



Book Of Hours I & II

In conversation at The Art Station, 24th April 2022

Helen Gilbert – HG

Annabel Dover – AD

Mahal De Man – MDM

Clare Palmier – CP

Richard Oliver - RO

CP

The catalyst for this next In Conversation is [Helen Gilbert's Book of Hours I & II](#).

When Helen showed me the books last year I thought, how has anyone done this! They are an incredible focus, determination and immersion in Subject to produce this amazing expression during the whole Covid-19 pandemic.

So that's the catalyst for this conversation, we have Helen Gilbert, [Annabel Dover](#) and [Mahal De Man](#), who all are inspired by objects in different ways.

Annabel's book [Florilegia](#) came out last year...

AD

"Roll up, Roll up only £10!"

(Audience laughter!)

CP

(Laughs!)

... Florilegia a labyrinthine reverie that takes in so many different references and takes you on an amazing journey. And Mahal De Man who is also focusing on objects and expressing that in different ways. And is currently an artist in residence at [The Art Station](#) for a month.

So thank you all of you, over to you!

AD

Thank you, so we're probably going to be slightly less formal than the past conversation. We met on Friday for the first time, and we talked for quite a long time about our work and stuff and then right before I was going to get the train, we all had revelations about our work, to do with our families and growing up and suddenly things all made sense and I could really understand why Helen and Mahal make the work that they make which is really interesting.

So briefly, I'll say a bit about me and then the things that maybe you made me think about Helen and Mahal during our conversation.

When I did my degree, I don't know if you found this when you did your art degree, if you did an art degree, or whatever degree you did? I spent so much of the time going, oh God, there's so much to do you I don't know what to do! There's too much in the world! Everything so beautiful! You know whatever! And this is before taking anti-depressants!!

I just felt everything was so Beautiful, I just didn't know how to get it down!

That was at Newcastle. Then when I went to do an MA at [Saint Martins](#), I gave myself these sort of rigorous rules, parameters - I made myself do a painting a day for a year, which was then put in a sort of shower cubicle a Vitruvian sort of shape (*hand gestures to show shape*) and then from that point lots of people went in and saw the different paintings. The paintings were things I'd collected working for an antiques dealer, often the crap he didn't want, you know, the worthless stuff; photos, scraps, lists, that I felt I just couldn't throw away as it was this other person's stuff so I wanted to paint it to record it. What I found, was that when people went into this cubicle installation, they came out and told me loads of stories and really related to it and that to me was amazing and one of the first times I thought God! It's incredible how the communication, not only that maybe we all naturally superimpose a narrative on to a collection of images. I mean, I don't know if you feel this but just sitting here and look at Helens work; It's hard not to relate to things. But also, just how much we have in common maybe.

And then I started a PhD at Chelsea and partway through I was trying to get pregnant and the fertility drugs gave me a stroke which was really odd; I couldn't walk or talk for a while.

I was just saying to [Livia Wang](#) that the hospital give you a tray of stuff, one of the objects on the tray was a toothbrush. Because of the stroke I didn't know what it was called or what you did with it, but I instinctively went like this - *does brushing teeth gesture*

It made me think of the [Gaston Bachelard book Poetics of Space](#) and interiors, I suppose quite a lot of that came into my PhD which turned into the book *Florilegia* and ideas when talking to Livia; because she has this amazing space at [Van Gogh House](#), a living breathing building, as this is (referring to [The Art Station](#) building).

So then while talking to Helen and Mahal about all kinds of things, I suppose we were talking about a series of things, and your (*addressing Helen*) Book of Hours because it was made during lockdown which I don't know if you've had a chance to see the [Emily Richardson](#) films? They are really amazing and give you quite an intense concentrated essence of some of Helen's work, it has this reflective aspect to it. And we also talked about our view of the world. You've (*addressing Helen*) got a sort of palaeontological background and very interested in rocks and stones and big history.

You were talking about what you find quite reassuring is, imagining that you're a tiny, tiny thing in a massive expanse, a huge universe, and that maybe some of our common kind of philosophy or ideas of things, maybe we don't all exactly believe in God but we have some crossover.

Yeah, that's my possible introduction to anything. I don't know if that feels right for either of you? I don't know! (*laughs*) Helen how do you feel about the film? Because it's an interesting portrayal. But I didn't know if you felt. Did it reflect things you hadn't considered?

HG

Well, I think the films are very interesting in fact, seeing this woman talking about it was very interesting, just that, the separation.

I think Emily has done a great job actually, it was a lovely collaboration with her; To make a film about what I've been doing in lockdown. Which was, I don't know if any of you have seen them, but they're over in [Saxmundham library](#), two books made completely accidentally, no planning! I'd been working on playing cards which I think is a very interesting metaphor.

I had a fantastic residency in the [Earth Sciences Department](#) at Cambridge, it was right up my street because I've got a geography background, geography and art, but I did part of my degree in geography, so I've always been very interested in land issues. So the idea of working in the Earth Sciences Department at Cambridge was for me, an absolute dream! And one component of it was, there were many components of it, but the one component of it at the end was to go to Canada and to look at these fossil beds; the [Burgess Shale in British Columbia](#). I'd been trying to find a way to sort of manage this development of evolution, this huge, the biggest story in a way and it was too unwieldy, and what I really focused on was just time and time constraints. The enormity of time, our speck in it, you know how the push and pull and the sort of fact that time rotates and it circles and we jump through it and you know, 'How old am I?'

I've done this cabinet at the back which is referencing rocks and geology and then referencing it to the original materials, the rocks and what the rocks then make, which also seem to be in pretty deep time and referencing them to the Book of Hours. But you know, it's an interesting thing isn't it when you start saying 'Well, I'm taking some I don't know, milk of magnesia' and you're drinking this kaolin, this kaolin which is sort of 500 million years old and you think, 'how old am I?!' You know these strange silly questions they might be, but they are preoccupations of connecting with time across time and with COVID it was a time. It was obviously, we had lots of time, but also it gave me time to play with the things that I'm most interested in.

This work ([Into The Holloway, a Walk at Dusk](#)) is a much earlier piece, well it finished in 2017 and that is very much something about walking at night. I'm interested in night walking and then in that sort of space connecting through time, back to things that might be related to that specific environment. Because I am very interested in very specific places, I started very much as a landscape artist.

But going back to the playing card idea, was that, going to Canada the playing card became a very good metaphor for the sort of lottery nature of evolution. So I started working with that. They were also very portable, I could take them up into the mountains, work at the face of these fossil beds very high up in the Rockies. And then bring them home, no questions asked, they could be in my pocket!

So when COVID started and I'd worked on this playing card way before, it just seemed incredibly chanced, another chance, a flicker of something happening, a clash of certain circumstances and you know, here we were, and it just seemed immediately, oh! I'm just going to play for four to six weeks or whatever we're going to be closed in for. And of course, that had its own momentum, which of course, none of us knew at the time. For me it was just something that started, it just sort of rolled on.

A.D

Did you do things at a similar time of day each day and did you do it every day or not particularly? I'm asking that because you said people often ask you that! (*laughs*)

H.G

Yes, I'd love to say I was an artist who got up at a certain time and started a certain time and finished at a certain time. I'm absolutely not this at all.

AD

And you made them in your studio, didn't you?

Sorry, I didn't mean to stop you, just keep going.

HG

No no no!

The playing cards yes.

And initially it was as I said, simply a way of reconnecting. I think as artists you can, well, I can only speak for me, as an artist you can sort of get lost in things and lose your focus. You know I can lose my, you know, the core of me where I'm meant to be, and I thought Aha! it's like it's snowed, where you can't go out, you're going to sit inside and you've got to stay here! And for me I thought I'm going to use this to try and regroup, rethink and that's what it started with. It was just me bringing to bear all those cultural references and things from here, everywhere and playing. I was playing. And then of course as that very heavy news, even in our lovely little bit of rural Suffolk, as it came pressing in and the feeling of oppression became stronger and all the news was coming out. It was inevitable that the COVID story sort of bubbled by itself. I mean, I really didn't feel I don't feel I can sort of tell you exactly how that happened. It was all unconscious, really. I think it just sort of began to find its way in, and I thought in the end when I looked at it, I thought there was something inevitable about it. It was almost like just, 'OK here I am' and just almost going another way, walking again and just following the track that it was laying out for me. If that doesn't sound too metaphysical, it's not meant to. It just sort of happened by itself.

AD

So you made them and you didn't initially have the intention of them being in a book?

HG

No, not at all. I mean I started painting and kept following interests.

AD

So they're the ones in the library but also there are facsimiles of them down in the entrance lobby.

HG

Yes, so it was not at all the way I would imagine somebody planning a book, where you do all your research and all that. I felt really that, all these things through my adulthood, all through my life I've been really interested in the way culturally, through time, we explore and express and create these objects that we're all interested in, and how we manifest them. And the thing that overwhelms me is, how similar they are! It's like music, you know. You listen to folk music or you look at textiles and you just think, how can that be Indian thing when it reminds me so much of Paisley that they did near Glasgow, you know! All these extraordinary ways that we have of connectedness, and I hope if anything that those books have shown how, rather than being about how separated we are, how connected we all are together through cultures and time.

AD

I was going to say, you're very interested in a motif but it's not really a motif, is it? But the hand axe, that's part of some things and you have also done drawings of hand axes, haven't you? (*Addresses Mahal De Man*)

MDM

I'm really glad that we've had this opportunity to meet because I definitely, with our work, I see a lot of similar interests and similarities, although we've obviously walked different paths and it's really interesting to see also how visually you can see the connections, and I'm also interested in time and connecting to people through history. Maybe in a place, also within this residency I hope that I can connect to people here or connect to the history through this place.

So for the last few years I've been drawing Stone Age tools in museums and in your Book of Hours you've got Stone Age tools as well! I also draw rocks at the moment, I'm doing a rock drawing exchange, I'm also taking

AD

That's really nice. Is that open to anyone? Or just a few people?

MDM

Invitation at the moment! *(laughs)*

AD

Yeah, invitation only! It's quite an exciting project, a special rock!

MDM

Yeah, so I ask people to give me a rock that has some meaning to them. They don't need to tell me what exactly that meaning is, it could be from a place that is meaningful to them, or they might have had this rock for a long time, and they give me the rock then I make a drawing of it, and I keep the rock and they get the drawing. So, it's an exchange. And for me it's really about spending time with this object or spending time on this connection with this person, and maybe noticing things that you wouldn't really notice. I mean, there are so many rocks you wouldn't really go and look, 'Oh!' there's a little hole here or the shadow goes this way or look at the colour or how it looks in the light. And by spending like 10 hours with this rock that somebody chose for me, I feel like it's a way of connecting in a different way.

AD

Also, in a way it sounds slightly like you not exactly worship, but kind of respect, giving respect and really noticing and observing and kind of really loving this rock.

(Addressing Helen) And there may be aspects of just I mean, you're calling it a Book of Hours. It's a slightly meditative aspect to it, Kind of appreciating these things, do you think? Is there a relationship between that? No Annabel!! *(laughs)*

HG

Inevitably, I mean, you know spending time makes your connection to something change enormously, and going back to the hand axe, I'd always looked to them with a sort of slight distance until I was started to look at the collections that were at Cambridge in the Sedgwick in the Earth Sciences Department.

But the thing that really changed my view of looking at the importance and the meaning behind hand axes was this extraordinary one that was found in [Haisborough](#) in Norfolk. It's about the length of my hand. It was found in 2000 by a man called [Mike Chambers](#), who's an amateur fossil collector, and he knew immediately because of the matrix because of the context in which it was found, that it

was very significant and opened up this extraordinary project, opening up the belly of the beach in Haisborough, looking at human migrations north, to the north of Europe. And I was invited to be part of this and it was amazing actually because opening up a beach, like surgically, I found that fascinating because of course it's a bit like a body, you have pumps, all the liquid and everything you know? It suddenly became like a pulse! There is this body that is being dug into and you've got this there, and this there (*hand gestures*) it's a bit like when I go to the dentist and you have that pump thing, I think, Oh yeah, you know, there's something all very connected about that.

The project became a very important one. It was called the AHOB ([Ancient Human Origins of Britain](#)) about how they came up over the land bridge and how the Thames had been actually coming out in Norfolk and all the things they discovered about pulling back the timing when in which people had moved north, all through this little hand axe that had been found! That led to this explosion of knowledge, which I thought was extraordinary! So I started to have much more respect for these wonderfully napped pieces of Flint or chert, and so started to really explore that, particularly in lockdown.

AD

And you talk on the film about the [Lapis Lazuli](#) coming from parts of Afghanistan and the political and the elements of your work, would you say that they're political?

HG

Well yes! I don't know when things don't get political to be honest! (*laughs*)

AD

No, I mean, I agree! But I think when we described our childhood things and you talked about elements of your childhood, I thought God I can really understand why you don't trust authority! It just completely makes sense! (*laughs*) and I guess COVID has certainly been a time that a lot of people have felt that I think, I guess, one way or another.

HG

Yes, I think it's very difficult to carry boundaries between one's work and context politically, structurally.

AD

And how you think and feel about things just generally.

HG

I think Lapis Lazuli which I've got in the middle of the top row in the cabinet. I love Lapis Lazuli! it's the most beautiful material! I wear Lapis Lazuli, I've got some on me! And it's an extraordinary material but again to think about this material which is beautiful, an extraordinary blue! That's been mined for centuries and centuries in these remote parts of Afghanistan. Have been in the hands of the Taliban for all through the time the occupation was there. And of course when you buy into Lapis Lazuli, you're buying into the Taliban in a sort of way! And then suddenly I started looking at Lapis more and the gold pyrite that you get through it, these are in considered impurities. The more impurities you have in it, the cheaper it is. And so, I suddenly started to think about how it was tainted, literally and metaphorically because of the context of it. So, you know you take a material; I should think you could take many materials, most materials and find something.

AD

So, like your milk of magnesium, in a way, it's sort of the stardust memories, you're taking your milk of magnesium you were saying, and the history of that. That's amazing.

HG

Yeah, there's a [kaolin](#) that's being mined and, well, you get it in Britain and all over the world.

But I think I'm very interested in those deep histories of rocks and geological forms and what they become. And of course, the stones and the prehistoric sites have been something I've been very involved with since I was very young, and so they have such a beat and such a pulse to them for me.

AD

And Lapis was used for the blue pigment, wasn't it? in a lot of the miniatures and in the Book of Hours, and very expensive.

HG

Absolutely, yeah absolutely.

AD

And in your work (*addresses Mahal*), you had that commission for the drawing room. That's very beautiful. For that, does that relates to your idea of the world being the sort of cosmos?

MDM

Do you mean the billboard?

AD

Yeah, the Billboard image, which is how would you describe it? It's written, isn't it? In the sky

MDM

So I was commissioned by [Tannery Arts](#) to make a design for a billboard outside the building and we shared the building with Drawing Room.

Big room and I. I usually work quite small so it was the biggest, two metres by three metres and so for me that's a very big space to fill and you would have to be able to see it from afar. Nina and I were talking about what would the building say? What would the building want to communicate? And this was just after another lock down ended and obviously we all know about the social distancing and all of these things, and sometimes I work with text and it made sense to work with text for this piece. So it's a found image of a sky where I erased the ink to form a text and it says 'I miss your touch', and that is quite a small image, and it was then blown up to fill the Billboard.

And because the building is, it's only one floor, so it's not a very high building, so you could clearly see the sky above it as well. I feel like I'm going a bit side-tracked, but... *(laughs)*

AD

No you're not! It's not digressing at all! No, it's really fascinating. It's a fascinating image, and for me it was quite hard to work the image out. It's very beautiful blue sky with kind of lovely, fluffy white clouds and then it's almost written. At first I thought God is that a vapour trail from an aeroplane? So it's kind of a magical thing, a bit like in the Mrs. Dalloway, that sort of recurring image, but it's not, and you've created it.

And we were talking about how we create work weren't we, and Helen you were saying, you sort of do it and it becomes. And I was saying I found the PhD hard because it was hard not to make things an illustration of a theory, as I think sometimes people did and it sort of deadens the art and you don't want to do it. And you were saying there are aspects of you, that can be quite concept first and that you sort of try and trick yourself sometimes with collage, I suppose there's elements of Surrealists perhaps, not that that's what you're doing! So it can connect with unconscious decisions, maybe more, and also found objects and digitally sort of altering them. Is that right?

MDM

So I find that because I also work with big topics like Helen does, like time and space, it's very hard to grasp these things. So sometimes when I get to thinking about these things, I can get a bit stuck, so that's when I started using collage and it really helped me to think more visually and not make an illustration of a concept, but let different elements come through. Although they are selected, I select the image, but there is more chance, coming into the work and that allows me to find

different associations, different Connections. And I think it also helps convey the concept a little bit easier. For example with the billboards I thought I would just write the text on. I would put the text on top of this found image, like write it and then scan it and put it on the billboard. But when I was erasing these pencil lines that were helping me write neatly, I found that actually, this is something that I could use and it made a lot more sense, because the topic is about absence. It makes sense to erase the ink or to make something appear that isn't. Like to not add to the images, to take away.

I like that we both, although we didn't really mean to have works that kind of now represent a certain time, like all this was made in lock down, when I made the Billboard design. I felt like I should make something relating to the pandemic. It's such a big thing that we're going through. We're just going through like day by day, we don't really stop to think about it. Not every day at least. And so I felt like with this, it's an opportunity to stand, to have a moment and think about what it means for me and to make a work in this time. And I like that if you have the Book of Hours that maybe might be continued? Who knows, hopefully not! (*referencing the pandemic, all laugh*)

HG

I don't know!

MDM

The billboards didn't really intend for me, so meaningful for it being in lockdown. I like that it was quite public and I fell like with art I feel anyone should be able to engage with it somehow. It shouldn't be a secret only for certain people who you know have access or anything. I think it should be open to everyone, so it was really nice to have an opportunity to have it on a building. And I think we all, we've all missed somebodies touch.

AD

Yeah, touch it and also your .

I think it would be nice if anyone wants to ask any questions or talk to us or anything we'd love it if you want to!

Biscuits? (*all laugh*)

If anyone has anything they want to ask Helen or Mahal or me.

Audience Member

Did you do just one billboard?

MDM

Just one, yeah. Hopefully the first of many!

Audience Member

Yes a whole sequence!

MDM

Yeah, maybe yeah!

I do notice that I usually work in series. So for me it feels like the start of something, who knows! I definitely want to work more large scale. And after the Billboard I did do something like a kind of poster. It was also like 1.5 by 2.25 metres. So kind of big and indoors. And I erased ink from a stock photo instead of finding an image in a book to see how that works. I had that printed off large scale and then rubbed it off and there was a lot more physical, so it's interesting. When I know you work large scale and small. I usually work quite small and when you start working larger scale like the body like in the previous conversation, the body starts being a part of it as well in the making.

HG

Absolutely, I think the physicality of working is a very interesting one to me because I do work very big too, but more laterally I haven't for very practical reasons is that when you work very large. I like the fact that you can work very small, and it can become or grow into something very big.

I think the nature of the context of one's life if you're very pressed with things, I felt when I made these, which are the earlier works in this show, I was very pressed with for time for various reasons, but I had to keep working. I think working small you can bore down, it's very intimate, but it doesn't have the same sort of demands as a very large thing presenting itself to you, it can be very intimidating, I certainly find it so. There's a flexibility in this for you to do certain things and because I was thinking of it as a walk it sort of became something which had a physicality to it.

I mean, one of the things that I don't think I did talk to you about, which has been something that has dominated some of my thinking for a long time, is that I've always envied people who write a composition, or write a book, or do something which has a linear form to it, so that you don't get presented with it all in one go.

You watch people looking at art and paintings and they look at it and then they are off.

AD

But I suppose that's what you were doing maybe with the Book Of Hours, by putting it into a book it's slightly slowing it down or controlling how it's viewed?

Audience member

It's a different experience for a viewer, looking at your art in a book form or even looking at those (*gestures to paintings on wall*)

AD

Yeah, it is isn't it?

HG

Well, this was the one that had come out of when I was in Cambridge, I started thinking of the candle as a metaphor or certain things to do with [vanitas](#) and time and everything, and they linked bigger paintings there and I thought of something cyclical so you've got big paintings linking small, and then it gradually opened up more and I thought, oh maybe I can do what they do when you're listening to a piece of music. Maybe I can do that where I start you off and you have to go the length of it to actually make any sort of engagement with it. And I thought, that might be the answer to this problem that I have with people flicking aside, you know, I think all painters particularly just get very rattled with the lack of time people commit to looking. And I think that I don't really hold any interest in a book review. If somebody hasn't read the book beginning to end, et cetera. So, I thought, I want a proper engagement. I think that idea of stretching it physically into something that you have to actually go down the line and hands out first. Now and originally this was meant to be the walk was meant to be just this third line.

AD

I hadn't thought of that, you sort of gaffer tape people down!

HG

And of course, I said to Clare you haven't got a big enough place here! I need a mansion where it can all go round, and in fact that was the original concept, the way you start walking down it and then it's a single clean line. It has no other interactions with the line, other colour which was a very problematic thing for this. Clare very kindly let me spend a weekend here working out how I was going to lay it out because I hadn't thought about the cross references to other lines, it was just going to be this clean, absolutely, you know, very sort of clinical line that you would have to wander with somewhere. So that was another thing which has dominated it, which has probably ended up with these lines and eventually as you say, the books. It's hard work, it's hard work me looking again at the books it must be really hard work for people actually going through them.

Audience member

Yeah, It's exciting!

HG

But because it demands a certain amount of time. Whether you like them or not, you know you are.

AD

It's a totally different way of looking at it.

Audience member

Yeah, you don't know what's coming next! You can't look ahead, well you could. But what I loved was the colour palette that you suddenly changed. Bam! It was all blue and Bam! It was all yellow with the daffodils. How did you go about putting your cards together in the sequences that you have. I know it's linear as far as following a Covid story.

AD

Oh yeah, is it chronological?

HG

I think initially what was happening was I was just making a lot of images and obviously my thinking was in a certain frame and by the time I got to a certain point I thought I've got to put these into something, they are so unwieldy, so I put them into these books and then it began to become the book. So, themes began to have much more of a flow. So yes, they became much more clearly consciously thematic as time went on, but that certainly hadn't been the way they'd been initiated.

AD

Yeah, I suppose you could destruct it, I mean, you might not want to disrupt it, but you could disrupt it if you wanted to, the order so it's non chronological. I mean, if you wanted to make you feel it was chaotic which a lot of people did feel.

HG

It is very interesting when you give it out to other people, like I haven't met the guy who's doing the website for it, the microsite which is going to be linked to Art Station. So, they've all been digitised, all these cards and they're going to have sort of cross references, and then I saw an image on it of

just amalgam of them and I thought, Oh! I should make a pack of cards, I should have them as a pack, because suddenly they were random, and I thought that was very interesting way of seeing them

AD

And that's something that I think they do in the Royal Society, the science place. I think quite a few of the botanical specimens were donated in [Herbariums](#), in no particular order, so the way they've been put in order is quite sort of political sometimes, like for example, that woman that [Anna Atkins](#) has been filed under her father's name, she didn't have her own name. but you know, since Darwin the way that things were ordered was very different than pre doubting or you know enlightenment. But so, yes, how you present is something that it has a huge impact on how it's read and this is very different than if you have to go to the library. Also, because it has to be under glass, that's maybe quite frustratingly exciting looking under. I think they call it [Scopophilic response](#). So, there's a Greek word, the idea that when something is hidden behind glass, like those vitrines, it's kind of really exciting. It's kind of precious and you want to touch it and get in there, and that's so frustrating as well! *(laughs)*

HG

Yeah, phycological.

AD

Yeah!

Has anyone got any other questions or thoughts or anything else about any of the ideas?

CP

Yeah, I can I just say, we've commissioned Josh Watts at Outpost who've now made a digital version of the Book Of Hours. So, that was one of the things that we decided was really quite important because they're really quite fragile, these two books and it would therefore be impossible to have hundreds of people leafing through them in a short time scale or over a longer time scale. So, we've created, with Helen working sort directing I suppose, and our input to .

We've now got this digital version, which has ended up being quite complex, but in a way, a thing in its own so that it now allows audience to spend a long time with any of these images. So please have a look! You access it via [The Art Station website](#). I think he's still working on book 2 because they took him a hell of a lot longer than he thought!

(Everyone laughs!)

HG

I think I nearly fell on the floor when Clare very calmly said to me, you will need some notes and I said, Oh OK, I'll do them for each double page? We need one for every card!

(Laughs)

And there are nearly 800 of these cards, so I thought OK! That was quite an interesting journey in itself!

AD

Oh yeah, exactly that's a whole other piece of work isn't it I guess?

HG

Yes, that revisiting of time when we condense time. It reminded me of early motherhood, I had one daughter and then I had twins and I remember somebody turned to me and asked me a very fair question about something with babies and hers happened to be about 3 months younger than ours. And I can remember looking at her thinking, I don't remember any of that! I don't remember any of it! And suddenly I was looking at these images in my book thinking, did that really happen then?

AD

But that's really interesting! Because that's sort of what the Book Of Hours is, yeah.

HG

It's such a weird thing! Actually, when I showed it (The Book Of Hours) to people and friends before it was here at The Art Station. They said, did that really all happen in a year? And already people were putting the eject button on. You know, that can't be then! That couldn't have happened then! You know, and actually when I had to go back and check and make sure my references were right and it absolutely did! And it seems such an extraordinary period for us all being so still, well, for a lot of us, being so still, certainly being located in a very limited area. It seemed extraordinary how many things were happening. How many extraordinarily, awful and dramatic things were happening beyond the actual reality of COVID, in the world I'm talking about. So yes, it took me a long time to do the notes!

AD

And interesting the idea of it being digitalized and the idea of, I suppose, if you think about a vanitas or the kind of idea of breaking things up into smaller manageable things like we were talking about an album or smaller. Or, you know, huge concepts and using collage! Or rather than it being

analogue I suppose as some people might think of it as looking after children, maybe it does all kind of blur into one! It's interesting how we do view time and how we look back on things that are traumatic or not traumatic. You know, just time, it's very odd whether it's this big amorphous thing, or if it's more manageable for us, as humans to see it in kind of individual discreet units.

Any other questions (*looks to audience*)

RO

Hi, I was working alongside you (*refers to Helen*), putting these up (*referring to paintings on the wall*) and you were constantly deliberating how to connect them, as you weren't used to seeing them in such a vast space, on this scale wall, all together, and it was quite pleasing for me to almost relive the works in a way, and that was really interesting. Does spur you on to change, maybe the way you display or the artwork itself?

HG

I don't know!

I have to introduce [Richie Oliver](#), he was the most patient individual putting up this work! (*everyone giggles*)

He let me deliberate in a way which was very helpful, very supportive.

RO

In a nice way! (*laughs*)

HG

Yeah! But it was very supportive.

I had come in and tried to work out how to do them. But I don't know the answer to that actually; Would I display them in the same way again? I don't know, I think there's a flexibility.

RO

I guess there was a change in your vision almost, because you kept saying that you wanted a story line that just went and went and went. But you couldn't do that in here, so you then had to layered them. And for me, it was the natural thing to do in the space. But for you, obviously you wanted this continuum.

HG



I mean, they're not absolutely complete.

There are others that are very dark, very grim, which I thought, you know we don't need these at the moment! and I thought they aren't.

AD

You could have a little lockable room you could go into the dark room! (*laughs*)

HG

Yeah, a little lockable room!

I think it was incredibly helpful, but also slightly unnerving lying them out on the floor. Because of course, you know, I'm always interested in when you get all that film footage of [Pollock](#), you know, painting on the floor, I thought, we never see those paintings on the floor! I thought of a moment that was miraculous; years ago when I was learning to compute, I can remember on a LC-3 a little computer, that was like that (*typing on a computer gesture*) immediately it was like, I can write properly now because it's upright! Nobody seemed to be talking about the fact that we'd all learned to write like that (*handwriting gesture*) but suddenly we were thinking like that, and I thought I can think on my feet! You know, it's upright, it's so different. The experience of writing for me was transformative!

AD

Like a music stand

Audience member

So, how did you paint the cards? Did you paint the cards flat?

HG

I painted the cards flat and they're shown flat, but I think that when I was lying them out on the ground, I knew that they might look very different or not.

AD

So you don't, you don't paint flat? I always paint flat, do you paint flat?



HG

It depends what they are.

AD

Yeah, yeah, yeah it depends how wet I guess it is. Yeah, flat! (*laughs*)

HG

It is! But lying this all out with Richie, I mean, you know, I'm open to suggestion really!

AD

You love Richie! (*laughs*)

HG

No! I'm open to suggestion about how they could be put in a different sort of way really

Audience member

Helen, having not seen them exhibited in a single line and I'm standing fully in front of them seeing the journey continuum of that. Seeing them displayed like this, remind me very much of your music reference, it's like a sort of score.

AD

Oh yes, different layers

Audience member

You start offsetting one against the other and you do read it, you do read them but you're just reading them as a journey, but in a different way.

Audience member

But the gaps? The gaps in between



AD

Someone has a question at the back

Audience member

Do you think your interests control how someone experiences your images? There feels like there's quite a dream line quality to how you recall some of them. Have you thought of making a film from these especially?

AD

Yes, I thought of that and that too

Audience member

And then you could choose how they morph between each other as one continuous experience

AD

Yeah, return them to analogue, maybe or not.

HG

In order to present them they've be made into a film just to show them, so that you go through them as a line. They are very straight though, because in order to show them, how do you show somebody all these? You know, and when I had the flat images they just didn't do what I needed them to do, so the film takes you through them beginning to end.

Audience member

And it's got music hasn't it? On your website?

HG

I don't if that's on my website. I think there's a very short version of it on my website, it's only about a minute, I thought 25 minutes is really too long! (laughs) Because that's how long it takes to look at all of them. So the very short versions on my website, I should put up a longer one.

But I think the idea of actually morphing them and the idea of the cartoon as well, which I'm sort of thinking of making them do something very different, I don't know! It's all sort of rumbling around,



but I think for me, it has worked. It's been a good format for me as a linking format between, as I said earlier, on bigger works and for a physical format for making people move around. But where that will go, I just don't know yet!

AD

It makes me think a bit of the [Fra Angelico cells at San Marco](#), paintings on the wall and you go through, it kind of reminds me of your Book Of Hours and of your billboard as well.

I don't know if you've seen that crazy place [Marianne North Gallery at Kew Gardens](#)

HG

It's wonderful!

AD

It's just mad, isn't it? I mean, you go in and slightly feel a bit slightly sick! But I mean it's amazing! It's just sort of like incredible Gordie wallpaper of the hundreds of flowers. Not that yours is like that (*everyone laughs*)

HG

(*laughs*)

No, no!

AD

But it's an overwhelming experience!

HG

I have a massive respect for her, I'm sure we all know who she was.

AD

Yes, amazing women isn't she!

HG



She had the means to travel all over the world.

AD

Yeah, well, that's the thing lucky woman.

HG

And her knowledge for botany in the context of where she found these plants, is just overwhelmingly important scientifically.

AD

Yeah, incredible woman!

HG

So I don't know if any of you have been there to the gallery is in the special building that was built for her in Kew Gardens

AD

Yeah, take some Neurofen maybe that's all I'm saying!

(everyone laughs)

It's Marianne North.

Yeah amazing!

HG

She just did flower paintings

AD

She travelled to the actual places

HG

And they are beautiful in a very particular period of time. But they also were showing scientists the actual context in which these plants were living

AD

Yes, and making them realise why they sometimes couldn't work in England.

Has anyone got any more questions? As maybe we're drawing to a close!

Audience member

Yes, just an observation, because I think the conversations have been quite focused in a way on the technologies and display and the objects

AD

That's true!

Audience member

My experience of them is the subject matter

AD

We haven't really talked about the subject matter!

Audience member

And my experience of the subject matter, is that it's very emotional. You know, and actually I experience it as a whole object, and it makes me think of that period of time, and the trauma and the difficulties that we all kind of experience collectively. And so there's this is sort of something that's kind of quite strong and present to me about what each of the paintings contains in itself

HG

Well, I think that's a very interesting question, thank you! The fact was though, that these works were finished before COVID, so the COVID books are in the library, but this is why I put them up because they are so linked

AD

Within the context, yeah.

HG

And I think some of the ones I didn't put in which relate to political things, scandals and things that, you know, when you say about political, I've got one called 'Consider The Silk', which is all about the Catholic Church really, Bishops looking like frogs and it's all very problematic! But I suppose I can't help how I paint in terms of what I'm communicating. Mostly I can't really work unless I feel very strongly about something. So, these images relate to many things, and the interesting thing is the process of doing the Book Of Hours and doing the notations that were very much part of it to support the actual images, is something I'd very much like to do here, because, I'm very aware that I've got this tiny introduction to it on the wall there to for this piece, but if I was to only put one piece into an exhibition, I'd probably put quite a lot of information about one of those sections, because they're all streams of thought, they're all referencing certain things, they're all separate paintings, ideas in a sense and they are disparate, but they're all linked. But, as I say in that piece of information on the wall, is that our minds do that anyway, and when you were walking

AD

Yeah, I think I do

HG

When you've got this, that sort of stimulus you get from the place, the people you're with, or something happens, and your mind goes like that

AD

Well, we were talking about [Covehithe](#), which is where you're going to visit as part of your residency, (*referring to Mahal*) and I was saying, it kind of looks prehistoric and you're saying, well, maybe you're picking up on those elements of it being.

HG

That's part of the [land bridge](#) and people would have trumped over that for thousands of years!

AD

Yes, sort of goes back to the geography.

HG

Yeah

AD

Yeah, any other questions?

Audience member

Yeah, it's interesting to hear a little bit more about Mahals residency, and to hear about how you organise your thoughts. And with Helens work that it's this process of making and being very immediate response. Whereas Mahal you're here for a month which is a restricted time so it's quite interesting to hear how you're getting organised and what you hope to start from doing that.

MDM

So, I arrived on Monday and now it's a week gone and I've still got three weeks left. This week I've been doing a lot of walking and getting to know the area and a little bit of the history here and visiting [Sutton Hoo](#). I'll be continuing walking and I want to learn more about the native plants here and hopefully I would like to focus more actually, this is also because we were talking about land bridge on Friday and then somebody else also mentioned it, and I feel like this is a really interesting starting point for me because I'm Dutch! So, I'm from the other side of the bridge! So, I think it would be really interesting to somehow connect to that history here or maybe with stone tools that were found here from people that migrated. And yeah, it's still a bit kind of open where it's going to go, but I'll be here! There will be a showcase of my work here in this space, please come on the 14th and 15th of May!

AD

Excellent! It's pressure, isn't it? When you do a residency because you want to have all this time to absorb, but then you feel you have to create. But sometimes maybe usually creating after you've gone, possibly.

MDM

Well, yeah, I definitely think I'll continue! This will have a longer effect than just this month. I was also just thinking when you were talking about your display (*refers to Helen*) that I think when we've got restrictions that's when we widen our boundaries actually. So that's when we get interesting



ideas, I think it's good that there's a time limit and there's only so much I can do, and I have to start making decisions, so yeah.

AD

Concentrate! *(laughs)*

MDM

So we'll see how it GOES

AD

Yeah, I'm sure everyone knows, is there a statue near Sizewell of some people that have come over from Holland? Is that right? They rode out there, isn't that right?

Audience member

Yeah

MDM

Well, I'll go there then! *(laughs)*

AD

Ok!

Are there any more questions?

Thank you very much Helen and Mahal

(Audience claps)

CP

The Book of Hours is in the library until the end of May

AD

And you can look at it, can't you? You can ask to have a look at it with gloves.



CP

We're going to be doing some handling sessions, so try and catch it in the library or have a look online as well.

AD

Thank you.

CP

Thank you for coming!