well.

L - Ah, can you remember it?

H - I can indeed. Yeah. It was, the other thing about that was it brought to me thoughts of "I wish I could still" Because it's so many years since I've done the cha cha cha that I would hate to try and, when I was learning it, they always used to say to me "Smaller steps, smaller steps" because, you know, you stride out a long way. And I used to do a lot of country dance and folk dancing, ceilidh kind of things. And without somebody calling the moves for a ceilidh you just can't get back into it. You need the caller there.

L - So it was nice having the guidance, you know, someone taking us through it step by step.

H - It was because I used a couple of the phrases when we were doing the language, the poetry and that because I said, "Allemande left" and you didn't realise I was speaking French. So it says a lot for my accent. And then it was Allemande left, your corner and do-si-do your partner, which dates back to when I was doing a lot of ceilidh and folk dancing.

L - And dancing is something we talked quite a lot when you were talking about human connection. That music and people singing together and some nice stories of just singing together in your family in the car. Those are very nice moments of connections.

H - And the beer soaked carpet came into it from you didn't it? Being at the disco.

L - Oh yeah. Yes, because we had to remember a time when we felt connected into and then everybody had to copy a movement. And that was really, I really enjoyed doing that. It really felt like you were inside people's memory by doing the movements with them. So I made you all jump around, didn't I? Like you were at a party dancing.

H - It was very good.

[MUSIC BREAK]

H - Yeah. And but the other one that we've not talked about yet was the words. And was it Scott?

L - Yeah.

H - Yeah. And he was asking us to come up with words and linking words and things like that. And I got into my head to be as polysyllabic as I could be.

L - Yeah. You came up with some good starting words, didn't you? So we, we were, we were kind of writing together.

H - Yeah.

L - We had some big sheets of paper and responding to each other.

H - Penecontemporaneous. That was one of them.

L - Oh yeah, I forgot what it meant.

H - Almost at the same time.

L - Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Which led to a nice little phrase in the poetry of being, being in the wrong place at the wrong time or wrong place at the right time. Right place at the wrong time. Or right place at the right time.

H - Yeah. Which is what we were throughout this session actually, it was the right place at the right time because it did get people talking. Even the people who attended the first session who didn't come back because there were some of them who came to just one and when I suggested they came to another their answer was "No, it was good I'd rather they, that someone else got the opportunity than I was hogging it." but -

L - They kept the memory.

H - And I think that everybody did get positive from it. I've not had any negatives from anyone.

L - Oh, great. And do you think for some people it was the first time that they go into an organised event since lockdown?

H - I think that was a big part of it.

L - Because some people were just really happy to chat and it was nice. And we just let the session be quite informal didn't we, people had a good chat and it was nice.

H - Yeah. It was nice to sit down and get the mask off.

L - Yeah. Yeah. Actually see people's faces fully. Yes.

H - Yeah. But I don't know how you feel but when masks disappear will we miss anything?

L - Do you think we'll miss something for you? You have to look at people's eyes a little bit more but -

H - That's very true. But I love putting a mask on and going into the bank.

L - [LAUGHS] Yeah.

H - Yeah. I would never have imagined I would ever be in a position where I put a mask on and go in to the bank.

L - And it would have been, yeah, it's fine.

H - Yeah. It's good.

L - Yeah.

H - But I mean, the project did make me think more about the way I could fit this or other projects and what the U3A does because once people are in their groups, they tend to close the door and family history remains, excuse me, family history and rarely spreads into, although I try and force it to, spreads into history and heritage or the walking groups or things like that. And I, I do like the idea of occasionally extending outwards.

L - Yeah, mixing it up a little bit.

H - And this has really inspired that kind of thing because I mean, basically I began life as a geologist and a geographer and I have realised that a lot of the geography that I learnt is now history.

L - Mm hmm.

H - And so I'm inspired a lot by history as well as by the geography of places. And I don't know, more because I'm now the Chair, I see that I've got to try and inspire other people and get them to join in with things. And this was a really good way of doing it. What was it that, about the project or about the projects that happened within the Heart of Glass that pushed you towards getting involved with us, with this one?

L - So Heart of Glass got in touch with me because they wanted to do a project about what initially was called the Loneliness, Loneliness Projects. But obviously talking about loneliness can be quite a dark and sad thing.

H - Yeah.

L - So we decided to twist it around and instead of talking about loneliness, we thought, what if we talk about not being lonely and about all the nice memories we have of doing things with people? So that's what really started it. And personally, within my art practise, I'm really interested in these invisible connections, so important things in life. Things that really make you feel alive more than physical things. And for me it was a bit of an experimentation to see what if we explore those feelings with drawing and movement and, and words. How can we shape this invisible thing that's so precious to us all?

H - Yeah. Well.

L - Yeah, yeah, and it has been great to work with older people and who have, know more experience and I really enjoyed that.

H - Yeah, that's good. I just feel the bit you said about with older people, it's certainly gave several of us an opportunity to look back to earlier times in our lives and talk about and express things that we'd done in the past that other people have no idea about. And it would probably never have come up in normal conversations. I mean, in my case, I remember talking about doing Route 66 when I was 17, and some people have said to me since that they're quite jealous. Andrea was talking about how she travelled to different countries when she was a similar age. She travelled a lot around the world. And again,

L - She never had the right time to say, or it just never came up in conversation before. Yeah.

H - There was never the opportunity to express those kind of things. And they're an important part of your make up because the thing happened to you in the past.

L - And I found that with drawing before. I did a project with refugees, refugees and asylum seekers last year and we were doing some drawings and we were talking about journeys. And again, people started to talk about the past and where they came from and the job they used to do. And which is the kind of thing they wouldn't usually have talked about in the workshops, but just a...

H - Yeah.

L - Yeah. So the art is really the tip of the iceberg, isn't it.

H - Yeah. It's certainly a...

L - Catalyst for more, more things to happen.

H - A nice icebreaker certainly yeah.

L - What was your favourite moment in the whole project? What is the one one moment you will remember more than the rest?

H - Seeing the animations.

L - Uh, so when your drawing came to life.

H - Yeah. That was an eye opener. I've since downloaded that piece of software.

L - Oh, great.

H - I've started, they're not completed yet, maps of St Helens to show the development of mineral railway lines. I'll send you copies when they're completed.

L - Oh great, so that is quite a useful skill.

H - It's excellent. I wish I'd had it when I was teaching. But they hadn't invented the iPad when [LAUGHS] 19, early 70s when I first started teaching, and there's no need to tell me what you were doing then. [LAUGHS]

L – Yeah. And I think my favourite bit was when we were dancing with, and talking without words. I really enjoyed talking with movement.

H - And because through that movement, the story did come out because we, everyone understood what the other person was talking about, didn't they?

L - Yeah.

H - So.

L - We rely on words quite a lot, don't we?

H - We do.

L - Within our society.

H - And I suppose it's when you're masked and you're looking at somebody's eyes and you're having a conversation, you probably see more of the truth in the eyes than you get from hearing what they're actually saying.

L - Yeah, it's funny what you can see just in someone's eye. Yeah.

H - Yeah.

L - Maybe I should show you as well the little newspaper which arrived today.

H - Oh, excellent.

L - Um, so yeah, fresh from the printer so we kind of, we edited, we kept, we tried to put quite a lot of drawings in there and then Scott put a little poem together inspired by all of the conversations. I think you will spot your hug drawing in there the beginning.

H - I see a picture of a motorbike that I recognise.

L - Yes, that was your aswell.

H - What a surprise.

LW - Thanks for listening to this episode. I hope that you've enjoyed it. Check out the show notes for more information about this project and the people involved. We'll back again soon with another Conversation Over a Brew.

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