Podcast transcript – A Walk in The Park – Episode 4

April 2020

A Walk in The Park

A Walk in the Park is a podcast series from the Whitworth. A university gallery, set in parkland in central Manchester. Hosted by the Cultural Park Keeper Francine Hayfron, each episode takes a look at what is happening inside and out at the Whitworth.

Episode 4

In this episode, we listen to a conversation between Francine Hayfron (Cultural Park Keeper), Dominique Heyse-Moore (Senior Curator, Textiles and Wallpaper) and Alistair Hudson (Director, The Whitworth and Manchester Art Gallery).

Our podcast takes a turn in the road from the usual magazine format, in a series of more issue-based programmes highlighting some of the topics raised recently around the role of museums and galleries in relation to the subject of race.

This week's instalment focuses on the different routes taken that lead Dominique, Francine and Alistair to work at the Whitworth, and what this says about the structures of the art world.

All of the episodes are available to listen to at:
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A Walk in The Park

Episode 4 - Speakers

Francine Hayfron (FH) - Cultural Park Keeper at The Whitworth, The University of Manchester.

Dominique Heyse-Moore (DHM) – Senior Curator, Textiles and Wallpaper, The University of Manchester.

Alistair Hudson (AH) – Director, The Whitworth and Manchester Art Gallery, The University of Manchester.

A Walk in The Park

Episode 4

<Music plays in the background: Sam Cooke - A Change is Gonna Come>

FH: Welcome to a Walk in the Park. I'm Francine Hayfron, Cultural Park Keeper at the Whitworth in Manchester. In this podcast, we usually look at what we're doing both inside and outside of the gallery. But for this episode, and possibly for the next few episodes, we've taken a bit of a different turn. I want to highlight today the issues around the black lives matter movement.

I'm a black lady, in my early forties, in a relatively senior position at the Whitworth Art Gallery. And the idea of using this podcast as a vehicle came as I was digesting the news around the Black Lives Matter movement a few weekends back. People were pointing the finger at institutions like ours, to say, what are you doing, how many black people have you got in your leadership team and what are you views towards Black Lives Matter.

I felt almost like I couldn't respond with a clear answer. Yes, the Whitworth probably has many things it needs to do to make it a better organisation for people of colour. But at the same time, we're doing some really great stuff, and maybe the problem lies in the fact that we don't shout loud enough about that. Maybe, we should be better at demonstrating that there's people just like me who work at the gallery. This podcast is rooted in those ideas and in this part of the debate I wanted to bring in two of my colleagues from the leadership team at the Whitworth, so I grabbed a Zoom call, who doesn't these days, with Alistair Hudson who is Director of the Whitworth and Dominique Hayse-Moore who is our Senior Curator for Textiles and Wallpaper. This ended up being a really fascinating interview in that it revealed our different routes into the arts sector, our differing abilities to take risks when following a career in the arts and a shared desire to see change.

Black Lives Matter

FH: So I thought maybe a really good starting point today could be talking about our individual journeys, um, to the Whitworth and within, working within the museum and gallery sector as I'm sure the three of us have very different stories to tell. Maybe I can put the question to yourself Dominique, how you came to be at the Whitworth and working in your role?

DHM: Ok, so, I'm a mixed black-white east-asian woman and I'm forty. I feel like I need to tell quite a long story about how I came to work at the Whitworth because I feel race has informed so much of my career in the, in the sector and also coming into this particular role. A long time ago I studied, um, art history and then a few years later I did an MA in history of design and, while I was doing that I ended up working on race specifically, um, so I was looking at dress in the nineteenth century in that in Trinidad, in the Caribbean more widely as well, um, and thinking about the racial the categorisations that were quite complex at that time, um, in, in the British colony, an- and how those related to dress. Of the back of that, I came as a curatorial trainee to live in Manchester. The project I was working on as a curatorial trainee was called 'Revealing Histories'. This was across many, um, museums and galleries in Manchester, but I specifically worked on rotation on the Museum of Science and Industry, the People's History Museum, Manchester Art Gallery, the Manchester Museum and the Whitworth and I was a positive action trainee. So, that means that I was recruited partly on the basis of, um, of race, but also brought in to work specifically because I had looked at the history of slavery quite a lot, transatlantic slavery, um, during my MA.

I tell that story because obviously my identity and what I've worked on and my kind of area of expertise if you like has been so informed by my racialised background if you like. After I did that traineeship, which was two years long, a job appeared at the Whitworth as an Assistant Curator so I applied for that and got it. I'd say, very much to do with the traineeship, but also my history of design background so I was Assistant Curator of, uh, Textiles and Wallpaper and then worked for a few years at the gallery then, um, and came back two and a half years ago into my role as senior curator. I came to that very much knowing the gallery and was appealing to return, uh, in a more senior role. You know, an important thing for me to describe is that, with responsibility for the textiles collection, I, I really look after the parts of the collection that could be described as ethnographic with all of the problems of that term and it's the part of the collection which if often described as a "worlds' collection". So, you know, most parts of the world are represented by that collection. That means that it's, um, it has a very problematic relationship to colonial history. Yeah, so that, m-, my journey into working at the Whitworth.

AH:I just won-, just out of interest wondering about, you know, the point you decided, prior to studying, what was the decision making process around, you know, a life in art and design.

DHM: My, white grandmother was an artist, and we went to exhibitions with her, a lot, and so I feel like even my, um, time where I was made to feel

comfortable in that setting and came to like that setting was prescribed by my racial identity.

AH: Yeah, 'cause I just think it reflects on my formative years, you know, I- I kind of got into art because I liked it and I was good at it, and like you I was surrounded by a family, you know, we went to look at churches and art galleries and, you know, all very – and national trust properties and all very sort of, you know, English middle-class white things to do, and, and, in a way to take a step into, for someone like me to go into the art world, although it's not a normal career, you feel, somehow, it's, it's a sort of luxurious position to be in that you can take the risk of going into a, a career in art which doesn't necessarily have a, a secure future. I, I, I, maybe I'm projecting but sometimes I think that sort of in a way that's almost were some of this starts as well that I have the luxury of that comfort of knowing I will probably have family support or a fallback position or another way to make it in the world, a kind of confidence that everything will work out ok.

DHM: I think the decision to have a career or to aim for a career in the sector only came when that traineeship was advertised and so, you know, these kind of diversity or positive action schemes have been very problematic in that there've been lots of reviews looking at, at those, um, historic schemes but that was the point where I felt that's two years of security. I mean, I've, I've always been conscious that going into something where, you know, most of the people I'd studied with, who'd had that ambition, we intending to work for free for a long period of time, so, yeah, I feel like I wouldn't have had confidence in that decision before, despite my comfort in an art gallery setting, so, though, I have criticisms and I think that those schemes are, are very complicated, I've never felt more racialised that I did while I was positive action trainee or as I was sometimes introduced a pat. [laughs] You know, I would sometime be taken around, 'cuz I worked in five different institutions, I'd be taken around and kind of, shown off basically. I find it interesting that it was the thing that enabled me to work in the sector, but also the thing that has made it most problematic and most, interesting, [laughs] in another way. There's something to challenge that has kept my here, yeah, despite many significant moments of doubt along the way [laughs].

FH: Alistair can you take us a few steps back, I guess, on your journey a bit, then, as you say you were kind of like raised with this interest in looking at the arts and everything, but when you were coming into this sector, what was it you wanted to do, what did you wanna –

AH: Well, I, I didn't know, I mean that was the thing 'cuz I studied history of art and, fine art. And in a way that, I always liked, I kinda liked both and I kind of kept trying to do both and in a way I've sort of always, [deep intake of breathe] imagined I'm still doing both. I think, just the path I'd taken was a slightly more, kind of Maverick one certainly like the art history I did was, was, uh, I mean I had a very influential tutor called Saraph Maharaj who was, um, kind of, uh, Indian originally and had a very complex and interesting life but was a very key voice in, um, anti-colonial, kind of, in the art world, a sort of fighting against, you know, the kind of western-centric version of art. People like that were very

influential in my thinking, that I knew that I didn't want to sort of take as traditional route. So really aft-, after that I-, I mean I considered doing an MA but also then it kind of wasn't fashionable. There was this sort of mentality around Goldsmiths that you just went out and you were an artist or you di-, made shows or made a gallery, and so I really followed a trajectory like that, kind of, trying to do things on my own and then just to make ends meet I got a job in a commercial gallery, in London, the Antony Dofey Gallery, which was sort of then the, the blue chip, you know, international shop for very expensive art selling paintings and sculptures and installations to museums but, you know, the wealthy people of the world, so I sort of had, I did that, I was there for seven years and that was also quite formative in sort of seeing really how the art world is constructed and how it's made and how it works and how- how power is very important in the art world and money is very important in order to shape and control and often people who were acquiring these works of art we doing it for, for power reasons as well as, you know, because they loved art, but even the act of loving art and having the resources to buy it, is also part of that establishment structures that, that we've got. And so in a way, that sort of established a, you know, thinking about how you could do another version of art or make another version of art that was for more people.

So after that, I k-, I went to work for the government art collection, commissioning artists to make projects for different government buildings in London and Westminster, but also internationally in embassies and consulates, so we were sort of representing Britain through art as a political tool. So that, sort of, um, turned the screw in another direction as well, in terms of thinking, and then I ran a residency programme in the Lake District, which was really at a time when I was sort of, quite against institutions that, th- the future lay in kind of small subversive or, kind of artists working in everyday life, cuz I was quite interested in how to pull apart this kind of Eurocentric, white version of what art was and open art up to be much more interesting, expansive, complex thing is really is that works in all kinds of different cultures and societies.

I went on the back of that to Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, which was, um, an opportunity to try all this thinking out at a museum. And the challenge really was, which I suppose is relevant to this conversation, was in a way this was a new museum that had been built showing, you know, the great and the good of the, um, consensus art world. But the people in Middlesbrough didn't necessarily see eye to eye with it and so, and what I tried to do was to change the way that that museum worked by being relevant to people and talking to people and to working with those communities around it to define what that museum was. That ended up being a very, very sort of, rich and diverse programme. And it was really on the back of that work that I sort of got the tap on the shoulder to say well, there's this job come up at the Whitworth. And, um, of course, it worked because it was like the ultimate challenge because it's the, you know, a big, big institution but, uh, you know, in a city, and the city that I came from, that I always thought, you know, had criticisms of myself growing up. So it was possibly a chance to try and change it. So I guess we're in that process of change now, um, and, and in that process of change of trying to diversify what art is and what that means to people and how we can basically

encourage people to accept it and understand it and use it so that it has value in their lives rather than just, uh, you know, a narrow band of society.

DHM: So, I mean, I'd be interested to ask you, Alistair, cuz I guess it's autobiography, or, family history in a way that has lead me to want to work on these things, an- I guess a question of where do we belong in this county. What led you to work on these things, what part of your identity led you to, to feel like, this is what you wanted to challenge?

AH: Um, I think, cuz the household I grew up in. It was quite a sort of left-wing household. The early part of my childhood was in, uh, Wiggin which was quite a working class environment and I was brought up basically as uh, had a one parent household. You could, sort of growing up in that environment, you're sort of aware of the, imbalances of life I suppose. And I suppose that, that, that period as well, you know, it was the 80's, so these were the, you know Thatcher years you're growing up in. So you're very conscious of, you know, the sort of turbo charged, neo-liberalism, capitalism, free market, laissez faire, but alongside that a sort of growing divide between the haves and the have nots. And there was a lot, you know, the worl-, the world I grew up in then was very racist as well. You had it nearly every day in the school playground, and you know, th- these things really stick with you think. So, um, I don't know, I guess you grow up thinking that you need to do something about it, people like me. We also came from a family of quite staunch Methodists who are kinda a bunch of do-gooders as well. [Laughs] So I think uh, there was a bit of that sown into me as well.

FH: Have you, uh, um, grown up, and like at college at Goldsmiths and um, when you kind of went out to the working world, did you have many peers of colour and did you see them also going off and, being able to I guess, take up roles or things which they were aspiring to from, from college?

AH: No, no, to be honest no there weren't. I mean, you know, obviously the- there were quite a range of people within the school, people like, Steve McQueen, you know, were studying in and around then, around that time. Um, but there weren't many. But also the art world wasn't very conducive to work from people of colour at the time as well, you know, this was, if you think about it now, people like Lebane Himid, Sonia Boyce, they were all on the scene then, at that time, but they weren't, they weren't approved, by the market. They weren't, no, they didn't have professional gallery representation. And they, it very much felt as a sort of the critical art world wasn't really into to them. Obviously there was things like third text, Rashy Darene about, there was a lot of counter movement. But it was still fighting against the system it wasn't sort of, working within in it now, as it, as it now is. Um, so it did feel like a very different place.

DHM: Yeah, I mean I would say for me it felt like being an artist was just too uncertain, you know Rashy Darene and so on were for reading about like [laughs] with excitement, you know, I did an art foundation and it was, I guess from that point onwards that I became aware of those people an-, and um, that

was really exciting but still the path that they went round- down felt too risky so actually being a curator was a least a institutionally validated thing [laughs].

AH: Yeah, it wasn't cool for the sort of consensus art world. The art world is a very sort of, um, you know has a quite a sheep mentality. It has to be told what to like, you kn- it's like a ring of people going "is it ok to like this or not at the time". Um, so it was quite hard for that to really come into the mainstream. I- I- it's funny now to imagine it was so different but it was.

DHM: Fran, can we ask you about, um, uh your way in.

FH: So my journey into the world of museums and galleries was slightly different from, um, the both of yours. I'd previously worked in broadcasting and radio production, in particular percussion music radio shows, producing radio shows rather, um, both in London and in Manchester. I then moved into working um, with the arts, in particular, um in community arts. So worked with a couple of different organisations, um, starting off firstly by working with young people and um, using the medium of uh, radio to engage with young people.

Um, so as I said before, at school I'd never really thought that I would work in the arts. I wasn't even allowed to do GCSE art because my art teacher thought I wouldn't get a good grade so I was kind of suddenly convinced to do something else. Um, and also I guess, it was one of those things as well, it didn't come into my radar, because as a young person, I think, when we used to go an visit art galleries and things with schools, it was great, loved what was in there, but I didn't really see that many other sort of black faces working within those places. So I think that was just another subconscious thing that, it kind of never came into my radar about working within an art gallery.

Um, I eventually saw the job that was advertised, um, for the Cultural Park Keeper at the Whitworth and um, yeah, kind of immediately just thought I had to apply looking at the job spec, um, and what the job involved. Um, the role appealed to me because it had never existed before basically. It was the opportunity to, um, do something new, um the opportunity to combine my passions, so passions of, for example of using horticulture to work with people who are experiencing difficulties with mental health, and just um, as using horticulture in the arts as a tool to help improve peoples' health and wellbeing. And I guess one of the important things for me to point out is that all through growing up as well, I've mentioned this before to some of my colleagues, that I never felt like colour to stand in the way of going for anything that I wanted to achieve or any kind of job. I'm very much used to have being in school, college or any other workplace either the only black person who works there or one of two black people say, so yes, the colour of my skin that I'm always conditioned to be one of the few, so it's never something that I would say stood as a challenge to me or that I was really mindful before going for any opportunity. But, when I did come to have the interview for this job, and I think afterwards when I found out that I'd got the job, I think it's then that it dawned on me that actually this could be quite an important thing to do, quite an important position in terms of being a young black woman, taking this role. And I think also particularly, not just a role within a museum or art gallery but also the role of,

the outdoors lady [laughs] if you want to say it in that sense. But you know, when I look around and had looked around I also didn't see many people of colour being represented in the environmental or outdoors sector and so this and combined with being in an art gallery, it did feel at that moment that all this could be something quite special here and um, I think only later on, maybe a few months down the line did I realise it was important in a way.

We had one of our events, the Frost Fair, which um, we have biannually and lots and lots of people come and take part in a weekend celebration of music, arts, activities, the whole works. And I remember walking through gallery 3, one of our main galleries inside with a view out to the park and it was absolutely heaving with lots of people in there at the time and I remember walking past a young black boy and his sister and hearing him make the comment to his sister that "oh my God, this is amazing. Never been in here before, never thought that we could come in here before", and I immediately backtracked and went and spoke to them and said "listen, I couldn't help but overhear your conversation and the fact that you've just said 'oh my gosh you never thought you could come in here before, that's absolutely crazy, that's wrong. Of course you can come here, this is your place I'm assuming you live around the corner", they were like "yeah, we just live right across the park'" and I was like "of course you can come in here, people lie you do come in here. I am here, I work here" and so we had a bit of a chat afterwards but then I left from the moment thinking, that it's quite important, for a young person who'd never felt they could walk into the place, or even begin to aspire their career or something they might do later in life would have something to do with this place. But just by seeing someone who looked like themselves, realised that, yes, those doors can be open and those doors are open for people like myself.

So I think it was, that's the first point really, that my colour ever really came into play, um, within this role and thinking about it. And still today, you know, I still don't see that many people of colour kind of representing the environment or environmental art or things like that, so I think there's still a bit of a long way to go but I guess I feel fortunate, to be in this position what I'm doing, and if you know, helping to break down any barriers, or just to meet another young boy or young girl like I met that day across in gallery three and for them to realise that whatever door they want to be open can be open for them. So that's kind of where I came from to this point. Um, and I think the issue of Black Lives Matter has also kind of opened my eyes a lot. I wasn't very well-versed in this subject or had even read much about peoples experiences working within museums and galleries but, um, Black Lives Matter has really opened my eyes to that now, to see that, that there is quite a long way to go but there are places that are doing things and um, yeah change is coming.

DHM: Yeah, I hope change is coming and I guess, because I feel like I entered the sector, or started working in the sector certainly at a point which was, meant to be, a springboard for change, so the bi-centenary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, um, there were activities in museums and art galleries across the country and there were all of these diversity schemes um, going on, but I've seen those things, have some lasting impact and then those things be,

temporary. What I feel determined, is to make sure, now I have more power than I did, so when I was a trainee, that this is something that makes a more lasting change.

AH: Well cer- , in a way that's part of the key to unlocking this issue to get people into positions of power as well, it's not just about representation. It's about actually getting people into decision making positions because I think that's fundamental to the creative act. If you're going to change something you need to bring in elements. You need to bring, difference, and yo- you need to bring in texture and variety and life. I mean, that's sort of how, that's how things evolve, th- that's how I see the world works and it's actually about bringing in, what you'd call, cognitive diversity, diversity in thinking. So if you just have people like me running an art gallery it's going to be run with decisions all based upon my say and life experiences. I mean, I- I like to think that I'm relatively um, progressive and forward thinking an- in lots of ways, but no matter what I do, the decisions I make will be based upon my experiences and my knowledge. Whereas actually, if you bring in people, other people into those decision making situations, with different understandings, different life experiences, you're gonna get a much better responsive version of decision making. Um, so yeah, I suppose in a way I trying to do myself out of a job [laughs]. It's the ultimate ambition.

[All laugh]

FH: And, um, I guess, my question for you is, in- in these difficult times of financial constraints, pre-Covid, post-Covid, how do you think we can make this possible Alistair?

AH: It has to be a long game. I me- mean, my, my worry at the moment is, that I mean, the way it's been for a while, I think yo- you were just touching on this before, is in a way, a lot of initiatives to diversify the workforce are ba- they're projects, or initiatives an- or something like that and they tend to be temporary or not long lasting or when the funding is lost, they're also lost too. So the ability for those things to have real, long term traction is quite hard to maintain unless you embed this really at the roots of how something grows. And at the moment of course, yeah, I mean absolutely we're in the middle of Covid and um, there's not going to be any recruitment in many organisations, you know, for quite a while now.

One thing we have to do is take the opportunities were we can to grab them, to turn something upside down and turn it, you know, in a – in a different direction. So it might be just a case of, if an opportunity comes up, make sure that we are proactively turning that opportunity into something, you know, that works for somebody of colour. Um, there are lots of things we can do in terms of changing, who comes in. So a lot of the, you know, the language of the building, the way it talks, the types of art is shows, the way it presents its art, the stories it tells, if, if, if that's starts to itself diversify, you're gonna to bring in a different range of people who understand art in different ways or consider it in different ways, think of the museum in different ways. So you start in way to create a sort of vibrant, microcosm um, and obviously, you can't just kind of have, say

yes we're going to bring the world into the gallery, because they need to know well, "why would I do that? What's that for?" And I think art in itself is in a way kind of, it's sort of racist in a way by itself the current Eurocentric version of art we have. We talk about this being a structural problem, art in itself is kind of part of the structural problem, so I think we can do a lot to br- and we are doing a lot, it has to be said at the Whitworth, you know, if you look at our programming, you know, we are really trying to rewrite the story with different voices, different countries, different cultures, different versions of art. You know, folk art, and we already have textiles and you know, we have a park and we have horticulture, you know, these are all art forms to many people. So I think we really have to open up the idea of art in a broader way that allows people to say that "actually this is a place that is for m".

You know, that conversation you had Fran in the gallery, in our behaviour in the gallery, what we present and how we do it needs to change the way that people see it, so they don't see it as sort of the edifice of the art institution, but they see the Whitworth as this place they'll go "ah yeah, I'm gonna go to the Whitworth today" because it's sort of part of my daily life, it's sort of my habit and I know I'll get something out of it when I go. And then the other thing that is a big passion of mine, is, is changing the way education is done. And I think we do have an opportunity as a sort of, you know, we're part of the University we have, you know, very extensive schools programmes, we're involved in, um, how culture is delivered to schools. Um, kind of across the city as well. I think we can have a big influence on changing the curriculum so that we kind of use culture to tell a different story of culture. I mean, it's not just about telling a story of Britain's past and all the bad things it did and slavery and colonialism. It's about also telling a story which is about stories of cultures and countries and places without that narrative as well. The story of how art evolved in Africa, the story of how art evolved in China, the story of how art is involved in, you know, in the Americas prior to colonisation. We can do that in a way that says, hey hang on a minute, it's not just all about Captain Cook and Winston Churchill, the story of the world, you know, is much more expansive and actually much more interesting than all that as well. So I think that, u-, those fundamental things that we can start doing now.

DHM: Well then I guess, I would then ask you, what you think we do about the, many thousands, around sixty thousand historic decisions that we are responsible for because most of our funding comes for making that collection accessible and of course that collection represents some incredibly uncomfortable to abhorrent attitudes. And, you know, of course the textile collection is very diverse but then the names of those makers are not recorded because of the history of our institution and of the sector. So what do we do about that heart of our institution and the building, you know, stored in our middle and, um, that we are given money to bring into public view.

AH: Yeah, I thin- we- I think - well my view is always that we're honest about it. And we tell the real stories of why these things came into being and how they found themselves in the Whitworth and to make those names visible again, trying to make those, those stories that have been suppressed come to the

surface again and actually use that in a way that actually communicates the reality of what has happened in our history and to do that in order to make better decisions in the future. So that our future acquisitions programme will be about addressing that balance.

FH: Are we that so that is something generally we shall be and want to do at the Whitworth, basically re-evaluating what it is that we have and what it is that we still want to hold onto and could it be better purposed somewhere else?

AH: I think we have to have those, I think every museum has to have those conversations now. The rule book is, you now, in these circumstances, in where we are now, if there's an issue before that's just been accelerated by the Black Lives Matter movement we have to be rethinking our rule book. And how we operate in museums. I mean what do we do? We keep on accumulating objects forever? You know, is that ethical? Is it environmentally sound? Probably not. The museum is always in a point of flux, and they- and they should be, they're not static things, they need to change. I mean, they're quite new things anyway really, in the grand history of human culture. So I think they need to evolve and adapt to their circumstances.

FH: And in the spirit of that I guess, what do we say to someone who might say, "well you're only talking about this now because of the Black Lives Matter". How do we show ongoing commitment to people that this yeah, just not of the moment.

AH: Yeah, you have to do it. Of course we have been having these discussions in, in varying degrees. We talk about the decolonisation of the museum and you know, this have been sort of, um, thrashed around, you know for about ten years more or so. And obviously a lot of the artists we're interested in are, you know, come from all, you know, different corners of the planet. And they're challenging museums as well all the time and a lot of stuff we've been doing, Ibrahim Mahama last year, you know, is part of that movement to sort of, you know, change the balance of power and so on in the art world. These things have already been in play but I think what our problem is we haven't shouted loud enough about it. I think we've shied away from it because it's, it's tricky stuff right? It causes a lot of friction it causes a lot of, factionalism, um, but I think we just have to dive into it and embrace the complexity of it now, in a way perhaps we haven't shouted about before or in the same way. And I think that's why people, you know, sometimes just they see museums as, as kind of you know visitor attractions, you know, rather than dynamic machines for writing culture. I think we need to show more of what we do cuz I think most of what we do at the Whitworth people don't see.

DHM: I think the tricky there is that obviously virtue signalling before we've made enough progress is, you know, something that is rightly being criticised in all sorts of area's at the moment.

AH: That's why I talk about useful art. Art has to be a process that is effective, that get's stuff done. An- and in a way, that's why I've been pushing for projects that we do at the Whitworth, that really makes something happen in the world. They're not just pointing at problems an- and working in a sort of symbolic way.

They're actually delivering- that might be work that Fran's involved with, you know, with, with health programmes this is actually about using creativity and art to make sort of bodies healthier and to make the city healthier. You know, some of the stuff we're doing with various communities are about changing people's life chances, about giving them a different kind of education, a different pathway in life. And it's those sort of projects that's actually working with art to get stuff done in the world. That's actually, that's where the proof of the pudding will be.

DHM: In terms of getting stuff done, I guess, we're- the reason we, the three of us are having this conversation now is cuz we're on the leadership team at the Whitworth. And I just wonder how you see that working without us kind of excessively instrumentalising the experiences of other people of colour who work at the Whitworth and maybe at a more junior level.

AH: What I'm interested in doing is, and a bit like the gallery itself, is about creating a culture in which everybody feels like they have a say and a place and they have a substantial amount of agency and power to make something happen. I mean our management system, our operating system at the Whitworth, is quite unusual for a gallery. A lot of galleries will have, you know, a board of trustees and then it has a director and then it perhaps has a sort of a leadership team and then a management team and then another team under that and you sort of have this pyramid scheme.

The management of the gallery itself, ultimately comes down to me and our leadership team which is actually quite large, it's representative of all the different parts of the gallery from the, you know, the to the park, to the building operations, to the exhibitions, collections, curatorial, you know, um, kind of civic and education. And so in a way there's sort of a council there of people who are pretty representative of the organisation. And pretty much that's the team that runs the sh-, that's also done with very much the idea you know the Whitworth is a sort of collective entity of voices. And in a way I kind of think about it as all the users. What you want to do is have a place run by all the, you know, kind of, directed by the people that use it and I think also what we can do and what we are doing now is bringing in groups of people who can help shape what that will be. In a way it's constant listening, constant consultation, constant feedback, constant integration of ideas, assimilation of thoughts and processes that kind of turns into something that feels far more equitable than a kind of top-down institution you know, with a sort of king at the top shouting instructions to below.

DHM: So, but I guess, still in terms of, um, pay grade and, title and particularly in relation to black lives matter, w- we still have a very long way to go as an institution, um, because black voices specifically are not, very, well-represented in our workforce.

AH: Often the benchmark is this, that- that the proportion of people working in institutions should be representative of diversity and society. I actually think our, our goal our aim at the Whitworth should that it is more diverse than- than that benchmark because if you're trying to make change happen, you should be

more diverse, you bring more diversity into the system. So my ambition will be, yeah, it would be more than simply being representative of the demographics of Manchester for example. I mean I know we're sort of in a, you know, we operate within the systems of the University but you know the University's looking at ways to do this better as well. We're not just doing this on our own as a gallery.

DHM: The challenge there is the size of the machine. The University is huge, you know, with good policies, but it um, those are just, um, big and complex to navigate.

AH: Yeah, but- but also I think we have licence in the gallery to do things, um, you know, slightly differently. You know, there is scope to be um, slightly more, um nimble on our feet, I think in certain. I mean, for example if you look at the way we recruit for our visitor team, that's changed quite a lot. And that was done consciously knowing, you know, trying to avoid having the same old, same old coming into the gallery system and it was about, kind of, doing open days and um, you know, kind of quite active recruitment processes rather than form filling and questionnaires and CV's and all those sorts of things. And you know, we can- things we are, you know looking at as well is things like you don't have to have an MA or a Phd or some things you know which already create a filtering system. Um you know w- we're actually you know quite open at- at the gallery in terms of, you know, what your credentials are. Um, it's about what they bring as a person and what they're capabilities are so I think you now we can- we can turn those criteria to work in favour of changing the workforce. Um, but you know, people stay at the gallery a long time, as you know, cuz it's a nice place to be. It's a wonderful place and people want to stay here, people want to stay as long as they can. Um, so we have to be accepting of that but just look at every single opportunity to see how we can shape it differently I think. I mean I would be interested in doing something really super radical to free up some money. I mean the question is finding the money and making the money available. I was looking, you know, very seriously thinking of, looking at what happened at Baltimore museum where they sold, uh, works by white, you know modern masters to create um, a fund to buy, um artists of colour.

DHM: But it's it's fascinating isn't it because those things, many kind of museums in the UK would hold onto as one of the best parts of their collection but actually they're, you know they're f- they're over-represented globally. [laughs] So, um, yeah, it's um that is an amazing case study to look at.

AH: Yeah, yeah and of course, you know, it's problematic and flawed and it kicked up all sorts of dust, let's say in- in the art world but was, um, I thought a very good example, of, somebody genuinely trying to do something different and break the mould, and it those sorts of things that um, we will inevitably have to do if we're going to make an- any headway in the near future. So I think we have to– we have to look at our rule book in order to kind of facilitate something um, that- that actually pushes this whole agenda on.

A Walk in the Park Episode 4

FH: My special thanks to Alistair Hudson and Dominique Hayse-Moore for sharing very personal stories and feelings over the last forty minutes or so.

Dominique touch on some rally important issues around the galleries collection and Alistair was just hinting at the sort of radical change that has been demonstrated in Baltimore in the United States. Our collection is a whole topic for a podcast in itself so I'm hoping to talk about this in our next episode. In the meantime, thank you for joining us for this very different episode of a walk in the park and if anything we've said has raised concerns for you or if you just have a question for us please reach out on social media @WhitworthArt on Twitter or Facebook.

<Music plays in the background: Sam Cooke - A Change is Gonna Come>

<End>

All of the episodes are available to listen to at:
https://www.mixcloud.com/TheWhitworth/playlists/a-walk-in-the-park-podcast/