

Portraits Untold – Video Transcript

Artist: Tanya Raabe-Webber

Sitter: John Akomfrah

Venue: Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Date Saturday 16th July 2016

Ambitious live portrait project with artist Tanya Raabe-Webber, exploring and celebrating our common humanity – the beauty and strength of humanity lies in the diversity of its people.

This stream features artist and filmmaker John Akomfrah - more information can be found at - <http://portraitsuntold.co.uk/sittings...>

This video stream was filmed at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG) on Saturday 16th July 2016.

The second sitting will feature Dame Evelyn Glennie at the National Portrait Gallery on Friday 22nd July 2016 - more information can be found at <http://portraitsuntold.co.uk/sittings...>

Take part by contributing your drawing via Facebook, twitter and Instagram and tagging [#PortraitsUntold](#)

<http://portraitsuntold.co.uk/>

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Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

[#PortraitsUntold](#)

[Transcript Starts]

Tom Dipple, BMAG: Thank you for coming

Tom Dipple, BMAG: I'm a learning manager for the museum.

Tom Dipple, BMAG: Welcome to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

Tom Dipple, BMAG: Birmingham Museum's trust is proud to be hosting Portraits Untold.

Tom Dipple, BMAG: We are honoured and excited

Tom Dipple, BMAG: The project aims are similar to our own

Tom Dipple, BMAG: We hope to grow diverse audiences

Tom Dipple, BMAG: and make Birmingham a focus for contemporary art.

Tom Dipple, BMAG: By welcoming artists and others, we can promote diversity and culture of Birmingham

Mandy, Project Producer: Thank you to BMAG for hosting our first Portraits Untold project

Mandy, Project Producer: While this is national, the partners are midlands based,

Mandy, Project Producer: Thanks to Arts Council, for funding and officers' help.

Mandy, Project Producer: The project is collaborative, with venues, University of Birmingham research

Mandy, Project Producer: The Big Draw is involved, supporting the project.

Mandy, Project Producer: Thank you to technicians, Hache&Twine! :-)

Mandy, Project Producer: This project aims to make audience participation as easy as possible.

Mandy, Project Producer: Instructions for this are on the banners and it's also on the website.

Mandy, Project Producer: We have Lane Whitiker, BSL interpreter.

Mandy, Project Producer: Live captioning too! :-)

Mandy, Project Producer: Tanya would like you to create line drawings of what you see and hear.

Mandy, Project Producer: You can do this with material provided

Mandy, Project Producer: You can also do this through digital drawing.

Mandy, Project Producer: The instructions are on the banners but that's through the app programs you can download

Mandy, Project Producer: send through using hashtag #PortraitsUntold.

Mandy, Project Producer: You can join in the conversation, online, using that hashtag.

Mandy, Project Producer: The audience here, it's free flow, but use the mic.

Mandy, Project Producer: Breaks will happen but we're through until late afternoon

Mandy, Project Producer: When we wanted to find sitters, we wanted to link with Tanya's aims

Mandy, Project Producer: Also who were connected to the locations

Mandy, Project Producer: John Akomfrah was a perfect choice for Birmingham through his extensive work in the area

Mandy, Project Producer: His work fuses issues, fiction and mythology.

Mandy, Project Producer: This will be a fantastic day

Mandy, Project Producer: To engage with the dialogue

Mandy, Project Producer: audience is part of that as conversation and artists

Mandy, Project Producer: I'll hand over to Tanya!

John: I'm nervous

Tanya: This is the first time we've met

Tanya: Crazy lives

Tanya: The first time we've met

Tanya: I'm going to start putting some paints out.

Tanya: Mandy's just told us about who you are

Tanya: Can you give us more of a story?

John: Happy to try

John: I suppose one way of start is why I said yes.

John: Three reasons

John: One is you

Tanya: Me!

John: I was always intrigued how sitter and painter relationship

John: Second is to do with the location.

John: It's interesting because I've spent a lot of time in this city

John: Almost 30 years

John: I spent that time making portraits of this place

John: It seemed appropriate that if I had one of me, it should be in Birmingham

John: For the third reason, Mandy said that she was keen on me doing it because it was about trying to encourage dialogue around identity

John: I thought I'd come see how this goes

John: If you can't hear me, I'll shout!

Tanya: The sound in here is strange

John: What can I tell you about myself?

John: In the 70s, I went to a number of FE colleges in London

John: Between 76 and 79

John: In that time, I met a range of people who were exactly like, me:

John: Young, black and trying to figure out what to do with their lives, in London initially.

John: We started a series of conversations then which led us to having a film club, an art club

John: Most of us ended up in the 80s in the same uni on the south coast

John: I left Portsmouth in 82

John: We wanted to set up an arts group

John: We set it up as soon as we left in 82

John: That group worked for about 18 years

John: Like all groups, it went the way of all flesh

John: After 15 years we felt we had done enough

John: Time to shut shop!

John: That's pretty much most of my first 20 years!

John: It was a collective.

John: We tried as much as possible to be involved in everything together

John: We wrote together and tried to make sure that everyone had the ability to use a camera or edit or write a script

John: In that way we worked between 82 and 97

John: Enough?

Tanya: Tell me about your relationship with Birmingham. What draws you back?

John: I formed relationships and they are still strong.

John: My best friend is from Birmingham, now lives in South Africa

John: I told him about this and he reminded me of what connected me, him and the city.

John: I started to come because of the art scene

John: I started to work part programming that festival with him.

John: Our strand was called Third Focus about black, Indian and SE Asian film.

John: That's why I came

John: What solidified that was the disturbances in 85

John: I get a call, Get down here!

John: If you are a film maker, something is happening and we think you should document it

John: Came in Sept 85 at the height of the riots and stayed a month, interviewing, filming

John: No clear idea

John: If you had said we would have made a film, I would have laughed

John: We saw our selves as documenting

John: By Jan 86, it felt to me then that what we had started to collect had a role to play

Sorry small hitch there...

John: I've done four projects now since 86

John: I was asked by an Arts Council Made in Britain project

John: Take an artist and drop you in an archive

John: From that you would create something out of it

John: I was approached by them and I just remember during the research for Handsworth Songs, we saw so many programmes and films that just didn't make it there.

John: Some stuck

John: So my suggestion to the initiative is that they allowed us to make something about labour and migration to Birmingham in the 60s

John: As it started, it got bigger

John: It was a single screen piece which I had premiered at the Public in West Brom.

John: When I finished, this is great but we could go bigger with it.

John: Nemsine[?] Greek goddess of memory

John: I could see it in the cinema

John: We started straight away to do that. That became a project called the Nine Muses

John: It used the material but added to it

John: That went to Sundance

John: It went all over the world

John: What else? Errr

John: A year and half after that, the next piece, the Unfinished Conversation.

Tanya: This is the piece that brought me to you.

Tanya: I was working with a company called Fittings Multimedia

Tanya: They saw that piece and they did one around a person who was the first black person to invent tax dance

Tanya: It came here

Tanya: They couldn't find much info about him.

Tanya: So they created this company to make a show around Jibe[?]

Tanya: I think you met 'sticks man'

John: Yes!

Tanya: From that came Missing which was because we couldn't find the info

Tanya: We looked at missing children

Tanya: It was a schools project

Tanya: They went to schools and used the theme of missing various groups created their own piece

Tanya: Not about missing itself but the concept and young people

John: Where was the Jube one shown?

Tanya: Kendal

Tanya: Gary Robson, if he's out there, he'll know

John: Tweet us Gary!

John: The Unfinished Conversation, as I said, wasn't about Birmingham but ended up being so

John: The figure at the heart of it, Stewart Hall.

John: He came in 51 as a Rhodes Scholar, moved to London, joined magazines and left groups and helped to set up many groups, eg. New Left Review

John: He got a job in 64 to set up the first centre for contemporary culture to Birmingham and stayed till 78

John: A lot of what he ended up doing for film and TV were on Birmingham subjects

John: I started off doing it about him and ended back in Birmingham

John: At the end, the idea of doing something just for the gallery seemed not enough

Tanya: No

John: So I did a single screen version of that from BBC footage

John: So I ended up with the fourth Birmingham project over 20 years!

John: I've been coming and going here for a long time

John: I'm very happy to be here with you

John: How you doing?!

John: What are you doing? I can't see

Tanya: I'm sketching you in paint

Tanya: I'm trying to capture your physicality

John: Am I allowed a look?

John: That's fast

John: Blimey

John: Really good!

John: Is that paint

Tanya: It's paint

Tanya: I have two colours on the palette

Tanya: I've got hookers green and Prussian blue

Tanya: I don't mix them, because I want to see both

Tanya: Sometimes I want water on the brush but I want little lines, not thick

Tanya: It's very sketchy

Tanya: You're very animated

Tanya: It's great

Tanya: I shall pull that in later

John: Why those colours

Tanya: I usually have hooker green I can get nearly a black line or water it down and get a green

Tanya: The blue is making the green darker

John: Paint away

John: What are you lot doing?!

John: Wow!

John: [To the audience]

Tanya: Any coming through on the stream?

Tanya: You probably look a bit foreshortened but that's okay

Tanya: It's kind of looking like you

Tanya: You can have a look

John: No, I want the surprise

John: Does anyone have any questions?

Audience: Can you talk about Vertigo Sea?

John: Yes, what can I tell you?

Tanya: What about the aesthetics

John: The single most important reason for Vertigo is because for as long as I can remember I've wanted to do something about Whaling

John: If you remember, I have used whale sound. Their culture

John: Ever since I read Heathcoat Williams, Whale Nation

John: What was it?

John: Poetry?

John: Manifesto?

John: Lament?

John: But you knew it was extraordinary.

John: It's like most of the stuff I do, long gestating periods

John: You have an idea and try and figure out what to do

John: Sometimes for up to a decade

John: Vertigo Sea had a long gestation!

John: 15 Years!

John: I wanted to see it talking to something else.

John: So we left it

John: I remember going back to Moby Dick

John: One of my favourite books

John: You are forced to read it, which is a terrible thing at school

John: Loads of it makes no sense

John: But I just want a story!

John: Then bits haunted me so I went back

John: Lo and behold. There is a story!

John: About the forming of a multicultural community

John: That is taken to sea by Ahab. Most meet their end in that space.

John: It felt relevant, him

John: Many of the tech figures now

John: Reading about Steve Jobs!

John: Many of the people we celebrate now, are like him

John: I thought it could be updated now

John: The thing that clicked for me was the migrations across the Med that started in 2007

John: Hundreds very quickly were starting to die, drowning at sea

John: Something in that story reawakened other drowning stories

John: In Chile, the Turner Painting came to mind

John: Events of drowning at sea could be pulled together

John: That's the germination of Vertigo Sea

John: I don't have a plan

John: I have a broad sketch of what I want to do

John: A bit like what Tanya's doing now

Tanya: Do you physically sketch?

John: : Lines of thought, indications of possible pathways

John: : Colour coding

John: : I can see quickly what the train of thought is

John: :

Tanya: : Do others work with that too?

John: When you say you're doing something new...

John: What's it about?!

John: I can't tell you.

John: It's what we do together

John: So we'll have meetings, bring stuff, thoughts on costume, ambience

John: You never know

John: Sometimes it could be a costume which bring it together

John: I said to Jackie, and [?Equiano]. He brought it to attention, the drownings.

John: She said, I see him in a red jacket.

John: That made stuff click

John: What makes the ideas cohere could be anything

John: Music, a location...

John: Then you think, Ah, that's what we're doing

John: With Vertigo, it had also this other structure that a lot of the works do

John: They start open ended

John: I knew it would be three screens and 45 mins long ish.

John: So you know you need to generate 75 mins of material across three screens.

John: If it's 40 mins, 180 mins

John: That's a lot of stuff.

John: My trick is to keep it openened

John: I figure it out later

John: Because of the triptych nature, you can have a variety and things don't have to agree

John: There does not have to be harmony but they have to sit beside each other

John: My job is to make them work together

John: To have a conversation that's productive.

John: There's a moment always when my arrogance and my desire to see everything come together starts to fail me

John: The material starts to reject this imposition

John: It says i'm about slavery. I don't want to be with migrants

John: You say, as long as you agree to be in the same project, you don't have to get on.

John: I'll stick the enslaved Africans at the top and the migrants somewhere else

John: A lot is about choreographing

John: They don't always agree

John: The trick is to admit you are being over zealous, over manipulative

John: Stuff doesn't have to have a conversation even if in the same space

John: Just whilst we're on Vertigo, I don't really care an awful lot about whether the pieces work or not

John: Work is what somebody else brings to them

John: My job is not about working out if this thing works

John: My job is about the full implications. Have they been realised?

John: That doesn't make it good necessarily

John: But at least you can sit easy

John: I don't have a brief. This is not an adaptation. This is an open-ended project

John: At some point you have to have a sense of where you think you've done it

John: It could go on forever!

John: If you concentrate on if it's working, then you are on a slippery slope

John: You can always go on

John: It's never finished

John: I would usually say, these are the elements. I want to do something about the Vietnamese Boat People, the Ark, Whaling, migration, perils

John: At some point you have to say have you said it then?

John: Have you made progress on that?

John: If the answer is yes, then it's done,

John: Then you down tools!

John: If you haven't answered yes, you have to carry on

John: With the Unfinished Conversation, at a certain moment, this really could go on for two hours

John: I got to 40 mins and we hadn't left 68!

John: This could go on forever

John: I think there was a cut that was two and a half hours long!

John: That became the object

John: The object then was find a reason for having it shorter!

John: That would be the end if I could find a reason

John: So here's this guy and at some point, he says, I realise that I was black, because I'd been struggling with this colour/identity questions

John: After black power, civil rights, he thought, I'm black. Right. That's it.

John: If you are teasing out the implications of identity because a figure says history and psyche meets,

John: the minute he says my identity was formed when I 'became' black...

John: We'll end it there!

John: The arbitrary can be elevated to a narrative principle

John: They don't have to accept it, but if they see it, people will go along with it, grudgingly or not.

John: Same with Vertigo

Tanya: I'm just thinking about the point of having the art with the cultural identity in art galleries

Tanya: Your first one put you in the gallery scene.

John: Earlier than that

Tanya: Compare that with then, today

John: Today is much, much better than yesterday without question

Tanya: The arguments we have for it be in contemporary art spaces

John: I guarantee after today there will be loads of Tanya's

John: your charisma will mean other Tanya's will be encouraged

John: When we had our first conference, there were 50 people there, now!

Tanya: Disability art has stayed closed, but started at the same time

Tanya: The movement empowered people and created the laws but stayed closed in the art.

Audience: You started as a studio-based artist

Audience: I'm interested in you working in the public and why

Audience: Why and how did you prepare yourself?

Audience: How do you feel about in terms of people looking over your shoulder?

Audience: Can you share that or talk it through?

Tanya: I have a studio in the house

Tanya: I've always been interested in the performative element of creating a portrait

Tanya: Bringing the art of creating a portrait in a very public way creates a space for me to stare on my terms, not on there's

Tanya: That's one reason

Tanya: I come from a very colourful background

Tanya: My parents were in the circus.

Tanya: My mum a ballet dancer and my dad an animal trainer

Tanya: I wanted to bring that through into the visual artwork that I make

Tanya: I'm also interested in other people's creative responses

Tanya: I want to create a truly collaborative thing, everybody comes together

Tanya: Also demystifying the art of portraiture

Tanya: Usually between two in a studio

Tanya: It's opening that up

Tanya: I want to celebrate the art of diversity in its widest theme

Tanya: I consider myself as an artist of diversity as well

Tanya: I was just thinking, my relationship with the West Midlands when I left an old disabled boarding school and I came to Coventry to a disability FE college

Tanya: That was the beginning of my political awareness

Tanya: A lot of people who are involved with the disability movement came out of that college

John: That's what I was going to talk about!

Tanya: We'll carry that on into the next session

John: I'm fascinated to hear from you and how by what means you arrived at say, I'm a disability artist. What's your route?

Tanya: I think we could talk about that and learn from each other

Tanya: We will, in the next session.

We will be back at 1:00

Any problems with uploading pics here, see one of the tech staff and they can do that for you.

Thank you and see you back at 1:00 PM!

We will be back soon!

Any minute now!

John and Tanya are just getting their microphones one.

People are uploading pics!

Mandy: Welcome back.

Mandy: Part 2 of Portraits Untold. We are running until 2:30, then a break and then straight through until 5:00

Mandy: Comments, drawings, images send to hashtag PortraitsUntold

Tanya: Lovely lunch! Energise and ready?

John: I am

John: I said I wanted to talk to you about how you got into this

John: I hadn't really explored it enough in the works we've done

John: I would say that growing up in the 70s, as a young person of colour

John: felt a bit like living with shame

John: An unspecified shame

John: I wondered what you would describe your childhood as?

John: Growing up was I went to a boarding school full of disabled kids. Huge spectrum.

John: I spent majority of my time in this institution, bubble

John: When I did go home, it was often quite an alien place

John: Quite isolating for me because I didn't have friends, I relied on my sister and my parents

Tanya: I guess I didn't have much control

Tanya: Apologies, those last few comments were Tanya...

Tanya: My own identity was very much driven by my school days

Tanya: My home in effect, my school.

Tanya: It was 1969 when I first went there. When I was 4

Tanya: I was a little, little person

Tanya: That whole system really created my identity

John: I'm a decade older than you

John: Late 60s I would have been a 10 year old making my way in the world

John: For me it was the exact opposite

John: The outside of school, where the terrifying place was

John: The home was a haven, safety

John: That doesn't change until the same period I began to explore identity, 16, 17

John: Now I need to leave home so I can discover...

John: From then, I would find things to identify from the outside more than home

John: Same for you? A growing sense of who you were

Tanya: Brought up with other disabled people, that was the basis for my structures really.

John: For you that would be a good thing

Tanya: You can look the other way where you are taken away from your home.

Tanya: Like a lot of children were.

John: Another way of coming at this is about power

Tanya: Yes.

John: What I'm saying is when I was younger, between 7 and 14, 15, domestic spaces, spaces where I had my family with me were empowering

John: Then you feel restricted a bit

John: I need a bit more of an outside influence

John: That would be more empowering

John: From 15, outside was more empowering

John: Bit sad being at home at 15!

John: Everyone else is going out!

John: If you were at home, something sad about you! You need to get a sense of who you are then

Tanya: 17, after school, I went to another institution

John: Interesting

Tanya: This was like an awakening

John: Tell me why

Tanya: This was where disability politics took shape

Tanya: Disabled people were beginning to shout about their rights

Tanya: They weren't able to do what others could do

Tanya: That going out and having access to real, proper education

John: Were you shouting at the school?

Tanya: At the world

Tanya: Born out of this college there's been a lot of disabled people like...

John: Activists

Tanya: Activists who have gone on to create disability discrimination acts!

Tanya: From that, chaining yourself to buses!

John: At 17, what form did activism take?

Tanya: It was us coming together and sharing experiences

Tanya: Then deciding how we were going to change the world

John: When I talk about me, that's me too.

Tanya: It was a bit delayed though. You leave college and go home and get stuck a bit.

Tanya: That might not have happened if we'd had social media!

Sorry for slight hitch there - back captioning!

Tanya: Those individuals who were at the college became artists and became disabled artists and used their art to form and develop activism.

John: Like finding areas of overlap in our lives

John: When I was eight or nine, mum used to work so we were looked after by our white nextdoor neighbor.

John: This was when black power was coming out

John: She didn't like 'black'

John: She liked to call us coloured

John: We had to fight to get her to call us black

John: Were there turning points where you wanted to name yourself in that scene?

Tanya: People today you find the term... People think of it as labeling.

Tanya: For me that's not a label; it's a cultural identity

Tanya: You have to explain that.

John: You're comfortable with disabled?

Tanya: A disabled person not a person with disabilities

John: Unpack that? The distinction

Tanya: If I call myself a person 'with' disabilities, it's not cultural identity. It's the medical model. You need to be fixed

Tanya: If I'm a disabled person, is a label that we fought for

John: Self definition

Tanya: This is where anti discrimination came in from. The reason why

Tanya: That's when we chained ourselves to buses.

Tanya: I never did!

Tanya: I did one demo at Leeds City Council. We were demonstrating against something that Harriet Harman was doing.

Tanya: Can't remember.

John: Something objectionable probably!

John: Where's the art come in then?

Tanya: I always wanted to paint.

Tanya: I'm not a portrait artist. I'm a painter of people.

Tanya: Since a child, painting is what I need to do as a person, within me.

Tanya: I went to uni and did a degree in graphic design.

John: Wow!

Tanya: Yeah!

Tanya: Spent my 3 years in illustration department painting self portraits.

Tanya: Not in a reality way

Tanya: About situations and how I fitted in the world

Tanya: I'd have paintings called The Piggy Back

Tanya: My friends used to carry me around on their back.

Tanya: I did these paintings and put myself in them.

Tanya: My tutors said, you don't want to be painting wheelchairs and crutches!

Tanya: That means I can't paint myself and the world around me!

Tanya: I'm going to do some research, so I sent a questionnaire out to mainstream art organisations and disability arts organisations.

Tanya: This letter was questioning...

Tanya: One said, I'm a Disabled artist will you exhibit my work?

Tanya: The other, I'm an artist...

Tanya: I sent these to disability and mainstream organisations.

Tanya: The responses, the disability arts one said they were interested

Tanya: This was late 70s when disability art was growing.

Tanya: They were interested when I said I was disabled but not when I said I was an artist

Tanya: The others not interested either way!

John: Charming!

Tanya: So where do I fit?!

Tanya: A lot was about body and confrontational imagery and the nude figure and all its twists and forms

Tanya: At the time it was not being exhibited.

Tanya: Too much breast!

John: Too much info!

Tanya: So what camp?

Tanya: What path?

Tanya: I chose the disability arts path

Tanya: At least they're interested!

Tanya: I wonder if you did that today, what would you get from that today?

John: As you were speaking I was thinking about this tension

John: I suppose part of art making if you are from a minority...

John: So if you remember, I was talking about going to this conference of black artists who wanted to make black art in 82

John: 70% of people of being happy to be called black artists

John: 25% really hated the idea. They wanted to be called artists

John: 5% didn't care!

John: That tension is still with us

John: We have the same conversation today!

Tanya: We have the same as well

Tanya: There are artists who are disabled out there who don't want to be anything to do with being a disabled artist

Tanya: Is the context of their work around that experience?

John: Sometimes it's not.

Tanya: It's a choice

John: Do you feel part of a movement?

John: Is it art, political, cultural?

Tanya: All at the same time.

John: Do you identify with disability art or...

Tanya: It's complex!

John: In the morning I'm...!

Tanya: It's what fight I have at that time.

John: I'd go along with that

John: It does matter more I think to me now that I'm seen to be part of a movement that's created people interested working with images.

John: That's important to me

John: You don't want to be pushed to make a choice about any facet re your identity.

John: If pushed, I'd rather be an artist film maker

John: I wouldn't have said that when I was younger

Tanya: Yes, that does come with an age thing

Tanya: I would go the same route

Tanya: Sometimes I'm a disabled artist, sometimes and artist, sometimes bother

John: Interesting

John: Can I take you on a connected journey?

John: It's to do with that painting behind you.

Tanya: The middle one?

John: That's by an artist by [Lodsdale?]

John: What struck me is it's about the St Marco Piazza Venice.

John: In the middle, they look Asian or North African.

John: Looking at it now, this is interesting. That IS what St Marco looks like now

John: But more Senegalese than Asian people

John: That is the kind of painting I saw a lot of growing up.

John: I grew up close to the Tate. I'd go there every other Saturday.

John: The paintings included figures I could recognise.

John: After a while, you started to think, okay, I can see lots of paintings where people of colour are subjects, but not where the painter is a person of colour.

John: Slow realisation of this

John: If a resolution to do anything, it would have been with that.

John: I loved the art world and image making

John: This thing that I loved didn't have enough of people like me doing it

John: Do you have those sorts of things about the art world as well?

John: I see enough of me but not of 'me' making it.

Tanya: Totally!

Tanya: I'm always looking for the artist I can relate to as an artist, as a disabled artist.

Tanya: Always looking for that.

Tanya: The references you get are when artists get old, like Matisse

John: In a bed

Tanya: In a bed.

Tanya: That then becomes incapacitating

Tanya: Freda Carlo... The biggest in history of art.

John: When did you find out about Freda and disability?

Tanya: At uni, at Leeds

John: Did she become a model for you?

Tanya: Totally.

Tanya: As I get older as a painter, I think about the different ways I will need to paint.

Tanya: I don't want images of me that are incapacitating!

Audience: To John: Your work, where you've filmed have you been restricted?

Audience: When you've had a film out, has it been banned?

Tanya: Oh, that's an interesting one!

Tanya: I've got a banned story!

John: You go first

Tanya: I've got two!

John: I need to think about mine

Tanya: We were talking about the 80s and when my work was just coming on the scene, I took it to a charity that had a gallery shop, which was in London.

Tanya: I showed them three pieces and they refused one

Tanya: A pregnant woman in a wheelchair in fishnets

Tanya: They thought it too titillating!

Tanya: The second, much later on.

Tanya: This was part of a project that was called Who's Who and it was portraits of disabled artists from the disability arts movement.

Tanya: One was of Matt Fraser.

Tanya: Very popular, on TV, tall with short arms

Tanya: He was fully nude but this was a line drawing but this gallery didn't want to show this.

John: When was this?

Tanya: Second one was probably about 7 years ago.

Tanya: So I hand it to you for your story!

John: Oh...

John: In a way I don't have anything as explicit as that!

John: Partly because when you're making stuff, there are very clear guidelines and in a way you're aware fairly quickly about when you're outside of that space.

John: Early on we learned about film classification.

John: Once you're beyond that, that's is.

John:

John: I remember [Sado? Salo?]

John: It was pretty gross!

John: The only way you could watch it was to join the ICA or The Triangle as a private member.

John: Not had anything like that

John: You learn very early on that there are things you can't do.

John: I remember going to Ghana

John: For a film about [Encruma?]

John: He led the country to independence

John: But when we got there, films about him were still banned

John: What film makers end up doing is finding ways to avoid the traps, the preset traps.

John: We just made a more allegorical film. His name not mentioned once. If you watch the film Testament, you know it's about him!

John: Since 87 I've learned how to avoid falling into the banning traps

John: When you make documentaries, half of it is about that.

John: When you go to interview someone, there's a lot they don't want to say

John: You can feel a kind of censoring mechanism at work

John: Part of documentary makers' skills is to enable the unspoken to become said

John: How to make the interview ambience, environment and climate so they don't feel they will be injured

John: We're going for something else now?

Tanya: Do you want to see how it's going?

John: My word!

Tanya: I'm going to draw the audience!

John: I might take a picture of them.

John: We can double whammy them!

Tanya: How's the audience out there?!

Tanya: Yorkshire! Hello Yorkshire!

Tanya: We're coming up there soon!

Tanya: Tanya is drawing the audience.

Audience: When you are in the arts, this is a question for you, as a black man...

John: That's definitely for me then!

John: We had a go at this earlier.

John: I've struggled a lot to gain a certain kind of presence, identity

John: What's part of that is that I'm black, of African decent. 2 I'm a man

John: There are other artists of colour who haven't had to go through that and feel that's central to how they define their practice.

John: My son is trying to find another way of coming at it.

John: Largely to avoid being like me!

John: I don't consider it to be an insult or problem to be called a black artist.

John: Some do.

John: Fine.

John: But we've come far enough to have different ways of defining ourselves.

John: No one catch-all phrase is necessary.

Audience: Does anyone else want to ask anything?

John: It doesn't have to be anything grand

Tanya: Questions from the lives stream? [Not yet]

Audience: If you had the 20-year-old you sitting opposite now, what advice would you give him?

John: I couldn't sleep yesterday and ended up the Shawshank Redeption

John: The final parole...

John: If the 20-year-old was here, I'd say even more mistakes

John: Make as many as you can because actually in aesthetic terms, that is what you will define you.

Tanya: Never use a rubber!

John: Just plough through the mistakes

John: What you don't want is spending your formative years trying to be someone else and then you think, what was that about? What was I doing that for?

John: A lot of the time what seems a mistake one day becomes quite interesting...

John: As part of this collective, we used to do a lot of tapes, slides, experimental pieces we'd shelve, just for research.

John: You occasionally get one out and you think... mistakes!

John: But more, they tell me more about what we were thinking that anything more refined wouldn't have.

John: Make mistakes, worry about it afterwards.

John: In the work!

John: It just struck me literally as I was watching him make that speech.

John: If you are doing things to land you in prison... !

John: Otherwise, make mistakes. How else can you grow?

John: I'm a crap painter so I need to understand what you're doing.

Tanya: I'm doing drawing of the audience because I want them in the painting.

Tanya: I'm doing them on the iPad.

Tanya: Later I'll reposition them and draw them in with a thin brush

Tanya: Draw them and put them in there.

Tanya: We're going to do something else in a minute.

Tanya: Now we're going to look at the drawings people have been sending us. The portraits of you!

John: Wow!

Tanya: Yeah?

John: Amazing

Tanya: I'm going to put them in the program in a minute

John: It's great!

Tanya: That one.

Tanya: That one's from social media

John: People are sending these in?

Audience: Sending them in.

Audience:

Audience: A question from Philip Higman on live stream...

Audience: A question about restrictions...

John: One of the reasons we set up our collective was because we were keen to not do things we weren't interested in or wanted to do

John: There are easier ways of making stuff

John: Go work for the BBC if all you want to do is make a film!

John: So over the years, a certain amount of self-censoring has gone on.

John: For good and bad

John: If I say I want to say I want to work on a project about humpback whaling in the 18th, 19th century then I can do that

John: Nothing in that space is going to be off limits

John: So I'm not sure now I take things out because they offend...

John: I don't shoot them in the first place

John: Once you're in the space it feels honest to explore.

John: I don't block and block things off

John: Hope that answers the question

John: Come back to me if you want!

Tanya: I'm getting there!

John: I'll tell you what's interesting

John: Yes, you go to college and decide not to be a painter.

John: A good choice for me

John: You can let things go for a while. You're just looking at options...

Tanya: Kind of story telling

Tanya: In my head, I'm thinking, how is that going to work?

Tanya: I like that spontaneity

Tanya: I never plan too much in advance

Tanya: I have a vague idea...

Tanya: Saying that, it probably is more planned than I think it is

John: I think that's true of what I do

John: Over the years what's helped

John: Just when I'm about to lose my nerve, I go and listen to a piece of music.

John: Something by Coltrane. Thank you. Got it!

John: Being Brechtian here - they are telling us to shut up!

John: You listen to these pieces of music.

John: Whoever it is.

John: You listen to this and you think, wow!

John: These are usually teetering on the edge of nonsense but they salvage it.

John: Take risks. You'll be fine.

John: That's not me!

John: What is that!

John: Is that meant to be me?

Tanya: No!

John: No clothes on

Tanya: It said, work it out in a minute

Tanya: I'll figure it out in the break.

Tanya: Stupid machine. Five minutes!

John: So what would you then do with these?

Tanya: These drawings?

Tanya: I'm going to project them on to here.

Tanya: An example, without doing too much damage.

Tanya: I'm going to paint underneath then when we get rid of that drawing there's an impression of that drawing underneath.

John: The choices, which will work.

Tanya: I'll put your arms in through photographs. It's too quick for me to capture that.

John: I hadn't realised I was armless!

Audience: Susanne says, it's been two-way. What have you learned so far from each other?

Tanya: I have learned...!

John: I've learned it's best to wait to the end to answer that!

Tanya: We will see you in half an hour, Three o'clock.

Tanya: We'll think about that question over our break and will come back to you with an answer. After I've worked out how to do this!

Audience: Applause

Back in a bit. Join us again around 3:00 to see more, hear more and see where things get to with this first Portraits Unlimited event!

Back soon. John and Tanya are just getting organised. Lots of questions from social media questions coming up!

Mandy: Welcome back!

Mandy: We are using hashtag PortraitsUntold so messages, pics to that.

Mandy: Thank you again to BMAG

Mandy: Friday coming, we're at the National Portrait Gallery. Join us again then.

Mandy: Thank you to The Big Draw. They are partners in this project.

Mandy: Now for social media questions

Audience: Does John feel self conscious sat there or enjoying it?

John: What do you think?!

John: A mixture of both. A bit self conscious. I'm also enjoying it.

John: I'm enjoying figuring out where it's going. I'm enjoying the process.

John: It's not what I thought it would be.

John: Not so much for me; for Tanya.

John: Talking to me and doing her work. Engaging with me and the canvas. That's the main surprise.

Tanya: For Tanya. What advice would you give to young disabled people to get into the arts industry, become an artist?

Audience: That one from social media.

Tanya: To find subject and form and never give up the dream. Find the people too.

Audience: What do you look for in a subject?

Tanya: When I pick a subject I think about my connection with that subject.

Tanya: I have to build a relationship with that person.

Tanya: I need to do the research.

Tanya: I'm looking for people who have achieved perceived great things.

Tanya: I'm looking for humanity within that person.

Audience: For John?

John: I don't do stuff about which I know a lot about.

John: There has to be something to discover.

John: I have to feel as if I can bring something to it.

John: There have been films I've thought about that I've given to other people to make or do

John: I didn't feel as if I would do it justice.

John: I didn't have connections with it.

John: I need to feel as if I was of value.

John: Slightly arrogant!

Audience: Having never worked together feel that you've taken away from the experience today, the adventure?

John: I suppose really important things... One is what an exercise in endurance, what Tanya does, really is

John: Standing for an hour and a half, sessions of three...

John: If you are working and engaging in discourse with someone, trying to keep what you are doing open to onlookers, viewers, so I've learned a lot more about how much effort it involves for her.

John: A little bit of the mystery...

John: I went to art college but never thought I was up to the task of painting.

John: I stay away!

John: Now I know I've made the right choice.

John: How much humanity and empathy is involved in what she does.

John: I was surprised how quickly we struck up a rapport.

John: We never met before today.

John: I will continue to learn more!

Audience: Tanya?

Tanya: I have taken away learning about John's artistic process.

Tanya: How that drives him to create the work he does

Tanya: I'm really fascinated by the connection that you've got with Birmingham.

Tanya: All the connections we've made today

Tanya: Even though we are two very different people from very different cultures.

Tanya: We've come together today and found a great understanding of each other.

Audience: You've both talked about humanity. One of the aims is to explore that.

Audience: John, what does humanity look like?

Audience: With all your work over the years...

John: I think some words are in a way grandiose and large and cumbersome.

John: Sometimes you need to break them down a little bit.

John: Tanya and I met this morning and as we start to talk, it became clear, to me and her I'm sure too, that even though we come from different worlds, the areas of overlap are much more pronounced than one would believe.

John: That for me is the essence of any discussions around questions of the human.

John: It has to start with the recognition that, yes, people have differences, but often times there's a lot that defines them together.

John: We've grown up with pretty much the same sets of questions

John: Adapting answers in similar ways

John: That is the language of humanity

John: We don't need it in UN speak!

John: Sometimes it's recognising you grew up, adapted to the world in the same way

John: That's the core of a language and discourse of humanity.

Audience: As a disabled person I've found it hard to feel comfortable in my own skin. How long did it take you? Are you comfortable in your own skin? To John.

John: I'm happy to hear they are happy where they are now.

John: I can't say that with certainty about myself.

John: Part of the reason for the work is to create spaces of comfort.

John: That is ongoing.

John: Because you change

John: You become different people as you 'age'.

John: You are always trying to find spaces of comfort in your developing...

Audience: Do you feel comfortable with yourself and your work? Tanya?

Tanya: Yes. I don't like to sit still. I like to push boundaries.

Tanya: Keep going. Very happy. Very excited.

Tanya: This fusing of the digital and the traditional paint. Very exciting.

Tanya: I'm loving these drawings!

John: Whose is that?

Audience: You had a picture given to you earlier.

Tanya: There was one by a four-year-old...

John: Isn't that me. He's 11!

Audience: What do you feel about the demographics here today?

Audience: Why do you think so many people want to get involved?

Tanya: It's so in our psyche.

Tanya: We pick up a pencil from young ages. It unites people.

Tanya: Coming together to draw and to paint.

Tanya: Even if people say they can't...

Tanya: A mark is a mark.

Tanya: Pen, a written thing, a mathematical equation...

Audience: Or a film...

John: Do you feel you have now a kind of signature?

John: I wouldn't call it a 'style'.

John: Do you work consciously to avoid it?

Tanya: I try not to have a formula.

Tanya: It's my hand and body that produces that, so a signature but...

Tanya: That's what makes having other's there too.

Tanya: It makes it something else.

John: Collective, collaborative

Tanya: A portrait is a collaborative beast.

John: We can carry on but it might be best if you can steer us... [To the audience]

Audience: Do you think black artists have been overlooked over time? Of the African diaspora.

John: Oh...!

John: Yes!

John: The prompt off screen was 'yes!' so I'll say 'yes!'

John: I'll qualify it.

John: In the 80s when I started there were loads of artists of colour who wanted to be in this world.

John: For one reason or another, by the time we hit the Noughties, quite had a lot had disappeared.

John: Always the case

John: The amount who do is tiny

John: Even taking that into account, I don't think it's coincidental that the numbers are so few.

John: When I think about the numbers in the 80s it shocks me how few of us made it into the light later

John: Overlooked? Almost certainly.

John: You can be overlooked for a variety of reasons.

John: Maybe not interesting enough!

John: Not every person of colour who decides to be an artist is interesting!

John: Certainly that is not the only case. What other factors for the overlooking?

John: That is the \$64 million question.

John: How can we make sure it doesn't keep happening?

Audience: You emerged in a political time. Sad we are still here. So what can we learn from then because still an issue now?

Audience: What can we learn from that period?

John: One of the really interesting things about our conversation was how much we spoke about finding our voice and identities in these collective spaces.

John: I still believe in that.

John: One of the great things that's happening in the South is the number of artist collectives have sprung up in last 5 years.

John: I'm quietly hopeful.

John: I'm not interested that much now in institutional critiques.

John: Not personally.

John: Not to say it shouldn't happen.

John: But after 30 years, I don't have the energy to ask what is the way forward in meetings!

John: What I am interested in is the groundswell of activity.

John: People coming together, sharing resources, ideas, aesthetic.

John: I hope that continues.

John: How we doing, Tanya?

Tanya: All right!

Tanya: I'm loving these drawings!

John: Earlier on you said, oh, I'm going to do these things later. I'm reserving the right to see if I do it. What's changed?

Tanya: I'm thinking I want to pull the composition together.

Tanya: I want to see how other people's marks...

Tanya: I've not done this before!

Tanya: I think that works.

Tanya: I like these multiple images

Tanya: I feel there are so many Johns, multiple identities.

Tanya: I think with those line drawings we did earlier at the top. Find those again, of the audience.

Tanya: If we start putting those in up there...

Tanya: Probably need to do a few more of those. But I quite like them big. What do you think?

John: At the top.

Tanya: Closer?

John: Further

John: Interesting.

Tanya: Let's put that one in.

Tanya: Let me look.

John: What are doing exactly? I know you're drawing, painting. Trying to tell a story?

Tanya: I think it's a bit more subconscious than the thinking of putting what where.

John: No, you can't describe that, can you?

Tanya: No I can't.

John: It's fascinating how much of the work happens in this autonomous plane, automatic world.

Tanya: I think it's all right not to be thinking in an intellectual way if you don't need to.

Tanya: I'm going to bring this over here.

Tanya: Also I want it to look contemporary.

Tanya: I don't want it to look... I'll probably loosen you up a bit. You're too structured.

Tanya: I was too precious about it in the beginning.

Tanya: I do quite like this imagery here.

John: That's quite literally a sketch that one.

Tanya: That's my one.

Audience: Philip wants to know, does John feel urge to do Ronnie Corbett impression in that big chair?!

John: The chair is becoming an icon in this!

Tanya: I'm thinking about capturing that sense of humanity in the room and the people, identities all different.

Tanya: All come here to see what we're up to today.

John: Do you ever just do it if you don't have a subject?

Tanya: No always got to have a subject.

Tanya: I need a somebody to work from.

Tanya: I never make it up.

Tanya: I do go to a lot of conferences and do this imagery and then build it like this.

Tanya: I don't know anything about these people but they're still people.

John: Could you use any old photograph?

Tanya: No, no.

Tanya: Needs to be someone I've interacted with.

John: So that connection is critical

John: A lot of the work I've done is reusing archive material.

Tanya: I've been thinking for a while about how to do portraits of people in the disability arts movement who have died.

Tanya: Disabled people's lives can be shortened.

Tanya: From a young age, death has been a common place.

John: I just thought the point you made about the role of death in your life and disabled people in general is worth registering now.

Tanya: Definitely.

Tanya: So there are many subjects who have passed on who I'd like to...

Tanya: I've got a bit of a bee in my bonnet about Sarah Biffen. She was born in the 1700s. She was born with no arms or legs. Sold to the circus and she became a really established miniature portrait painter.

Tanya: She had her paintbrush on her stump on her arm.

Tanya: Miniature painters use tiny brushes.

Tanya: So I've discovered her and I'm doing some research at the National Portrait Gallery.

Tanya: She was trained by the Royal Academy.

Tanya: She ended up painting dignitaries.

Tanya: No one knows about her.

Tanya: She was a disabled painter, wasn't she?

Tanya: She's not in the history books. Nowhere to be seen.

Tanya: A bit like the Jube story.

Tanya: I'm really fascinated about finding out more about this woman.

John: Would you like to do anything about it?

Tanya: I'd like to do something with it.

Tanya: yes, but don't know what yet.

Tanya: It's connected to this. A Portrait Untold. It's a story of...

John: As you were speaking I've just thought of something.

Tanya: Yeah?

John: I mean it seems to me just listening to you, especially when you talked about lifespan that I suppose there are two ways of talking about humanity or the humanitarian.

John: One way is to use it to just get rid of very real differences.

John: So you say we're all human so we should all be treated as human beings.

John: That's true but at the same time there are things that are unique to certain groups of us!

Tanya: Certainly.

John: Part of the humanitarian gesture seems to be about recognising those.

John: The lifespan of a disabled artist may not be the same as an able-bodied one.

John: you need to process that.

John: Do you know what I mean?

Tanya: Yeah, yeah.

John: So have you stopped thinking about that now?

Tanya: I've just done that pieces of research at the NPG last week.

Tanya: One of her portraits is in the Scottish Portrait Gallery which I've been to see.

John: How many do you think she did?

Tanya: Don't know. I think the RA must have information.

Tanya: There is one project in there. Linking that with a contemporary.... Stories of people who are not here any more.

Tanya: My God it's huge! It's going to be huge!

Tanya: Loads of them!

Tanya: Also the idea that you do a portrait of someone living is valued by the big portrait institutions.

Tanya: If I were to do a painting from a series of photographs, that would not be considered a portrait because the person's not sat for me, as you sit there.

John: That would be a 'painting'!

John: Something else we have in common, so much of the work that I've done really has been about narratives of disappearance.

John: Of course with people of colour, that's the big thing in this place.

John: All the books you read say, Africans have been coming here since Roman times.

John: They were up at Hadrian's Wall.

John: So where are they then?

John: If they've been coming for thousands of...!

John: No trace of them.

John: Disappeared.

John: It's about that recovery of memory.

John: That's kind of what you're trying to do? To fix something before it disappears.

Tanya: Totally.

Tanya: That book was to start to do that.

Tanya: To make portraits who are not going to remain with us for much longer.

Tanya: Top one, Baroness Jane Campbell Cross-bench peer in the Lords.

Tanya: They had to bring two objects.

Tanya: One was a hat she wore in the 80s on the demonstrations

Tanya: Jane has a limited lifespan.

Tanya: She should have died years ago.

Tanya: She's still with us.

Tanya: It's about capturing people's lives and essence before it's gone.

John: What's the connection? Did you know them?

Tanya: Some. That collection was about creating a series of portraits of people who are really significant, high profile who have worked to create disability culture, within arts, society, politics.

Tanya: I tried to cover a wide span.

John: How long did that take?

Tanya: Two years. There's 10.

Tanya: That's how the live-portrait events started.

Tanya: They weren't as spangly as this one.

Tanya: At Tate Modern, Liverpool...

Tanya: Some sat nude.

Tanya: I wanted to look at body fascism and the connection with disability.

Tanya: Yes, so we had a private sitting for the first half of the day and the public came in second.

Tanya: Wasn't filmed or anything.

Tanya: From that, I did this.

John: 'In all this stuff you've done is there something unique, is there an essence?' People ask this! Is there something? Is that a daft question?

Tanya: They're all unique and not connected to one another.

Tanya: They're only connected through cultural identity.

Tanya: They all pursue that in their own work in different ways.

John: Is that what ties them together?

Tanya: Their culture. Sounds like they're in a petri dish!

Tanya: A mold!

John: Important question though? It's about the singularity of the vision.

John: People ask is the reason you return again and again... Is there something tied together?

Tanya: They are all culturally diverse. All disabled!

Tanya: A cultural identity.

John: I would say the same.

Tanya: Any more questions? Any drawings?

Audience: The 80s and 90s were a golden age for disability arts? Agree?

Tanya: Yes, that's when we were establishing and passing law and becoming empowered.

Tanya: By achieving law.

John: Things were happening basically.

Tanya: Things were happening.

Tanya: In the 80s we were battling. Then we were seen as angry people with chips on our shoulders

Tanya: We wanted to do what everyone else wants to do so why not?

John: Is that just an age difference?

John: Those of you then now in 40s or 50s. Is that why it doesn't feel like a golden age now?

Tanya: I think young people have still got the battles and fights within them.

Tanya: But a lot has changed.

Tanya: There is more freedom to access

Tanya: It's a better place but there are still battles to be won.

Tanya: It would have been a generational... People of my age...

John: The only reason I was saying that, there was a whole bunch of us who were doing stuff in the 80s we can't do the same now because we're older.

John: People say your work has changed, you're not so political.

John: I'm not sure that's true.

John: It's different but it's not less political.

John: The approach might be different but...

John: I wondered if you were getting the same?

Tanya: Oh, yeah.

Tanya: We had a conference not so long ago which was in Birmingham and it was called The Awkward Bastards.

John: I see.

Tanya: That was to look at what's going on today in the arts for disability and diversity.

John: It was just about the 80s and whether people thought you were less political.

Tanya: I've got more into the painting and the art side rather than...

Tanya: My early work was quite political.

John: You then started talking about the conference.

John: The Awkward Bastards....

Tanya: Now I'm liking all these better than my own!

John: No!

John: They're nice but yours is very nice.

Tanya: Time for a kip now isn't it?

John: I've been sitting. I'm too relaxed. I'm completely chilled now. A coffee! Did I hear coffee.

Tanya: We can't have it here!

John: Ask us a question!

John: Somebody ask a question. Stop drawing. Ask us a question. All this art nonsense. Talk!

Tanya: Have you had your portrait painted?

John: No. This is it.

Tanya: Another first!

John: How do you survive? Literally financially...

John: Can you live doing this?

Tanya: I live doing this.

Tanya: I've always lived doing this even on nothing.

Tanya: This has driven me always.

John: This is it. This is what you do.

Tanya: This is what you do.

Tanya: The other subjects in the collection, do you know who they are?

John: No.

John: I didn't really see the list until this morning.

John: I said because I wanted to meet and work with you.

John: I shall certainly go and look them up properly for sure.

Tanya: I always like to get somebody with learning disabilities in my collection.

Tanya: It's one of those groups, individuals, people who never get... They don't get represented.

John: Like dyslexic?

Tanya: Proper

Tanya: Not that dyslexia isn't!

Tanya: Aspergers, autism, learning disability means lots of things. What do you think?

Audience: If neither of you were artists, what career path would you have taken?

Tanya: I wouldn't have done anything else.

Tanya: If my eyes weren't brown, what colour would they be?

John: What about writing?

Tanya: Oh, no! I'm not a writer, a reader.

Tanya: Has to be the brush in the hand.

Tanya: Contemplated being a sculptor. Too physical. Someone put a lump of clay in my hand and fell over!

John: I went to see a show in NY of Frank [Stellas?]

John: You can't get away from the idea that it's steel. Intricate but steel.

John: No I can't see myself as a sculptor.

John: What was interesting to me was that I went to the Tate for about 5, 6 years as a child.

John: By the time I was 14, 15 I wanted to be an art historian.

John: If I hadn't gone into making stuff, that would have been my thing.

John: Looking back now, part of the reason for that had to do with that sense that this was a rarified space where questions of race wouldn't apply.

John: I thought I'll go do art history because I can study Cezanne, Brach...

John: When I was a child, race was not part of the agenda.

John: That was a motif for us in that generation.

John: By the mid 70s, start to think I can't embrace this any longer.

John: Didn't matter how you dodged it, it found you.

John: It's going to have to be the racial question.

John: I'm going to have to take it on.

John: It's not leaving me alone.

John: If that primal sea, the place where you come face to face with this double that you heard about, this thing that was roaming the streets, mugging, breaking in, you sort of wanted it not to be something to do with you.

John: You were trying to run away from this.

John: Then you have this mirror moment. You realise it's you.

John: You're the trouble.

John: You're the one everyone's afraid of.

John: You can't run away with it any longer.

John: I remember talking to every black artist from the 80s.

John: At some point you become aware you are being stalked by this thing then you turn round and it's you.

John: In an idea space, I'd still like to write like TJ Clarke and be a great historian but I don't live in that space.

John: Ah the privilege of drinking coffee in an art gallery!

John: Thank you for making this possible.

John: Have a coffee with all these paintings around.

John: Don't try this at home, guys?

John: This is really coming on.

John: We done with the iPad?

Tanya: It's died!

John: Can I have another butcher's?

John: Show us yours! [To the audience]

Tanya: That's cool!

John: How long would it take you beyond this?

Tanya: I aim to probably... I'll work on it for another 4 to 5 days. 2 hours here and there.

Tanya: All these portraits are going to the NPG. December. 8th December I think. Mandy will tell us.

John: It is interesting watching this process evolve.

Audience: Do you feel more relaxed now we're hours into the process, now you're comfy in your chair with your coffee?

John: Like the rhythm of life. The longer it goes on the more confident you become.

John: In the start I was concerned for Tanya standing for five hours.

Tanya: I will have to sit down soon!

Tanya: Were you?

John: Can I keep her entertained long enough?

John: Now, she's more than capable of looking after herself. I'll stop worrying about her!

John: Also as you see the thing evolve, you know you are half way through.

John: We've got over hurdles and she's relaxed, I'm relaxed.

John: That sort it means it's less entertaining. Watching paint dry now!

Tanya: Shall we ask the audience what they think?

John: What do you think has happened in the time we've done this?

Audience: I think it's been really fascinating watching the thought processes going back and forward.

Audience: Finding out you'd not met before, really interesting.

Audience: I feel great respect.

John: I'm amazed at that.

Tanya: The conversation helps to create the portrait.

Tanya: It influences on a subconscious...

Audience: So Tanya, so you said the conversation has influenced. I'm not an artist. How? I don't understand.

Tanya: It influences the... Just... On a subconscious or conscious level. As the conversation is being spoken, I think about it as I put the paint... To do with the colours I choose. The tone, the shape of your face.

Tanya: It's almost like a dance and a movement. It comes through the brain into the brush. Into the hand.

Tanya: Do you think I'm just copying and observing? Not just that.

John: Learning something new every day.

Audience: Are you ever not in the mood to paint?

Tanya: Oh, God, yes.

Tanya: Yeah, but usually I get there and I think I'm not in the mood but then I start and then I start conversing with the person then it goes away and I think I'm having a good time.

John: You feel that bit when you're doing films that have people talking.

John: Sometimes people are really difficult.

John: I remember going to LA to interview someone. Can't tell you who!

John: She was just horrible

John: A dreadful human being.

Tanya: I've had to paint portraits of dreadful human beings.

Tanya: So I have to go back in memory and connect with that and put that in the portrait.

John: What helped was to stay in my zone.

John: I'm here to get something out of this process

John: Once you start, you do.

John: Before long, you get into it, they get into it and it all happens.

John: There have been moments when I have wanted to walk away had I not paid...!
you are not worth it!

John: But we stayed with it.

John: Oftentimes I learned that even the most difficult of situations, about 1/3 of the way through you hit the second act where the space, the person opens up to you and says, come on.

John: Then you can surf off that wave of welcoming to the last act.

John: Was I difficult?

Tanya: No!

Audience: I wasn't here this morning. I'm in art educating and educating art teachers. Wondering about how you experienced your art education.

Audience: At the moment there's a problem in educating art teachers. I don't see anybody different teaching young people. It's a big problem in school.

John: I think we both felt roughly the same.

John: How we came through art education.

John: It's hard to explain but I loved everything I learned coming through but you were left with this feeling that something which could speak more directly to you is not part of the setup.

John: We both talked about the beginnings of our journey made it what it is.

Tanya: It's a wrap!

Mandy: We've been trending!

Mandy: People have got a huge amount out of it.

Mandy: Thank you John!

Tanya: Our first sitter.

Mandy: The amazing Tanya!

Tanya: [Applause]

Tanya: Thank you audience

Mandy: Live, live streamed too

Mandy: Thank you to BMAG

Mandy: Thank you to Arts Council

Mandy: Portraits Untold back next Friday. Next stop the National Portrait Gallery itself.

Mandy: We're back again in September and October.

Mandy: All details on the website.

Mandy: Thank you to the team!

Mandy: Thank you to Lane Whittaker our BSLI

Mandy: To Marian Cleary for live captioning

Mandy: All our tech crew.

Mandy: It's been a fantastic day.

[Transcript Ends]