

## **A Change of Perspective Podcast, Episode 12. A Year in Review. So Long and Goodnight.**

Lizzie Lovejoy 0:13

Hello everybody, and welcome to the Change of Perspective podcast. I am your host, Lizzie Lovejoy. And today, it's just me, because this is the final episode of the series. After 12 months, we've reached the end of the entire Change of Perspective project. And so today's episode is going to be a review of all of the exhibitions, the episodes, and everything that's happened over the past year.

And this episode will come out in January, which makes it seem fitting to be a year in review, but I am recording this episode before Christmas, which means I am still working on the final exhibition, and putting everything together for that. In fact, this morning, I just finalised who all of our featured artists are going to be. So that tells you about where we're at right now. That being said, by the time this actually all comes out to you, and you guys get to hear it, everything will be coming together. So now you're gonna get a bit of the behind the scenes for every single piece that went into this past year.

I mean, what a year, can you believe it? 2021 was, globally something intense, similar to how 2020 was, but on a personal level, it was also very intense. And on a creative level, it was a whole different world of intense.

When I first pitched the Change of Perspective project to everyone over at ARC, I was originally planning to try and do 12 exhibitions in the entire year, one exhibition for each month. Now thankfully, a lot of the people I talked to talked me down from that, and decided to put it to six exhibitions, one every two months instead, so that I could answer three questions that I had on my mind and revisit them again later in the year with all the information that we had learned. If I had thought everything through properly and not been so eager to do so many exhibitions and produce so much, then I probably should have done quarterly exhibitions. Done four, one for every season, and come up with a fourth and final question. Perhaps one of the ones I'd originally pitched?

The four main questions that I did pitch were What Do You Call Home?, What Do You Call Family?, What Does It Mean To Be Working Class?, and basically, What Is Northern? Now you may have noticed, What Does it Mean to be Working Class? is not the name of the working class exhibitions. And this is because even though I pitched these exhibitions, back in November of 2020, by the time January came around, there was an exhibition series going up by someone else called What Does it Mean to be Working Class? So even though everything had been approved, and it had gotten to that point that everything was going ahead and starting, and work was starting to happen, the name had to be changed and certain ideas about it had to be altered, which is really frustrating, but also, that's kind of just the way the industry works. A lot of people have similar ideas around the same time, because we have similar cultural influences. And so you'll see this kind of thing happens a lot, usually not quite on the nose as that where it's exactly the same title, but these things happen.

And so January rolls around, and I'm finally able to announce my role, and say that I am the Artist of Change over at ARC and that I will be producing a full range of six exhibitions, answering those three themes. So let's discuss the process. My creative process for this project, and for a lot of projects that I work on, is to reach out to members of the community and get their responses to these questions. And find almost a middle ground, things that everyone agrees on. Something that can reflect the community and the people I've spoken to as well as my own responses, and put it all together to create a series of images. And so there's a lot of one to one discussions, various surveys and responses to surveys. And through the very first exhibition, the What Do You Call Home? exhibition, I wanted to focus on the people that work at ARC. And so I had one to one chats with most of the staff who work at ARC and found out about their favourite places because I was considering the idea of home as this favourite place and this idea of belonging.

And so talking to everyone there became this list of amazing places, some of which were the same as each others, where there were all these very powerful memories and ideas of family and northernness that were already intertwined with each other. I mean, at this point, it was showing how difficult it was going to be to separate all of the projects from one another, all of the titles from one another, because already home was the same as family. And home and family were both already the same as northernness. And for a lot of them, their working class backgrounds were very much entwined in this as well. The places that they grew up and valued, were places that quite often you could go to for free and walk with your family. And it was a beautiful thing to get to hear all of these different pieces.

And so I began to illustrate all of their locations and collage some of them and colour them in and mix all of it together to create a series of around 60 images. Now there aren't a full 60 images within the exhibition. That's just how many that I created in the first month for this. Me and Chloe, who is the Programmes Manager for all exhibitions and work of that kind over at ARC, we looked over all of the images via Zoom on screenshare, because at this point, we weren't allowed to meet in person. And we decided which images worked well together, and which ones would be able to be laid next to each other and create something visually interesting.

Once I'd gotten everything printed out it was time to put the exhibition up, at first in the windows of ARC. Because again, a lot of the country was locked down on work from home orders. And people walked past ARC and through the town, but they couldn't enter the building. And so I taped everything directly to the windows. Thankfully, the technicians were incredibly wonderful about it, and let me use as much tape as I needed to make sure everything stayed on the windows. And it was a really wonderful experience watching people walk past as I stuck everything up, because people would wave and they would comment. And I saw one older man with I assume his grandchild who looked about three or four, and pointing to different locations. And I could hear him talking about these places that he'd been and where they were, and it warmed my heart. It was a really positive experience. Over the course of this exhibition, ARC was able to open up again and the world opened up. But obviously the exhibition run wasn't over, and so we decided we were going to take it upstairs into the gallery space. And so we got everything reprinted onto foamboard. And I remember, this was the first time I'd been upstairs in ARC. And I didn't know where everything was, but I hadn't really told anybody that and so I think everybody assumed I just knew. And so I walked upstairs and

found what I assumed was the gallery. I was right, thankfully, and I just started to put things up. I remember one of the technicians walking by and saying, like although he was about to go for lunch at this point, he'd be back to help when that was done if there was anything that I needed. And I said, okay, but I just continued to put everything up anyway. And I was really, really happy to see everything up in the space, because it covered the whole curve, the whole arc of that particular room. And there's so much light coming through from the windows that everything looked really beautiful. And I was very proud of the featured artists who were part of it.

At first, the people who were featured artists within the exhibition were people that I knew. They were artists who were new to the industry who had recently graduated, and artists who were just beginning to emerge, all of whom created very varied and different interpretations of this idea of home. And it suddenly became very important to have this variation of interpretations involved in answering these questions, in creating these exhibitions. And that's why the role of the featured artists became such a strong part moving forward in the following exhibitions.

And then the second exhibition we moved on to was What Do You Call Family? And for this, again, I had Zoom calls with various members of the public and talked to people about their interpretations of family. And the idea that it's not necessarily biological but chosen. And they let me into pieces of their memories of times when a community has come together to help them and support them.

Now, I struggled a bit more with this exhibition, because I had worked really hard and really quickly on the first exhibition. I had, as I said, created over 60 images and almost overwhelmed myself. So by the time it got to the family exhibition, I had all this pressure of what I felt like I should be able to achieve and it wasn't a feasible goal. And so, when I started creating work, everything that I started to make I was throwing away, and saying that that wasn't good enough and restarting, and trying to interpret other people's visions, while staying true to my own ideas, because the whole point is to be able to express both. To be able to express the community and be able to express myself and show both within a space.

Thankfully, I feel like I was able to do that. And that's primarily because of the fingerprints. Now, the fingerprints was an idea that I had after having re-listened to the one to one conversations I'd had with certain people about their family and friends and community connections, and just wished I could share their words directly. And so I started to do this thing that I call word dumping. And it's something that I started doing at sixth form, which is where you lay words out on a page, in any place on the page and just keep writing until you've filled up the entire thing. And it's not typically right to left, it can be running up landscape on the page before switching to portrait, it can be going around in circles. And as I started doing this, I realised things kind of looked like fingerprints. And that in itself might be an important feature for the family exhibition, this idea that these people are inbuilt into you whether biologically related or not, they are still part of the very fibres that make you who you are. And so I started to translate their words into poetry, and then started to use those poems in fingerprints, and produced a range of five fingerprints that covered fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and friends. And it wasn't like anything else I'd produced before, it wasn't a

reportage based image, it wasn't any portraiture, it wasn't any buildings or locations. It was entirely abstract and interpretive.

And now we move on to the third exhibition, which was the first working class exhibition. This was a window exhibition that was presented on the metal boards in No 60, to be shown on the windows looking outward, but also inside so that people sitting having a coffee and their lunch could take a look at the artwork. Now I feel very strongly about the theme of working class-ness. It is my background, I am very proud of who I am, and where I've come from. And we live in a very working class community here in the North East, specifically around the Tees Valley, and the industrial towns of County Durham, where I have always lived. And one thing that is very important to me, are libraries.

My parents took me to the library every week when I was very small, until I was old enough to go by myself. And we lived close enough. And so I went week after week getting new books until I'd pretty much read all of the books in the section that I was allowed to read, which I find very funny because I have been diagnosed with dyslexia. So the stories must have been very good for me to power through it. And I loved getting to talk to the librarians, and experience that, and then it was knocked down and a temporary one was built in its place. And then that was knocked down. And then it was somewhat merged with the leisure centre, but with a much more limited and restricted range. And it was no longer the library that I knew and had grown up in.

And so when I talked to people about their libraries, and their experiences, it became very important to cover this idea of access, because as someone from a working class background, we couldn't necessarily always afford to buy books and keep them. These days, I'm in a better position and I own quite a lot of books, and I love being able to read and reread them. But that's not always something that's accessible, and it's not always a possibility. But libraries really open up the world. They open up the world in terms of education, and in terms of stories and narratives, and being able to be academically active in the world, and exercise our imaginations. And so I illustrated a range of North East libraries, and I illustrated a range of North East working class people doing their jobs and being active in the workplace. And I was again very happy and proud of the images that I produced. I felt very excited putting it all up.

And the best part for me, was the response afterwards, because people walked over to the staff at No 60 and told them stories about the libraries that they had grown up reading in. There was one particular woman who I was sent an email about afterwards who pointed to one of the libraries and said that it was the library where she learned to read and started telling people working at No 60 about her stories and her experiences. And that is exactly the response that we want to be able to elicit with these exhibitions. We want people to be able to look at their passion, their history and celebrate it, and think of these amazing and positive things.

It was also the first time that we were able to get our featured artists into the building to celebrate the exhibition, but also get to look around the space and see if ARC was somewhere that they might

want to be able to present their own work in the future. Now almost all of the artists featured in these exhibitions have been artists that are new graduates that are only just entering the world of art, design, and illustration. And all their styles vary quite dramatically. And in this particular exhibition, I had asked people who I had gone to see at graduate exhibitions in 2021, because obviously, in 2020, there weren't any graduate exhibitions, not physical ones. And so I was very happy this year to be able to go around the local area, and see the work of these new graduates, and ask some of them to be a part of something.

And after these three exhibitions, we were on to the revisited section. These were revisiting all of the themes that we'd covered in the first three exhibitions and looking at them almost from a new light - being able to analyse what we had seen, what I had researched and what I had created and what the featured artists had created, to pull together three new responses. And so I decided that the revisited exhibition of What Do You Call Home? had to be something pretty big, it had to be something that people would be able to go and see. And so we had our first opening event, our first open day to come and visit the exhibition space and get to celebrate the artwork of myself and featured artists. And this is really the exhibition where featured artists took precedent. They took centre stage, and I wanted to really get the breadth of their ideas and share them with the community.

So I reached out to the North East Creatives group on Facebook, which is a space where people can share different jobs and opportunities, but also celebrate their own work, and different events going on in the North East art community. I reached out to them and asked; Does anyone want to fill in a sketchbook about their journeys around the North East, because I wanted to look at home as these places that we go and what we bring with us.

Because something that I'd found from the first ones, these favourite places, the experience was as much a part of their feeling of home, as was the location itself. And thankfully, I had a lot of responses to it. I sent out sketchbooks to around 20 people. I didn't expect to get them all back and I didn't, I got around nine sketchbooks back and they were all so different from one another. They were all so varied. And style-wise completely different, but also in terms of what they tackled, what themes, and it was all because everyone was in slightly different locations to each other.

In response to these artists, I created maps for each location that the sketchbooks had been to. So I wanted to show the sketchbooks' journeys, the artists' journeys in this idea of home and place being around the north visually with these maps, and they were large scale, they were A0 maps. So I felt good about getting this idea of scale, of showing just how vast the area is and how much there is to the north. I also illustrated different iconic locations from within these regions that I had drawn maps of and almost presented it like a game to see if people could place where these locations would go, and where the maps actually belonged.

It was really fun on the opening day to hear people guessing about which location was Redcar and which one was South Shields and which one was Middlesbrough, because even though they had all

existed within these spaces, and celebrated these locations, it's really hard to imagine a top down view when you're living on the ground.

It was also really interesting for the other featured artists that hadn't created sketchbooks, the ones that had created different works to go on the wall. Because this was the first time we had a range of 3D works, especially this idea of putting everything in frames, and how you make use of frames as part of the artwork itself, not just as a presentation tool, but something creative in itself. It was the exhibition that I was the most proud of so far, and was so happy to be able to celebrate with so many different people.

One of the difficulties and negatives surrounding this exhibition though, was the actual curatorial side of it. Because of the scale, I hadn't printed things on foam board like I had done in the past, but instead I printed them on thick paper that could be stuck up onto the walls. What I hadn't factored in is how warm it can get at the time of year that this exhibition took place. And with the windows being present, it magnified the pictures on the walls, and melted the adhesive that stuck them to the walls. And so very quickly, the images started to fall down and had to be re-stuck up on every day, and caused massive inconveniences for everyone working in the area.

So to conclude that exhibition, I'm the most happy with the work in it with all of the featured artists and all of the ideas that I explored. But in terms of presentation and securing everything to the walls, it was the biggest disaster so far.

And now we're on the family exhibition revisited, which is the one that is currently up at the time of recording, and has been up a couple of weeks. It's a lot smaller of a scale of an exhibition compared to the one before it. And that ended up being by choice, because I remembered the extent of the burnout I experienced from the home exhibition the first time round, and I didn't want to have the same thing happen again, especially knowing that I would have to produce the work for the family exhibition and the working class exhibition at the same time, because they had a smaller gap between them than the subsequent exhibitions. So I specifically selected who I was going to talk to, and which images I was going to create from quite early on, and then just stuck to that, didn't plan on expanding any further.

And I think that was the right call. Because I'm very happy with the images produced. I created detailed portraits of various different members of the northern community, and their ideas of family together, including members of my own family. So this exhibition was a lot more obvious in terms of its relation to the theme than it had been the first time round. There was almost an abstract concept to the first family exhibition and this idea of community connections, and not being biologically related, compared to this next family exhibition, which was all about the people that we spent time with, and the people who were biologically related to us. It was a lot of parents with their children, and husbands and wives, and sisters and other family members of that type.

I was also really happy with the poems that I produced for it. Because again, like with the first family exhibition, I was happy to listen to their words and their stories, and get to translate them into a piece of poetic work, especially with Chloe's poem. Now, this is the same Chloe I mentioned earlier, who is, this is the same Chloe that I mentioned earlier, who works at ARC. And every time we'd had meetings, we always ended up discussing her family and my family. And so it seemed like a natural progression, to make her part of this penultimate exhibition. This was set up again in No 60 so that it looked out of the windows, and also was inside.

All of this together, that is the work of five exhibitions that are all created, curated, presented, displayed on the walls and windows of ARC. Now I'm working on the final one, this final one is the revisiting of working class. And I struggled with it because I'd had such a clear idea for the first one. I knew what I needed to cover, because it was important to me, and it was important to the community. And it was something worth celebrating, but also something that needed to be brought to the attention of other people, because we were losing these libraries. And we were losing these elements of location that helped our community to learn and be educated, and also come together and gather in a space.

And so I've spent ages mind mapping and planning and trying to understand what is the most important thing to cover, because I want to create something that's worth seeing, and that's important to be seen. But I also don't want to force it. I don't want to make something that covers the theme of working class for the sake of covering the theme of working class, because it's more than just a label that has been placed on us or that we have placed on ourselves. It is a way that we have lived, and an experience that we have had. And so I started to look around and analyse what the label meant.

When I looked up the exact definition of working class, it was shown as someone who works in an unskilled or semi unskilled profession, and the skill level of a job was put down to a mix of how much money that job earned and whether you could train for that job within a month. Now I can't tell you how much anger I felt at analysing this definition. And I don't swear on this podcast. But trust me, I was swearing when I was talking about it originally, because every job on the list of unskilled and semi unskilled, required a skill. All of them required work, they required something to learn, and, ultimately, is not something that just anyone could pick up and do, even if they think they could.

So let's start with cleaner slash janitor on the list of unskilled jobs. I remember the first time I had to do cleaning work. I was brought into the cupboard by another more experienced member of staff, and she said to me, don't put those two chemicals next to each other. If you mix them together, there will be a fire and they might explode. Can you really tell me that a profession is unskilled, if someone has to learn how chemical reactions work? If someone has to be able to understand what will and won't cause fire? What is the best thing for cleaning this surface? And that surface? What will cause stains? What will damage a surface permanently and make it dangerous to walk on? If you have to learn those things, if you have to be able to understand chemical compositions, can it really be an unskilled job?

Another one in the list of unskilled jobs is sewing machine operator. If any of you have operated a sewing machine, you know that that's not an easy task, that that's not something that you learn overnight. It's not something that you just look at a machine and you understand what all the buttons do, and you understand what kind of stitch will be the best for this particular fabric. And what kind of stitch will work for this particular design. Putting together clothing and bags and objects that are made out of fabric is not an easy or simple task. Someone operating a sewing machine is not unskilled. They are incredibly skilled.

And as we move on to the semi unskilled in this list, there is taxi driver. Firstly, you have to be able to drive. How is driving in itself not a skill? And you dig into this further, and taxi drivers for the most part have to be able to know and navigate the entire location of a town or a city or a region. They basically have to make their head a map. Have it all built in so that when you say, oh, I need to go to number 10 on this street, that they can vaguely go, actually, you know, I know where that is. And I can take you there. And I know how much this will cost. Can you tell me that that is unskilled? Because I couldn't tell you that was unskilled.

Another one in the semi unskilled list is fisherman. Now, I've been spending a lot of time around Redcar and Saltburn. And I've learned a lot about the fishing industry and the way that it used to work in recent years. In fact, there's an exhibition in Redcar Palace right now, and will still be at the time of releasing this podcast, that celebrates the history of fishing and fishermen within Redcar. Nothing about it is unskilled.

So now, with this newly lit anger, I am ready to tackle the theme of working class yet again, and try and celebrate some of these 'unskilled' jobs that take incredible work and dedication. Try and celebrate the people that do these jobs and the locations around the North East in which they're done. I'm still working on the imagery, but it won't be long until it's completed. And by the time you're listening to this podcast episode, it will be completed and it may even be being put up in the space.

This final exhibition is going to have an opening evening. And it's going to have 15 different featured artists all celebrating their own working class-ness. And the different memories and histories and beliefs they have around this theme. Before I've even seen the work that is going to be part of this, I'm already incredibly proud of everything that's going towards it.

And so that brings us to an end. The exhibitions that have been part of the Change of Perspective project are not only a collection of visual artworks, but also research and stories and in depth histories into what makes us Northern, and what forms a northern identity.

I am so thankful to everyone who works at ARC for helping to make this happen. In particular, Chloe, Louise and Patrick, who have done a phenomenal amount of work to put all of this together, and all



of the people who have been featured on the podcast and helped to look at the formation of our northern creative culture and how different things are put together.

Thank you so much everybody for listening. This has been A Change of Perspective. I am your host, Lizzie Lovejoy. Have an incredible 2022.