

A: So, before we begin, I have a couple of demographic questions to go through. First of all, I wanted to ask you how do you identify in terms of your gender?

E: Female.

A: And what is your racial identity?

E: White British.

[REDACTED]

A: And how old are you?

E: I'm 43.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A: And, I know it's a bit hard to estimate but how many times would you say you have visited the Manchester Craft and Design Centre, approximately?

E: Oh gosh, it is quite hard to, I would say over the last 10 years probably between 40 and 50 times, probably averages out between 4 and 5 times a year, so yeah, every couple of months.

A: Perfect, and in terms of your average spending per visit, what would you say it is at the Manchester Craft and Design Centre?

E: I think it would probably be about £45, something like that.

A: And how much would you say your average spending is in other similar spaces, or in craft and design organisations?

E: I go to craft festivals and things like that, so the average would probably be about the same; sometimes I would buy a big piece and it's quite expensive, another times I'll buy little bits of things, and it's the same for whatever kind of craft environments that I'm in.

A: Thanks a lot, that's all in terms of demographics that I wanted to ask, so we can make a start. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your relationship with craft?

E: I think that I first became really aware of craft and handmade products in my sort of mid-to late twenties because I moved to Copenhagen in Denmark and lived there for 5 years, and I would sort of, design and individual artists and craft people making their own products was something that I became much more aware of and something that I haven't really observed or noted very well in the UK, and that's probably to do with my age at the time, and the fact that

before I moved to Copenhagen I lived in London, and was only aware of kind of big, mass-produced stuff, so that kind of made me alive to the idea of craft makers, buying something that is relatively unique, if not unique, and supporting people who have particular skills and just buying things that are beautiful and are going to last a long time in your home, or jewellery and so on. I like to have something that is different, unusual and the sense that I am supporting a small maker rather than feeding a sort of big, corporate beast.

A: You've mentioned that you've started to become more interested in crafts when you've moved to Copenhagen, can you tell me a bit more about that and what was it that particularly drew your attention to the local arts?

E: I lived [REDACTED] that is a kind of space on a smaller scale than the Craft and Design Centre, but where individual makers and craftspeople have joined together to run a shop and there are workshops in the courtyard behind the shop, and some of the smaller jewellery makers have little workshops within the shop space, it's a relatively large shop, and it's through very regular visits there and certainly taking lots of, becoming to appreciate the work and the skill of the people, selling their goods there, and I started to get appreciation for the form and function, and the fact that you didn't have to buy things that were mass-produced, could have something that was individual, and could also commission people to do work for you and adapt things if you wanted to do that.

A: You've mentioned mass-produced products as well. How do you feel about the distinction between handmade and mass-produced products?

E: Handmade I feel are, I'm happy to invest more in handmade and have fewer products in my home if I know that someone has taken the time, they've designed and made the product from the start to finish, I appreciate that they would have gone through many years of perfecting what they're making and trialling new things, so I understand that the whole

process, I want to support that and keep craft and design alive, support it in the best way I can. I have a small house so I have to curate quite carefully what I put in it, but I also like the fact that if I invest in something, generally it's something that I don't see it as a throwaway thing, I see it as something that I'm going to have forever, whereas mass-produced goods, unless it's something that has a real function like a kettle or whatever, generally now, as I got older, I rarely pick up any mass-produced items, I see them, unless they are really good design and really good quality, I generally avoid them because I see them as more throwaway.

A: And you've mentioned before that handmade products would last a long time as well.

E: Yes, and I think something that I'm proud to own, to have, as well.

A: In what sense?

E: Just again, because of the relative uniqueness, the aesthetic as well, I'm looking at some jugs and things, some ceramics that I have in my living room, I can look at each of those and they take me to a particular time and place, and also I can recall, in the majority of cases, I've bought them directly from the maker so I know, I remember the conversation and the discussion around me choosing them and it's nice to have that connection to the product as well, sort of makes you appreciate it more if you know who's made it.

A: Is it important for you to buy directly from makers?

E: I do like to do that, yes. I will buy through small galleries and craft shops if there are some nicely crated stalls around the UK and they have good relationships with their makers, and that may get me to open my eyes to a new maker, curated a nice collection in their shop or the gallery, but generally yes, I prefer to buy directly from the maker.

A: Do you do any type of crafting or making yourself?

E: I did when I was younger, and I used to love making things and I think it's one of the things I've lost in adulthood, so sort to say up to my early teens, mid-teens, I used to make a lot, and now with my partner's little girl I make things, but I don't have a particularly skill; I have an eye and got some basic level of competency for basic things, I haven't done any courses in pottery or ceramics or anything like that, but I'm able to make what I need.

A: Was making typical in your family when you were growing up?

E: Yes, my mum is a sewer and made lots of my clothes, probably the majority of my clothes when I was in primary school, so probably until the age of 11, and I know when she was in her 20s she made a lot of her own clothes, and I'm conscious that all of the women on her side of the family used to sew and make clothing for their families.

A: And would she make with you as well?

E: She'd show me, she'd kind of give me tips and show me things that, you know, the key tenets of measuring, the number of times you cut, iron and things, but she didn't necessarily sit down and do that with me, something that I would pick up just by being around her, and same goes, I cook a lot, I make a lot of things and I know that I have developed a lot of my skill from observing my mum rather than my mum involving me in that.

A: You've mentioned that you make sometimes with your partner's child, can you tell me more about that?

E: We make kind of, we do knitting, we make pompoms, we don't do knitting to a kind of high level but enough to kind of make a scarf or do some, make her something for one of her dolls, and we've made dresses for some of her dolls, there's all kinds of bags and things like that, and they're going to the beach collecting shells and sort of making, putting them on something, making a box or something, and we use airdry clay to make little bits of ornaments or little things that kids like to do and paint, and she has in her bedroom as well, I

wouldn't necessarily have them in the rest of the house but she does like to make things, she loves an activity, as she calls it, her eyes light up when I say shall we make something?

A: Do you also enjoy the process of making and playing?

E: Yes, I do. I like the tactile experience and the idea of making things. Actually, I did a course at the Craft and Design Centre with the lady who does pewter, she makes beautiful things with pewter, and so I did one of her courses and made a little pewter pot and I really enjoyed that experience, working with the metal and learning the process, and finding out that I'm apparently very good at soldering.

A: Really? That's interesting.

E: Apparently I'm a natural, but my brother is a farmer and makes a lot of farm equipment, and he's very good at welding, so maybe it's somewhere in my blood, on a much smaller, reduced level that I can solder well, because I am ambidextrous to a certain degree, so I can use my left hand almost as well as my right, so I think that's very helpful.

A: And how did you find out about the workshop, and what drew your attention to it?

E: That was an email from the Craft and Design Centre, and it just sounded, it appealed to me and the idea of working in metal, and producing something that wasn't, some of the workshops they run are centred around jewellery and things, and I liked the idea of this one because you would come away with something for your home, rather than a piece of jewellery; potentially something that I could take the skills and apply them at home, although I never did. I would do that course again and make something similar, to pair with the work that I already have.

A: What did you make?

E: I made a sort of little vase, probably about 10cm vase and got a pattern of my own design around the outside that I drew in, and then cut out and soldered down, and I did something a little bit different to other people in the group, so it was a nice experience.

A: That sounds very nice. I don't know if you've thought about this in those terms, but what does craft and making mean to you as a woman?

E: I haven't thought about it. Well, I haven't thought about it in those terms; I do have something of an obsession which I've thought about, because I'm a woman and how that relates to gender, with vessels such as jugs and very large bowls made out of ceramics or pottery, and I don't know if it's about the product rather than craft in general, but all the things that are handmade that I go for and love.

A: That's really interesting. You've also mentioned before that your mum and women in your family have been makers as well? Is it something that you think about or have thought about as well?

E: I think potentially, there's definitely sort of a division along gender lines with regards to crafting in my family. My dad and my brother and my uncles, my grandfather died before I was born or when I was very little, they make things, they are very practical but they make things on a larger scale, machinery and so on, and yeah, I see, I think in terms of gender I see things on a smaller scale and certain crafts being traditionally more connected to women.

A: You've mentioned before the vessels. Have you bought anything that was particularly feminist or more political?

E: No, I haven't. Just thinking, I haven't; there was an excellent display, ceramics display, but I can't remember the name of the artist because I can never think of this and I have to always look this up on Google, but the Craft and Design Centre did have, in connection to the

Peterloo massacre, the anniversary of that, they had a really fantastic display there, and I was very, very tempted to buy a piece but the piece that I wanted the most had already been sold.

A: Does that sort of art appeal to you?

E: I think it does if there's a personal connection to it, if it speaks to me and resonates with me in some way then yes. I think generally, as a genre it does but I do like to see work that can provoke thought and make you aware of particular issues, if it can make you to explore things in a different way; I think art and craft is a really good tool for that and particularly if you tend to be quite tactile and visual in the way that you engage with the world, rather than someone who picks everything up through reading and so on.

A: Thinking about the Manchester Craft and Design Centre, do you remember how you've first found out about it?

E: Yes, I do. This was someone at work who told me about it. When I moved back from Copenhagen and I got my job, and was talking about all these nice handmade items in Copenhagen, and then they said that I should visit the Manchester Craft and Design Centre, and then I promptly one lunchtime, and it was raining, went and found it.

A: Do you remember your first visit?

E: I do remember, well, I remember finding the building, going into it and thinking how lovely it was, and really appreciating the fact that it was in the old fish market, and then I went back. Although I didn't buy anything the first time because I was doing it in my lunch hour, so just having a little discovery moment.

A: You've mentioned that it was a fish market, are you aware of the history of the building?



E: Yeah, a little bit. I'm interested in general in the history of that part of Manchester, of the Northern Quarter and the Smithfield Markets, so I know a little bit about that area and what it was before, but not a huge amount.

A: Why are you interested in the history of the area?

E: Because I like the fact that this part of Manchester retains its character from the past, and you can see evidence of what the city used to be like and how it's evolved and changed over time, I find that very interesting. In other parts of the city it's perhaps not as clear to see, with exception of kind of very, the grand civic buildings and the grand buildings that are a result of let's say nestling in banks and so on, and so forth; I like the fact that this part of Manchester was built around everyday life, so weavers' cottages in that part of Manchester and that connection as well, it's not far from the mills in Ancoats, and the history is there. I also like the development of the Northern Quarter, the fact that it's got its own typeface and street signage, and that a lot has been done to preserve independent nature of that area, and so it doesn't become crowded out by chains and so on.

A: We talked a little bit about handmade and mass-produced at the beginning and you've mentioned independent versus chains as well, is this something that is important for you, to maintain that sense of identity?

E: Yes, I think for independent businesses of all kinds, to have that thrive so there is an identity there for Manchester, but also when you visit other areas, whether they are urban or not quite so urban, things are different; there's history, there's character to the place, there's uniqueness and you are supporting small businesspeople rather than money being funnelled into much larger corporate companies, corporations, and I know the big businesses have their place in terms of employment and the role they play generally within the economy, but I like to see that there is an independent spirit in each city.

A: Is this something that you've also noticed in Copenhagen and Manchester?

E: The independent business?

A: Yes, this thing of independent spirit.

E: No, I think, it's something I seek out whenever I'm going to visit another part of the UK, or when I'm going overseas, I'm able to find that sort of area, or sometimes it's just the way things are in a particular country because there's very little in the way of chains, or if they are they're kind of confined to one particular shopping district and the rest is all independent cafes, businesses and things, that seems to be more of the case in other parts of Europe.

A: I wanted to ask you if you remember what brought you to the Craft and Design Centre in your last visit?

E: I'm trying to think, it was pre-pandemic, and I think I was just going there because I just wanted, sometimes I have a particular birthday gift or something like that that I want to buy, but I think the last time I went was because I haven't been for a few weeks, so I just wanted to go in, have a browse and see if there was anything new.

A: You've mentioned that you go there for gifts?

E: I do, yes.

A: Why do you like going to the Craft and Design Centre for gifts?

E: Usually they have something for more of the price points that I'm thinking about, and I like that I can get people something that is more unique and unusual, and I can also, in the past when I wanted something for one of my friends and something wasn't the right colour, then I was able to speak to the maker and she would be able to make the item for me but in a particular colour that would be right for my friend, so I just like that, the connection that you

get from buying something from there as opposed to just going to another type of shop or just giving your friends a voucher.

A: You've mentioned the price points at the Centre; how do you feel about the prices in general at the Craft and Design Centre?

E: I think everything is well priced, I think it reflects, there are price points that I think will suit all pockets, and I think that things are priced very fairly, they reflect the work that's gone not only into the individual piece but also the work that that maker has had to put in to developing a particular piece.

A: Thinking about this distinction between handmade and mass-produced products and prices, what other aspects of handmade products do you pay attention to when you're looking to buy and making decisions in terms of going for something that is more expensive than is handmade, rather than mass-produced, for example?

E: I think something that is distinct and has character, and sometimes when you see something, pick something up, you have a connection with something so that helps, and I think I spoke at the beginning that I feel if I buy something that is handmade I'm willing to spend more because it's unique, because I appreciate where it's come from, and yeah, I don't know if that answers the question properly?

A: No, it does, thank you so much. Can you tell me a bit about your visits at the Centre, from the moment that you walk in?

E: I generally always go in the same way, so I always go, bizarrely enough, to the front entrance on Oak Street, but you can exit via the second entrance-exit on the opposing side of the building, and I kind of, I do always follow the same route when I go in, so it's always ground floor first, starting on the left, and then do it on the right hand side, past the café and up the stairs, and then I go and do all of upstairs, and then I come downstairs, the same stairs

that I went up, the ones by the toilets, and then I do the remaining ground floor places, and I generally always look in every unit. Sometimes, if I'm short for time and I know there's a particular maker that I want to go in and see what they have then I'd go directly to them, but I would say the vast majority of the time I go to every single part of the Craft and Design Centre.

A: That's really nice. Do you also check out the exhibition space?

E: Yes, I do.

A: Have you seen any exhibitions there, or have you attended any of the exhibition launches, for example?

E: I haven't attended any of the launches, I think that's mainly to do with not living in Manchester, and if I did then maybe I would go along those because I do get emails about them. The exhibitions, I just, I don't make a particular effort to go and see them, but independently of my normal routine trips to the Craft and Design Centre, but yes, I will always try to check out the exhibition space.

A: Can you recall anything that drew your attention when you walked in during one of your visits?

E: I think in general in terms of when I first walk in, the exhibition space is always, because it's on a stepped area, I always notice that.

A: You've mentioned before that you know of some similar spaces in Copenhagen, have you visited anywhere that looks or feels like Craft and Design Centre?

E: I'm just trying to think. Other than the place in Copenhagen, actually, not exactly the same looking but I'm aware of visited spaces where makers are in the place and sell items that they're making themselves, but they're not necessarily of the same standard or have the same

sort of breadth of different skills, so from glassmakers and so on, and so forth, some smaller spaces like that but still feel that the Manchester Craft and Design Centre is not something that's replicated in every part of the UK, shall we say.

A: Can you tell me a bit about your interactions with the makers at the Centre?

E: Yeah, I think if they say hello and ask me if they can help we'll talk; there's one of the makers, I don't quite know how we, I think I do know, one of the makers, Andrea who has the &Made shop, we realised, she started talking to me and then I think she recognised, there was something I said or something about a recent holiday, and then she realised she was following me on Instagram and then we've started talking, and we always have a good chat when I go and visit, and sometimes it can be quite a lengthy chat, and we talk about everything and anything, whether it be places to go and visit, holidays, exhibitions, everyday life, that kind of thing, and then through her I got to know a little bit more about some of the other makers and yeah.

A: How do you feel when you walk to the studio?

E: At the very beginning, I used to feel quite intimidated but it's more to do with me than them because I perhaps wasn't as confident as I am now, and now I find them to be very welcoming spaces, and I think if someone isn't in the middle of doing something quite tricky, then they'll always look up to say hi and I feel like the makers are approachable. There are lovely spaces where they are able to make things, and they will show you what they're doing and explain the process as well about how things, how they make.

A: You've mentioned that you know Andrea now and you talk about different things. How about the other makers? Do you tend to have conversations with them, ask them about the processes or anything else?

E: Yes, I will do that and tell them, you know, if there are particular items that have caught my eye that I really like and I want to know more about it, then I'll talk to them or, you know, even if at that point I'm not buying anything, I like to pass a comment to show my appreciation.

A: How do you feel about the diversity or lack of diversity at the Craft and Design Centre?

E: I think there's a pretty good balance because between the different types of crafts that are represented there. I think there is quite a lot of jewellery, I don't mind that and I think it's good, you know, I've taken friends, there are friends who were really delighted when I took them to the Craft and Design Centre where they could find things that were a little bit more unusual than they may find where they live, and I think there's quite a lot of jewellery but that's not an issue.

A: And how do you feel about the diversity in terms of the people that work there, in terms of gender and race?

E: I think there isn't perhaps, just thinking about the different, I think it's predominantly white female, but I don't, it's not something I've really thought about before.

A: It's okay if it's not something you've considered before, I'm just curious to see if people notice or think about it when they visit the Centre. We've talked a little bit before about the shops and the exhibition space, can you tell me how you find the actual building of the Centre?

E: I like it, I like the layout, I love the ceiling space, the roof, the light that is in the building, especially around Christmas time, I think it creates a very cosy atmosphere that is appropriate for that type of year and kind of induces you to shop.

A: How long are your visits normally?

E: If I'm very focused on something, then they can be, I think shortest would be 20 minutes; if I get chatting to Andrea, then they can be about 90 minutes, but that's probably the exception. I think there had been times where we've been chatting for a couple of hours.

A: And when do you normally visit, which days or times?

E: Normally a Saturday now, I used to go in my lunch break when I first discovered there and I used to go maybe once a month or something like that, but I find that I get to enjoy the experience more and spend more time there if I go on a Saturday.

A: And do you tend to visit alone or with other people?

E: Probably 50/50, I have taken probably everyone who comes to visit me and when we go to Manchester, then I always take them to Craft and Design Centre, unless I know it's really not their thing but I think most of my friends have been dragged along there very willingly, and ended up making at least one purchase.

A: Why do you like to take them to the Centre?

E: Because I think, at least in terms of my friends, I think they'll appreciate it, it's something a little bit different for them and that it's a very good representation of independent Manchester.

A: Which do you prefer, visiting alone or with company?

E: If I know I want to buy things and have a splurge then on my own, so that I don't feel any judgement, that's a very honest answer.

A: Have you every visited with your partner's child?

E: No, I haven't.

A: Would you consider it a family-friendly space to visit?

E: I do think it is, I think I've been worried that she may not appreciate it, but I think now she's older, so she's just turned 10, I think she would find it interesting. She certainly has an appreciation for a number of the things in the house that I've bought from there or have bought from other makers, she picks things up and likes to see what they look like and feel like close up, so I think now she's a little bit older, she would find it an interesting place to visit.

A: Have you taken any photographs during your visits?

E: I tend not to, I have taken one of the outside of Andrea's shop and at Christmas when Kate, who does the paper craft, she normally does amazing displays that they put up, so you can really appreciate them if you're going upstairs on the balconies, I've taken photographs of those displays at Christmas just because they're really stunning.

A: How about the things that you buy, do you normally take any photographs of them and do you post them online as well?

E: I did at the beginning of lockdown, generally my Instagram is about sort of the built environment or space, but occasionally I will post a selfie, and that may well have some Manchester Craft and Design-made things on it.

A: How do you find the Centre's online presence?

E: I don't really engage much with their website, but I follow them on Instagram, and I think (XXX 46:54) the sort of pace they're posting is well thought out. I don't follow them on Twitter, and I don't follow them on Facebook.

A: Have you ever used any online shops, or have you ever bought online from them?

E: No, I haven't.

A: Do you follow any of the makers online?



E: Yes, lots of them. I would say I follow probably 50 to 60% of makers in there.

A: Why do you follow them; do you like their products? Are they active on social media?

E: Generally, I like their products, and some I think because, as well as liking their products, they have a good presence, you're able to find out more about the maker, you make a connection that way.

A: And do you like this opportunity to get to know this process?

E: Yes, it's seeing what they've been working on, what's coming up and sometimes they may post something, if they've been doing a commission for somebody and that person's allowed them to post it, it's nice to see the project they're doing for people.

A: Which is your favourite studio?

E: I do have to say [REDACTED] because I just think the aesthetic is beautiful, it's a calming and well put together space that really sets all the products that she makes, yeah, I think it appeals to me very much.

A: And which is your favourite thing that you've bought from the Centre?

E: I'm looking around my living room and trying to also catalogue what's in my bedroom and my kitchen! I think, actually unusually, I'm going to say I've bought a woollen, hand-knitted scarf [REDACTED] quite a few years ago, I wear a lot of scarves but that's something that I really love. I think it's really high quality, it's lasted very well, and I think it's that, actually.

A: Have you bought anything else that stands out?

E: Yeah, I do really love a tile that I have as well that's really beautiful, and I can't remember the name of the lady that makes them. Her studio is downstairs opposite the café.

A: What do you like about this tile?

E: I like the art, the colours, it's got large (XXX 51:20) on it which is a motif that I like, I think it's quite individual; it looks handmade which I also like, it's the fact, both the things that stand out for me are two of the things that look very handmade.

A: I don't know if you've ever noticed them, but have you ever used the donation boxes at the Craft and Design Centre?

E: I don't think I have noticed them so no, I haven't.

A: Have you ever donated to art and craft organisations?

E: Yes, I have.

A: Can you tell me a bit more about that?

E: I'm trying to think, I'd have to look in my phone. It's not recently, so nothing in relation to Covid or anything like that. I've donated to an organisation, it was to conserve and preserve a collection and to support the craft people's involvement in preserving and conserving a collection, rather than individuals making things in their own right. I can't remember the name of it.

A: That's okay. And you've mentioned Covid; would you be more or less inclined to make a donation at the moment?

E: More inclined.

A: Why is that?

E: I think they would have lost a huge amount of regular and incidental visitors; I know that the Craft and Design Centre ran an evening a few weeks ago over Instagram, with a hashtag where you could look at items that the makers had and contact them that way to buy things,

but I think because of the impact of the pandemic across the arts and more generally, I'd be more inclined to provide a donation now.

A: How has the pandemic impacted your engagement with arts?

E: Well, the only engagement I've had was through social media, so I would normally, in addition to visiting the Craft and Design Centre, there are a couple of craft and makers' events that are well put together that I would go in and attend, so there's one in Derbyshire, it's the spring fair and I can't remember the name of the organisation that puts it together, and then there's in Devon, there's an annual big crafts festival event, and I would normally go to that every couple of years and I was due to go this year, so I've missed out on that, but again, they ran a virtual online event. Great Northern Contemporary Craft Fair as well, that's normally in October and they've just, they're actually running their online event right now, this week.

A: Are you planning to visit the Craft and Design Centre when it reopens in August?

E: Yes, I am.

A: How do you feel about visiting the Centre and similar spaces again?

E: I feel confident about visiting that kind of space, and I will be pleased to see the space well-attended, but I don't get the feeling it will be overcrowded; I feel very confident visiting and I can see that they're making appropriate measures to look after everyone's safety and to make sure that the makers are also safe.

A: Do you feel that social distancing measures or wearing a mask will have an impact on your visits?

E: I think those measures are important, I'm still conflicted a little bit whether, because masks have been brought in now, whether they're just a tool to try and boost people's

confidence in going out, but social distancing I think is important. We've become quite indoctrinated into this now, or at least people who have engaged with the messaging around Covid, they're quite indoctrinated into the idea of social distancing.

A: How do you think that the pandemic will impact the Centre and other similar spaces in terms of visitors, events, in the short term and also in the future?

E: I am concerned that because in general the city centre has been much less busy than under normal circumstances, and even though other shops have opened, I am concerned that there won't be the level of footfall that they're used to experiencing, but I think people who know the Craft and Design Centre and have particular birthdays coming up or things like that would make an effort to go and visit, and seek out particular makers and things.

A: Are you looking forward to visiting other spaces, apart from the Craft and Design Centre?

E: In general, I'm looking forward to things, whenever that may be, however long that may be, getting back to normal more. I've got quite used to being at home and just pottering around at home, so I think it's going to be strange. I'm going on holiday to Devon in September and I'm looking forward to change of scene, rather than anything specific.

A: Thank you so much, I don't have any more questions but is there anything else that you would like to tell me about the Craft and Design Centre that we haven't covered during the interview?

E: No, I don't think so.

A: Perfect, thank you so much, it was really interesting and lovely to hear your experiences from the Craft and Design Centre. I'm going to stop the recording now.