

A: I have some demographics questions that I'd like to ask you at the beginning. Can you tell me how you identify in terms of your gender?

G: Male.

A: And what is your racial identity?

G: White UK.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

A: Where do you currently live?

G: I currently live in Manchester.

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[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

A: Perfect, and how many times would you say you have visited the Craft and Design Centre?

G: Well, I have visited the Craft and Design Centre 10 times.

A: And how much would you say is your average spending there per visit, approximately, just an estimate?

G: £4, maybe £5.

A: And how much would you say you spend in other similar spaces or craft and design organisations, per visit?

G: Similar amount.

A: Perfect, thanks so much, okay so we can make a start. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your relationship with craft?

G: My relationship with craft, yeah, so I'm a middle class professional male with an interest in art and design, and the creative world, and as someone who is interested in creative world I appreciate the time, energy and skill that goes into the making of craft, and I have a clear design aesthetic that I like. Now, what I would then say is that I've got a strong sense of design, so I know what I like, and I also know what I don't like.

A: You've mentioned that you have a clear aesthetic, could you describe it?

G: I would say it's Scandinavian minimalism.

A: And what do you like about it?

G: It's pleasing to your senses, and your sense of design and aesthetics.

A: Do you do any type of crafts or making yourself? You've mentioned that you work with music?

G: Yeah, I'm involved in putting on music shows, I don't do anything other outside that. I go to galleries, but I don't make anything.

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

G: No. My wife is a ceramicist and she's got a stall in the Craft Centre.

A: Do you make with your children?

G: No.

A: Does your wife?

G: Yes.

A: And do you like the work that your wife does, I mean the ceramics?

G: Yes, yes, I do, I think that she's got a talent.

A: Perfect. Can you tell me what craft means to you as a man? I don't know if you've thought about this in this way.

G: Yeah, well I think it's an application of someone's ability, their thoughts and what they feel as a manifestation in the work that they do.

A: You've mentioned before that you have appreciation of skill and effort that takes to create something handmade, can you tell me a bit more about that?

G: I think that's kind of self-explanatory, but you know, we live in a world where goods or items can be produced via a programming of a computer system, so to have something

produced from a human and made by hand is a kind of antidote to the disposability and homogeneity of factory-made goods, so I think you can have a relationship with something made by hand in a way that's hard to make with something that it's made by a machine, and also, also the materials that are used are chosen skilfully and chosen to reflect the purpose that the item has.

A: I've actually wanted to ask you how do you feel about handmade products versus mass-produced and if you own handmade products?

G: Yeah, I do. It's like both have got their purpose and compliment together, so you know, whilst you have, there is a purpose for a machine-made, factory-made goods, that can be complimented and softened by having, by mixing that up with bespoke craftsmanship and bespoke handmade goods, but you know, it would be very hard to, you know, we're not in an income bracket where you can afford to have everything bespoke in your house, but one compliments the other and one softens the other, so a handmade item can become a work of art against a factory-made item, or a mass-produced item.

A: Can you tell me a bit about the handmade products that you own, how do you feel about them?

G: Well, I mean my wife is a ceramicist so we have the work that she's made, it's within our living environment and that enhances quality of our lives because we're surrounded by art and we're surrounded by the work that she makes, and in that journey, and as she's developed her craft and made her items, she's brought other work, introduced us to other artists, and hers become a part of the world of arts and crafts, and existing one.

A: Have you bought anything that was more political or feminist, let's say, in terms of ceramics or anything else? For example, there is a lot of work that is feminist in ceramics, have you come across that or bought?

G: Not really, I mean I'm quite happy to buy (XXX 9:45) I've got posters and things like that that probably fall into a political category, but I have to say I've not bought anything that is feminist and I mean, I actually consider work made by a woman feminist, so feminist is a very broad, you've got that track to pick up.

A: Do you remember how you've first found out about the Manchester Craft and Design Centre?

(XXX)

A: Last thing I've heard was I don't know if you can count things made by women as feminist because it's a very broad category.

G: Yeah, it kind of, (XXX 11:44) the work itself rather than, let me just rephrase that. Yeah, I would be (XXX 11:58) political work to share my political views or move me, and that would be regardless of whether the person making work would be male or female, that wouldn't be important.

A: Thank you. Now, thinking about the Craft and Design Centre, do you remember when you've first found out about the Centre?

G: Oh god yeah, it would probably be 25 years ago.

A: Do you remember how you've heard about the Centre?

G: I think I probably went to see it when I was in the Northern Quarter, how did I see it? 25 years ago, in Manchester, the Craft and Design Centre was, you know, there weren't many places like the Craft and Design Centre in the Northern Quarter and so it was, you know, a bit of a novelty or something, it would've been slightly unique.

A: Do you remember your first visits there?

G: Yeah, I do.

A: Can you tell me a bit more about that, what do you recall?

G: I remember the glass roof, I remember having something to eat at the café and being underwhelmed by the work on display.

A: Why did it not appeal to you that much?

G: Boring, safe, not particularly challenging, suburban, colloquial, twee.

A: Were you aware of the history of the Centre then, or did you learn more about what it used to be later on?

G: No, it's been a place I've been aware of but not inspired by. It's not an inspiring place.

A: Why would you say that?

G: Why? Because a lot of the work in there is, in the Craft Centre, I wouldn't really wish to buy. I mean I'm being unfair but some of it is really interesting but a lot of it isn't.

A: You've mentioned before that you have a very clear aesthetic and sense of what you like and what you don't like; would it appeal more to you if it was more, I don't know, in the sense of Scandinavian minimalism type of place, or does it have to do also with the product range that they have?

G: Well, I suppose it's with the, it could do better. I mean I'm thinking if in a major European city, if you have a craft centre, you should be doing more interesting work, and if you travel, most of us travel to European countries as I'm sure you do, and if you were to go to somewhere like Amsterdam or Copenhagen, and you went to a craft and design space there, then you would be inspired by the work rather than thinking this is boring, so you know, if you are able to travel in Europe which a lot of people do, and if you are able to visit European

cities which a lot of us have access to, then the Craft and Design Centre is going to be a supremely underwhelming place, which it is.

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A: Have you attended any of the exhibitions?

G: Yes.

A: How do you find the exhibition space and the exhibitions that they host?

G: I mean I just think there's lack of energy, it's like going through the motions, this is what we do, this is what we're doing, but there's nothing there that's going, there's not a lot of excitement about the Craft and Design Centre. It needs shaking up and it needs to have an identity, rather than just being a parochial space in Manchester.

A: Have you attended any workshops or events at the Centre?

G: No, I don't like workshops, I don't like the work.

A: Would you be interesting in learning any techniques or anything that has to do with making things?

G: No, I don't want to learn how to make things, other people have greater ability. If people have got great ability and skill, then you're prepared to support them by buying their items,

but what you need to do is have a space that is exciting, that shows off people's skills to greater advantage and is known for exciting artistic work, rather than just being a sneaky, old museum of craft and design, which it currently is, it's just not an exciting place to go to.

A: We've talked a little bit about the product range at the Centre, how do you feel about the diversity or lack of diversity in terms of who works there?

G: I think a lot of the work is uninteresting and twee, and kitsch, and I think they could have more interesting makers doing more interesting work.

A: In terms of the makers, do you think there's enough diversity at the Centre?

G: What kind of diversity do you mean, in terms of the work or people who are making it?

A: The people that are making it.

G: That's not something, I think it should be more the quality of the work, I'm not someone who (XXX 19:55) you should have a, you know, I'm just someone who thinks the quality of the work is more important, it's what matters, so I don't think it matters who makes it, provided that the artists who are there are, and I think it would be very dangerous to have quotas of artists who are there to fulfil criteria of diversity, people should be there because of their artistic skill and ability, what they're saying, what they're doing, their crafts, what their abilities are, what their imagination is and they should be judged on the quality of their work.

A: You've mentioned before the glass roof at the Centre, can you recall anything that has drawn your attention as you walked in during one of your visits?

G: It just looks very tired, it's not changed for years, it's the same, and this is one of the dangers to the Craft Centre is that when I walked in 25 or 30 years ago, it's remained exactly the same, and it's as if the work that is there in the Craft Centre is the same, so it's been left behind and whilst it's in the area that is now, and 25 years ago the Craft Centre was kind of



an interesting place in a bit of a derelict area of Manchester, it's now in a very cool, vibrant area of Manchester and it looks very tired, unwelcoming, boring, dusty, old-fashioned, it's stuck in an 80s time warp.

A: Are you aware of any other similar space?

G: Any similar spaces, in terms of craft? Yeah, there is around the corner, there's some private spaces where people sort of curate craft and tasteful items, so yeah, there are. I mean it's not on the scale and it's been privately curated rather than there have been workers' spaces, which is a good thing about Craft and Design Centre, so I'm aware that Craft and Design Centre has spaces for artists to show their work, but it just needs to rethink its identity and what it's trying to say, and who it's trying to appeal to, and I mean by doing this, hopefully you may get some answers.

A: Hopefully, I mean that's something that we're keen to find out as well about visitors' experiences of the Centre and if it appeals to people, and ...

G: The thing is you can have far more, the experience is same as it has been for 30 years.

A: That's really interesting to say because you've visited a few years ago and then you can, you know, see if there's been a change or not.

G: No, not at all, it's stayed exactly the same.

A: You've mentioned before that you know some of the other makers at the Centre, can you tell me a bit about your interactions with makers, the ones that you don't necessarily know personally, you know, when you walk into the studio?

G: Well, there's some studios that I just wouldn't walk in because I see the nature of the work that they're doing and I just think that's something that you would see in Blackpool, not

everybody; some of the work is fantastic, some of the jewellery is tasteful and I've bought items for their shops, but there are others who are just not good enough.

A: Can you tell me a bit about the items that you have bought from the Centre?

G: I've bought some jewellery for my mother and I've bought other items, I've bought a picture and I've bought some pottery.

A: Which is the favourite thing that you've bought from the Centre?

G: The pottery.

A: What makes it your favourite?

G: I just like the minimalist design.

A: Was this something that you've bought for yourself, or was it a gift?

G: It was a gift.

A: How does it feel when you walk into a studio at the Craft and Design Centre, if you don't know the person who owns the studio?

G: I don't think it's, it's kind of like you like the presence of the makers, you're aware these craftsmen, these are artists, that's not a problem, but I wouldn't go in everyone's studio, I'd only go to a studio of someone that I like, and a lot of the studios I don't like and I think that the good artists are prejudiced by the work of some of the studios that are just not up to it, and they detract from the other quality artists, so you really have people who are not good enough to be there and whose work is not, not so good enough quality, it detracts, it's like not enough sufficient identity, it's like an upmarket jumble sale of craft, a posh car boot sale.

A: Do you think that is because there are no similar styles?

G: Well, it doesn't have any identity, it's not trying to say anything, I'm not sure what it's trying to say, and I think there should be an artistic identity that they should support, and the artists should have a narrative of what they're trying to say and what they're trying to do so that everyone can support each other and work of one artist complements another.

A: Have a collective identity.

G: It is, that's exactly right, there's no collective identity and because there isn't a collective identity, it doesn't give strength to any other artist and it becomes, it feels like a, I was going to say jumble sale – I don't mean jumble sale, that sounds very unfair and I don't mean that to be unfair but it diminishes the experience.

A: We talked a little bit about the building itself, but do you think that the building itself also doesn't necessarily add to that collective identity?

G: Well, I think no, for goodness sake, building should be one of the assets, the building is a beautiful building, and the Northern Quarter is quite an ugly space, so it's not an interesting space, it's not a nice space, really, is it? So, the Northern Quarter itself, it is quite a fine building in the Northern Quarter, you know, that's not a problem; what is a problem is just the old world of craft that when you go in, it then becomes a confusing experience, it's not thought out, it's not made out well, you don't know what art you're going to see, you don't know what you're going to get no identity and, you know, I mean there's someone selling clocks on bits of glass that's just rubbish, so the first thing you see when you walk in would be these glass clocks, like something you'd see in Blackpool, rather than you should have your best crafts maker, someone with an identity or even a display of all the work of the artists, you know, it just needs to have some energy about it, and some purpose, and some vibrancy, rather than being a museum of craft.

A: I agree with what you've said that the building should be an asset, because it's a beautiful building, in the heart of the Northern Quarter so they could really elevate the Centre by thinking more about the building itself.

G: Yeah, and the thing is, the thing that is kind of interesting is that it is run by artists, and I mean the artists in the space, the people who are within the space, you would've thought would have a knowledge of what's happening and what would suit them, and that would be quite a good guise. They spend all day there every day, they see the lack of footprints, they can see the response the people have when they come in the building, but it's a confusing experience rather than a beautiful experience. If you go to Tate Modern, or you go to Saatchi Gallery, you go to any gallery in Europe, any gallery in Amsterdam or Holland, when you've finished in the gallery you go to the gift shop and the gift shop is laid out in an enchanting fashion where people browse and spend money; in any modern gallery or any modern museum, that's your experience and that's all you're trying to do at the Craft Centre, create something that moves and that's what you're going to have to do if it is to be continued and then you can attract better makers who bring more quality, who bring equity to the Craft Centre, and you need to get rid of the rubbish and you need to identify who isn't actually good enough to be there, and there are so many talented people around doing fantastic work, and you need to have a strong identity about what Craft Centre wants to say and who it wants to celebrate, so within that building the Craft Centre should be celebrating artists and artists should feel, there should be a sense of delight to being in the Craft Centre that becomes a fulfilling prophecy, that becomes virtuous and works for everybody.

A: And, like you've mentioned, Manchester has a very vibrant, independent craft scene.

G: I don't know if it has, it could have a better one, if you provide people with better work what there is in Manchester, or what there is in the North, or what there is in the UK, I think

it's creative people, and I think you should be finding and sourcing these creative people, celebrating them and giving them a platform, that needs to be led by the, I don't know if there's a director, I don't know who's responsible for deciding who's work or which artist, or which craftsperson is in the Craft Centre, but you need to have an identity, it doesn't seem to have any identity, it's just, like I've said, a museum of craft which is all over the place, so for the user, you're not sure what experience you're getting, some work is good and other work is, like I've said, not good enough to be there, and it detracts from the other goods, so the poor quality work detracts from the good quality work. Now, what my taste is, is different to other people's but there should be some principles that are shared within the Centre that determines which work is shown, like in any shop; you know, in any art gallery you don't show everything, it's got to fit to what the Craft Centre is trying to say and what you have in your experience is not really saying anything, it's very tired, it's substandard, it's not good enough, and that's why you're having this survey because if it was functioning properly, you wouldn't need to because everybody would be happy and you would have footfall that is 3 times greater than it is, 4 times greater, you'd have a queue of people wanting to show their work there and you'd have journalists talking about the Craft Centre; no one talks about it and it's just something in Manchester that's boring and it's been there for ages, without any kind of, so people become lazy.

A: The times that you've visited to buy something or to browse, how long did you end up spending there, how much time?

G: Half an hour.

A: And which days or times would you normally visit the Centre?

G: I think, I'm not sure if it's open on weekends but I think Sunday would be the best time, but I've been during the week because I work in Manchester, so I can go during the week,

and it's not somewhere I would go at the weekend because I don't think it's good enough to give up my weekend for, I prefer to go to a gallery or something, not a boring Craft Centre.

A: Have you visited normally, you know, alone, with other people or with your children?

G: Mixture. Wouldn't go with the kids, there's nothing for them to see.

A: I was going to ask if it's ...

G: It's not a great user experience so I'd probably just go on my own.

A: Do you think it's family friendly?

G: Not really. I don't think that's the problem, it's a Craft and Design Centre, it's for people with taste, it's for people with money, who cares about, and I really think that making it family friendly would put off people who want to spend money, and you know, it's craft and design, it's for older people, it's not an experience for children and it shouldn't be, you know, there's too much done for children, this idea of making everything child friendly, make it adult friendly! You know, an older people friendly and people who spend money, I mean what do you want to do, do you want to sell money, do you want to sell the artwork, or do you want to turn it into a play area? I mean I just think that's ridiculous, not the fact that you're asking that question, but the fact is there's enough for kids, put a bouncy castle in the middle of the floor and see how that helps your artists. You're asking this survey because of the artists, you've not got good enough artists and the artists are not making enough money, so making it child friendly may bring more parents in but gosh, I don't know about that, I really don't know but it's like wear it, would it be somewhere where dad can stay with children, and maybe if you have the café outside, I think you should have the café outside so children needn't come in but they can be entertained or left, but I think focusing on making the place more child friendly is a bit of a red herring, really, I'd be surprised if that solves your problems, but it's certainly my opinion and I don't like children.

A: Have you taken anyone to see the Centre?

G: Yeah, I think I've taken my mum.

A: Did she enjoy the experience?

G: Not particularly, she's very polite but it's underwhelming, you know, she lives in Chester so she's, it's parochial, it's a parochial experience.

A: Have you taken any photographs during your visits?

G: Not that I can think of.

A: Of things that you've bought?

G: No. I've taken some photographs of my wife's shop but that's because it is my wife's shop.

A: How do you feel about the Craft Centre's online presence, do you follow them?

G: No.

A: Do you follow any of the makers.

G: No. Maybe Jess Owen, I'm aware of Jess Owen.

A: Why did you follow her?

G: Because she's a talented artist and maker, and she's got external galleries and she's got strong aesthetic, and she's got a vision and she's a quality artist.

A: Do you have a favourite studio at the Centre?

G: No. Actually, let me think, there are two, do you have the names of them? Have you got, there is two, I can't remember them, there's Andrea something and a jewellery maker, so there's Andrea and next door is a jewellery maker, they're both very good.

A: What do you like about their studios?

G: It's just the craft, really, and the work that they do and the fact that they are experienced, highly talented craftswomen, and they kind of, I suppose their work kind of reflects the northern kind of tradition, which suits the Victorian nature of the Craft Centre.

A: What do you mean by northern tradition?

G: Well, one of the shops has got, she uses old cotton, the furniture is kind of Victorian period, which is in keeping with the age of the Craft Centre, but I think that is kind of a weakness as it is strength, it's an overly familiar northern look but hers is tastefully done, it's something that we should be moving away from rather than encouraging other artists to fill that space. I think it's only because of the nature of the work that they do and it's done tastefully there, it works for them but I don't think it's something that I'd like to see in, I think the Craft Centre needs to be reimagined but you've got creative people within it who are, you know, who would provide those answers, I think.

A: How do you feel about the prices at the Centre?

G: Fine, I think you should pay for crafts, I don't think chopping the prices, I think if you've dropped the prices it would be very dangerous for the artists, I think you'll get lower quality artists in; I think you should be putting the prices up and I think you should make the experience, the whole thing needs to go upmarket, not downmarket and I think if you put the prices up, it would reflect the time and energy that the makers are putting into making the craft, and it should be to their advantage, but I think if you were to put the prices up, then you need to radically overhaul the experience for people in the Craft and Design Centre, and you need to work out what you're trying to say and what you're trying to do within the space, which I think is all over the place at present.

A: Have you ever noticed the donation boxes at the Centre?



G: Yeah.

A: Have you used them?

G: No.

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

G: No.

A: Would you be more or less inclined to make a donation at the moment, with the pandemic that is going on and everything else?

G: No, no, I support other areas in music.

A: Do you prefer to support artists in different ways, for example by buying directly from them instead of making a donation?

G: That's the whole point, that's the support that you should give and I think just giving a donation box gives up completely the wrong signal, and I think that people are exhausted in making donations, and I'm not sure what you get for your donation.

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

G: Well, it's made me realise how important, it's such an important, it makes me realise how important art is for the kind of beauty of existence, the meaning of existence, life without art would be life without meaning, and in terms of the pandemic, I feel that the arts and the artists have got the answers, and if we could follow art it would provide us with a far healthier route out of pandemic, and were the politicians to listen to artists, we would have a far better experience, rather than what I think is a totally wasted experience is the fact that you could have an artistic and creative-led recovery from the recession that we're going into but that won't happen, and there are examples of this in the way that Lisbon reinvented itself

as an artistic and creative city and used arts to reimagine itself. In terms of Covid, we should be having public arts events, public art should be celebrated and used as a guide to get us out of the mess that we are in, and the Craft and Design Centre should align itself for that.

A: Are you planning to visit when they reopen?

G: No.

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

G: They'd have to be good. Of course I would, but they'd have to be saying something to invite, to provoke my interest and there's nothing interesting about the Craft and Design Centre, it is boring.

A: Do you feel that social distancing measures or wearing a mask will have an impact on your visit to art and cultural spaces?

G: No, I mean that's ridiculous, you've got to wear a mask to go to a shop, people will get used to wearing masks, get over it! You know, there's kinds of pussy footing, why are people involved in art (XXX 46:52), you know? You've got to wear a mask to go to a shop and get your toilet paper, you know, people get used to it and that's what you've got to do to protect yourself and protect others, you know, it's not a big deal, just put a mask on, you want to go to an art gallery – put a mask on, go to the shops, you know, people go to the pub pretty happily, they'll go to see art, just get on with it, and be vibrant, you know, be vibrant and be bold.

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

G: What they need to do, they need to reimagine themselves, they need to tell people, they need to have an organised programme of what they're doing , they need to tell people who

are still around, they need to show that the craft means something, they need to tell people how important craft is to enhance the quality of their lives, and they need to promote themselves but what they're doing is to tell people, to be proud of what they do and what they say.

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A: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me and sharing your experiences, let me stop the recording now.