

Transcript from talk between Jennifer Gilbert, ActionSpace and
Garvald Edinburgh
Wednesday 27 January 2021

Jennifer Gilbert – Black

Sheryll Catto – Red

Morven Macrae – Blue

Jennifer: Hi everyone, I'm Jennifer from Jennifer Lauren Gallery, and thank you for joining me on this Wednesday evening or Wednesday morning for those in LA Paige. I've popped in the chat box, the auto link for the live transcript if anyone needs to follow the transcript, alongside the talk, then please click that link and you can have the two screens side by side. We have two interpreters today, Siobhan and Alex. If you need to pin the interpreter. If you hover over them three little dots come up, and then you can press pin and there'll be pinned to your screen. If you'd like to check that your mic is off, that would be super.

And without further ado, we'll get started if anyone has any questions, please pop them in the chat box, and I'll ask them as we go.

So today, I'm in conversation with Sheryll Catto from ActionSpace, who is the co-director and Morven Macrae from Garvald in Edinburgh, who is the exhibition's coordinator and the art studio leader. And today we're going to hear from ActionSpace first and then move on to Garvald afterwards. So ActionSpace is a London based art studio, working with artists with learning disabilities, and Garvald Edinburgh is an art studio across five different sites in Edinburgh and Midlothian working with a range of artists. So, Sheryll if we start with you. I wonder if you could tell us a bit about who you are, what your role is, and how long you've been at ActionSpace.

Sheryll: Okay, well I'm Sheryll, I'm the co-director of ActionSpace. We have two directors myself and Barbara van heel, who, I'm not sure is here. And I joined action space in 2008, which is a long time. My background is very much as working in the arts as an arts professional, and I've always worked in supporting people to develop and maintain professional creative practices. So for me, a move to ActionSpace was a natural move because it was just continuing the same thing I had always been doing supporting artists who want to have a professional practice in the arts.

Jennifer: That's quite different to some people that I was talking to from American studios last week it's quite interesting to hear that that is your background through and through. And that's why moving to ActionSpace made complete sense to you.

Sheryll: Yep, absolutely, it wasn't, I mean I have learning disability in my life I'm very interested in learning disability but it's always been about the arts and particularly visual arts for me, and always been about supporting artists.

Jennifer: So if you could tell us a bit about ActionSpace for anyone that's not aware and how long it's been around them that sort of thing.

Sheryll: Okay, well we're based in London. We have three studios across London. Going back one bit we were actually launched in the 1960s as a participatory weird art hippie cooperative. They used to go out and do all these amazing things I think at one point they did a huge blow up tent thing in Trafalgar Square and all sorts of things. And over time, they started doing community work and started working with people with learning disabilities. So in 1984 ActionSpace then was founded as a charity and a limited company and they concentrated on doing creative projects for people with learning disabilities. Originally it was across all art forms, it was just about creativity so they were putting on performances they were doing music they were doing art. Then in 2004 I suppose they did a big review of sort of what was they where they had the most impact and decided to concentrate on the visual arts. And because that was an area of strength for them and because there weren't an awful lot of organizations in London doing that at that time. So from then on, we've concentrated in the visual arts and as I said I came into the picture in 2008, because that was my particular area. We have three Studios in London, one in South London, one in call it North but central London and then one in northwest London, we used to say north, south, east, west, but it's not quite. We did have a studio in East London as well until COVID. And we've temporarily sort of let it go because we just haven't had people coming into the studio. One of the reasons for that is that London is big and wide and one of the big issues our artists have is in traveling. We thought quite a lot about the idea of maybe just having one big studio somewhere, but it just isn't possible in London, we just couldn't find anywhere that everyone could travel to and that we could be accessible right across London.

The core of what we do is the studio project, which is supported studio sessions. We've got eight of them across the three studios. So the artists come in and they work in the studio for a set number of hours - we have some that are half days, which is three hours and some that are full days, which is six hours, and they work with one of our artists facilitators. So we have eight artists facilitators who have all worked with us for at least five years, and they run a session where basically the artists can use the studio and can explore and use all of the materials and develop whatever they want to do. We're not at all discipline specific it's really about the artists coming in, playing in the studio. The facilitator works with them on a one to one basis to sort of develop their ideas and their skills, and then they sort of develop their artwork in the way they want to. So you can see from the picture on the screen. We've got people who are doing photography, we've got people who are doing textiles, lots of painting, lots of sculptural work. We've got people veering off into doing sort of digitalish work with projections. We've got

people who do performance, sort of, very much coming from the visual arts. We've got a very wide idea of what we consider visual arts.

Jennifer: Let's step back a second. You say you've got these three different studios and from what I'm aware, they're all inside bigger complexes. So, yeah, could you explain a bit about that and why it's important for you to go in those other studios within bigger centres.

Sheryll: Absolutely. We very much feel that we are part of the wider ecology of the visual arts sector, all of our studios are within studio complexes. So in South London we're at Studio Voltaire which houses, I mean it's in development at the moment but it usually houses about 50 to 60 professional working artists. In North London were in cockpit arts where we work alongside over 100 artists and designer makers and in North West London we're at activa studios where it's a studio with about 60. And that's really important to us because we are part of the visual arts. We're working alongside other artists, we've got gallery owners and collectors coming and going. We are part of the whole creative buzz of being part of the sector. We're part of the open studios, so we sort of attract new audiences and that's really, really important to us. In fact, throughout my talk everything I say will be that we see our artists as very much part of the sector, not sort of a studio that sits over there and does things differently. Can I tell you a bit about the artists?

Jennifer: Well I'm gonna play a bit of devil's advocate here. I'm gonna open this question up to you both because this question was thrown at me the other day and I thought, I'm gonna use this in my talk. What do you say to people when they say to you that you work, oh you know you're just a day centre that people come to when they come and they spend a few hours and they pass their time and they go home. What is your response when people say that to you about, you know, about ActionSpace and about Garvald. What is your response that you would say back?

Morven: In terms of us we're engaged in similar to what Sheryll is saying. We believe in the visual arts, we believe in crafts and making, and people are coming to learn skills and we are creating a space - a space that is appropriate and safe for them to be able to do that and develop their skills and the quality of the work should speak to the people. I think I question the whether people are seeing that value, that we offer in their day to day life. And that's I think, it's a comment that is not unknown.

Jennifer: Yes.

Morven: And quite often it requires actually someone coming into the space. And I mean we can articulate it and we can show pictures, but actually it requires that meeting of people to shift their mindset, or their perspective which has grown out of a historical background.

Jennifer: That's so true.

Morven: And often it's just stepping through the door and people will go. Oh, okay. And they're welcomed in and they understand the community and connection and really its depth. And all these things that are deeper that go beyond you know someone coming in to pass the time of day, and only within our context of framework, you know, we've got so many different workshops that are specific to a craft, as well as the art studio. And we are creating a space where people are able to learn skills and create and then contribute to the community in a way that's right for them. We're creating that space for them to be able to do that so whether that is, you know, in terms of art you know they're making the bread that's gone to the shops. They're making you know weavings that are being sold and cushions, or they're creating jewelry or woodwork. It's a space for them to be able to explore that in a sort of supported environment.

Jennifer: Yeah, and Sheryll what would you say?

Sheryll: Well, we've got people who are making really sophisticated intense, high art work, and they're in there for six hours making you know a piece of art maybe over a few weeks, you wouldn't do that if you weren't really serious about it. You know, I think also the supported studio thing is only a part of what we do, we do an awful lot of work, taking the work out of the studio, developing people's practices doing exhibitions, forming partnerships, things like that so it's way more than just what happens in the studio and in fact, the studio is just the beginning for us of what we do.

Jennifer: Thanks so just throwing that out there because I know that it comes up time and time again and people do just compare you to, you know, somewhere where people just go spend a few hours and go home again.

Sheryll: But also I mean because, in terms of how we get most of our people, a lot of people come through referrals, through care managers and social care and will often get calls from people saying so and so likes to do a little bit of art, so can I send them to you, and they come in and you know they're in a studio for three hours and it becomes really obvious that that's not really what they want.

Jennifer: Yeah, that's true. Well, while you've just touched on that. Do you want to talk about you know like you just said you get some referrals - like how do the artists that are in ActionSpace, how do they all come to know you and come to be part of what you do?

Sheryll: Okay well we've had people who've been there for 20-30 years, so for a long time. Which, you know has given them time to develop their practice. In general, referrals from

social Care, we've got really good relationships with the care teams in all of the main boroughs of London that we work with. A lot of word of mouth so you'll get someone who comes in with a support worker because we don't provide personal care support. We provide access to the art activities but anyone who needs support has to bring a support worker with them. So often we get referrals that way because we'll have a support worker who's come in to support someone in a session recognizes that this is just a really great thing and then they support someone else and they think okay well it'd be great if they came as well. Also we run a whole program of events and activities and we also get people from that. I mean we're part of Tate exchange, so we have people who come to our events like at Tate exchange, and then they'll get in touch afterwards to say that looks really interesting and I just really like your approach and how you do things.

Jennifer: And for the benefit of some people that might not have any idea what Tate exchange is please?

Sheryll: Yeah. I knew you were gonna say that. So we talked about not doing anything like that like the Tate's across Britain, run this program called Tate exchange which is really a community engagement program. And in each of the four Tate's they have sort of an area where they run a program over the year and they invite partner organisations to become associates and to put events on in their space. So we became an associate of Tate exchange about four years ago.

For us, it's just an amazing huge space that we can do wonderful things in. So we've been running events there on an annual basis. And yeah that's been a really great way of engaging with more people. It's also the events actually are led by our artists, because we have a lot of artists particularly who work with Charlotte because I'm looking at her name has just come up on my screen, who have a participatory practice so on top of their studio practice they also run workshops, and they do live art events. And so, that's one of the things that in terms of encouraging practice and supporting practice that we have, artists, then who lead workshops as part of our Tate exchange activities.

Jennifer: You know, is that in the Tate Gallery main space in London?

Sheryll: It's not, that's the whole point and I hope there's no one from Tate on here, but it's a different in Liverpool apparently, it is in the middle of the gallery space and in Tate London, it's in the new building and it's in level five and it's very, we feel quite isolated I think it's one of the things they need to look at.

Jennifer: Yes. Agreed. So on the screen now we can see four different artists with quite different practices. Could you tell us a bit about what we can see on the screen?

Sheryll: Yep, that's the thing, as I said if you go back to the fact that it's very much about a supported studio session where the artists come in and they sort of develop whatever they're doing. So you've got two people there. Well, you've got, Robin on the left, who's doing sort of large paintings. You've got Lasmin top middle who actually is a textile artist but she's actually photographing her work, and then working those photographs up into projections which she then re-projected onto her textile work. You've got Matthew at the bottom which we really liked that picture because we just thought it's really nice when your hair matches your artwork.

Jennifer: Yes he has stripy red, yellow and orange hair.

Sheryll: But he does very much tabletop painting type work. And then on the right there's Abu who does the sort of combinations of assemblage and collage, he'll sort of paint things and then bring things on it. We've got quite a lot of people who work in that way, really sort of putting things together way. Lots of people who work with sort of found and sort of recycled materials, we'll be looking at Nnena a little bit later. They all work big, but we have small studios as for some reason, most of them work really big - yeah seems to work really well for them. And it's, yeah slightly chaotic.

Jennifer: But fabulous chaotic, great energy at least. So I thought we could talk a bit about your partnership work and sort of how you work with other galleries and on the screen now we can see you've just mentioned Tube Lines which was at the Tate. But what is the importance of partnership working for someone like ActionSpace and, you know, how can you try to get your artists, out of the studio into the contemporary arts?

Sheryll: Yeah. Well, as I said the supported studio is sort of the beginning point, it's the studio sessions. It's the equivalent of artists going into the studio and developing ideas and developing practice. From that, it's really about what they do with the practice so we have a whole program of things that we do. We do our own exhibitions, on the right there you'll see the out there Art Fair, which is an exhibition that we started a couple of years ago which is a curated selling exhibition that we want to develop and maybe even take out to other art fairs. We do an awful lot of submitting work to open submission exhibitions. So on the left on the top, Andrew Omoding, he's one of our artists. We submitted his work to the Barbican art group trust, open submission exhibition which is open to artists all over the UK. He was selected from something like 200 applications. He was one of 20 selected. And actually, he's won a six week residency with the Barbican arts group trust. And that's just an open submission to everyone who's an artist in the UK that's not specifically a learning disability or anything. We work on Tate exchange and we work quite a lot with Studio Voltaire, where we're based in South London. We will talk about later they did an exhibition with Nnena Kalu in central London, right behind the Royal Academy. A major exhibition that for us it's really important that we work with partnerships, because again, as I keep saying they are artists and they need to

be beside their peers, with the wider sector and the way that happens is working with partners. The other thing I should say is that with each of the sessions, we have volunteers who work under the guidance of the artists facilitators to help the artists, sort of, you know, just access ideas, materials and things like that. And out of that comes a lot of partnerships because a lot of the volunteers are themselves practicing artists. And in fact, at the moment, Charlotte is working on a project with someone who's a painter who is, you know, has a painting practice and exhibiting painting practice doing a collaboration with one of our South London artists. So it's partnerships right across the board from partnerships with other artists to organizations, we've done quite a lot of work with small galleries. Small galleries really get our work and they're not you know, they don't have sort of complicated curatorial ideas. And obviously working with you, I mean you've shown quite a lot of our artists and that you know, gets them to a wider audience, and then from being out there, it gets picked up and they get other opportunities.

Jennifer: Yeah, definitely. And just so the people that are unable to see the images on the screen. Andrew's work there, which is quite a fascinating object, how would you describe that?

Sheryll: Andrew is really fascinating. I think he's 31 now, we started working with him when he was 18 through one of our young people's projects. Andrew is someone who is just amazingly talented, phenomenally talented. He finds things, literally, I think the piece that you're seeing there is called 'lady is lying down is resting before going back and playing tennis', and all of his works have amazing titles and it comes from I think somewhere in there there's a tennis racket that he found. So he'll appear in the studio with something he's found, he does a lot of binding and tying and sewing together textiles. So what you've got there - it's three pieces. There's a cushion. And then there's a long, sort of, lady, which is made up with a fabric that sort of padded and built up into sort of a little form, and then a tennis racket that she's leaning on. And all of his pieces start with something he's found, either because we've just got supplies of lots of stuff in the studio, so he'll come in and he'll either come in with something he's found, or we come in with things we are thought we find because we just find things on the street and think, oh, Andrew must have that. Or a piece of fabric and his piece of work will start with that. And then it'll start building up and building up a lot. It goes back to, he grew up in Uganda until he was 12 and he came here as a refugee. So a lot of his work will sort of hark back to stories about his childhood in Uganda, or things that have happened to him in life. And again, I mean he's he did a residency at Camden Art Centre in their residency studio. He's selected all of the time for his work and he is someone that is just amazingly talented and is exactly like any other artist

Jennifer: He's so infectious to be around. He's so happy and joyful and performance is a really big part of his work.

Sheryll: He sings and dances and in the Camden Art Centre exhibition he did a showcase for it. He led an entire dance. He dressed everyone up in these costumes he had made in fact somewhere I had a picture of you with him Jennifer.

Jennifer: Yes, yes I'm dressed up. So I thought we'd move on to Nnena Kalu now who is in my online exhibition 'evolving echoing entities'. So here she is in the studio working on two of her map drawings. So could you tell us a little more about Nnena.

Sheryll: Okay, I'm gonna feel really conscious now because Charlotte's around. At some point, I'm gonna say Charlotte can you say something. Nnena is amazing data, absolutely amazing. Nnena joined ActionSpace in 1997. She's part of our South London studio. She works with Charlotte Hollinshead who is one of our artists, our associate artist and who runs our South London studio. One of the things I should have said before is that the relationship between the facilitator and the artist is really important. It gives the artist confidence, and a real sense of acceptance, which they can then spring out from the artists facilitators point of view. They develop this really intuitive relationship with the artist, which means that they can bring ideas to them. Nnena is very complex. So Charlotte sources materials for her, but very much based on the fact that she knows Nnena really well. She works really closely with her, and she has ideas of what, you know, she can tell. Oh Nnena really needs this. She's got two areas to her work. She's got her 2d work which are these huge vortex drawings. And then in a second, you'll see she has a whole 3d Gallery installation practice - what ties them all together is this sort of rhythmic circular motion, which with the drawings which she does two at a time so she'll have them on walls facing each other, so she'll be working from one to the other building them up. So they start with maybe the black marks and then the Colours will come on to them. They're all different and very much about the rhythm and the sound to it it's really amazing when you watch Nnena work. There's like a sound and a rhythm and everything that goes into her work, and then from the 2d that transfers to the 3d and she works backwards and forwards.

Jennifer: And just to say with the 2d work, there's an audio description of one of the 2d flat drawings, as part of the online exhibition so you could listen to that and hear more about what the drawing looks like and how it looks on the page. Yes, now we can see her 3d work

Sheryll: Yes I did say to you that everyone works big at ActionSpace. So this was in fact, you were involved in this weren't you in fact you were the one who got us the opportunity. This was one of Nnena's first big breakthrough. She was invited by the Mad Museum in Belgium, to be part of a project they were doing with four international artists. And basically, they built these sort of wooden structures and Charlotte, sort of, liaised with them in advance and said what do you need and we just said we needed lots of stuff. I think they were there for, was it 10 days and Nnena just loved it. And these things got bigger and bigger and bigger and eventually they got so big and heavy that some of the wooden structures that came out from the back wall

started collapsing. But it was just amazing. And the other thing about these events is that obviously because as I said before our studios are quite small, so getting out of the studio. Part of Nnena's exhibitions are very much doing a live install because the process is really important part of the artwork. So Charlotte and Nnena always do a live install and the opportunity to sort of go big, came to a culmination actually I don't know do you have studio Voltaire next. Yeah, studio Voltaire was where we just had this enormous warehouse space in the middle of Mayfair which Charlotte worked with them and there was some sort of structures for Nnena to work off of. But she basically just had a five day install and then over the run of the exhibition she was in there for two days a week continuing, so there was like a five day install a private view and then it continued to evolve. And one of the things that Charlotte wanted to do was to just give Nnena as much space as she needed, as much materials as she needed, as much time as she needed, and just see where it went to.

Jennifer: Can you talk about the kind of materials that we can see in these photos, like I know she loves using like really bright colorful sticky tape.

Sheryll: Yep, lots of tape lots and lots and lots and lots and lots of tape, our budget, I think, I don't know Charlotte I think our budget for tape on this was about 500 pounds. I mean, lots and lots of tape but also then plastic, which we need to look at. What was interesting for studio Voltaire was that she introduced paper. And it was really interesting because from my knowledge of being there when I was working with her. She then developed this whole process. So a lot of the pods. The basic pods she had made in the studio in advance and they got taken there, but then there was a whole process where she would take the pods and then bind them together with plastic. And then there were these sort of tubes that were hung around so then she would take them onto the tubes. And then there was a step where she took shredded paper and in fact Charlotte had volunteers just shredding paper like crazy to keep up with her. So then there was shredding paper that got bound into that too. And there was a whole process and there was so many things that were different, and every time she does it every time she has more space, every time she has more materials, there's sort of a new element that comes to it because that element then develops you can see on the bottom on the left a whole piece where actually, when she was making it she was inside it. There was like a really fascinating relationship.

Jennifer: So they're like big circular balls that are like padded with things around the outside, then she's attached them onto these big black tubes that were around the space, and then built them up and built them up and they overlap and things overhang them and they're rather wild.

Sheryll: So yeah, I mean, sadly that exhibition was cut short because of COVID. So we never quite got to the bit where we saw how far she would go and we're very much hoping post

COVID, someone else will offer her that opportunity in an even bigger space I'm quite keen on the Turbine Hall at Tate.

Jennifer: Wow. Why not, you never know. Marta has asked where do your artists get funding from to access ActionSpace?

Sheryll: Okay, We are an Arts Council NPO, so we get a core grant from the Arts Council which is about 20% of our costs. Then 35 to 40% of our fund our cost comes from what earned income so our artists pay a session fee. Most of them pay that, well I think probably all of them pay that through their personal care budgets. We do a lot of fundraising then to make up the other 40 to 45%. And the reason for that is so that we can keep the session fee at a rate, where it's accessible and where it fits within personal care budgets.

Jennifer: Perfect. I'm going to move on to Morven for a bit now. And we'll talk about Garvald if that's okay. So, could you tell us a bit about who you are and what your role there is how long you've been there, and a little about more about Garvald and how it is structured?

Morven: So I'm the exhibitions coordinator and the art workshop leader at Garvald, so I have a kind of split role. There I work four days, facilitating in the art studio and one day a week, sort of coordinating the exhibitions program. The arts studio sits within a larger organisation, a much larger organization. And as I say I come from an arts background myself and I've been at Garvald now for I think 17 years, so it's the kind of place that you're there, you know, a lot of our staff are long term. And lots of us have been there a long time. So it kind of hooks you because it's just such a phenomenal creative sort of place to spend your days and working life. So, and the building which we we're looking at is where the art studio is situated, and we've been in that building 10 years. Garvald has been established since 1969, and it grew out of a Camp Hill movement, which was kind of got the underpinning ethos of a Rudolf Steiner and, and, which has to do with, you know, supporting each individual and their own path, essentially, and we do that through creating and making. So there's 21 workshops across five buildings in the area. Four of the buildings are all pocketed together and in a similar area. And one building is out in Midlothian, and within those we have. So we have to Woodworking, we've got an organic bakery, a puppetry workshop or drama performance workshop, two Weaveries, there's two pottery's, a glass studio, a kind of canteen as well so the service users, well they call themselves members so if you hear me talking about, members, that's who I'm referring to they've chosen that that's how they want to be referred to. And so in the canteen they'll make organic vegetarian lunches for us every day. And so there's a kind of nice rhythm and routine and each person will have a timetable. In terms of their work and practice so there will access a workshop, perhaps depending on what their funding is and how often they come. They'll work in the morning, and then usually change over lunch and change into different workshop, but their timetable is set so that you know the might be in the weaving in the

morning and in the bakery in the afternoon, and there could be three or four workshops over the course of the week, but it's generally one in morning and one in the afternoon. Each workshop has about eight members within that, and our core staff of one workshop leader at a time and usually we are workshop support workers – we're all employed by Garvald so it is run as a care organization. But then working through meaningful craft and making. And so all our funding comes from social care. Personal budgets, but the art studio, which we're looking at is situated on the top floor. So in the Orwell arts building it was an old Edwardian primary that we converted about 10 years ago. And, in there we have on the ground floor and pottery. And in the second floor there's a glass studio and a media group. And on the top there's weaving and the art studio. The art studio is different it is run slightly differently to the other workshops in it's a much smaller space so just by the fact of the space, it's a smaller group. So there's myself, I have a colleague that comes in one half day a week, but other than that it's myself supporting three or four members at one time in the studio. Within those four days of running the art studio, that's broken into two different kinds of groups so I have what we call xxx they have a permanent space within the art studio to develop their kind of creative practice or self driven kind of practice. And that's for as long as they want to be there, essentially, until they feel that maybe they want to shift, move on. So I have people there that have been there 12 years. So we're looking at... there's three people and you can kind of get a sense of the size of it the window was on the right hand side and that's the other wall. So, you know, there's 15 core artists, and then I run a sessional group, which because there's not a lot of through flow there's not a lot of access, you know, and there's a lot of demand, there's 250 members that access Garvald every week.

Over the 21 workshops, I can support six in a day so there's so many talented artists there, so I run a sessional group which is a nine month program. And that's like an introduction to materials introduction to the space and process. So it's a bit more of a lead workshop, but within our kind of place where I'm still listening to their mark making and what their energies are, what materials they're enjoying, what they're not. What size they're working on, you know. So that's broken down into, you know, three monthly blocks and working towards what people call personal projects. Pre COVID we were just starting to look at kind of different options for expansion, but everything's you know on hold.

Jennifer: In this photo we can see the way the studio is set out. There's a bit where there's a storage space for your work, your canvases. there's like a bookshelf a really tall bookshelf, then there's all your materials and then you have like tables within the middle of the space.

Morven: That's right yes and everyone has their own folder space and their own storage space. Yeah, we work next door to the weaving studio, so all the workshops are kitted out with really high quality facilities, because it says to the makers, you know in terms of value of their works. So you can see on the right Julie is working on a computerized loom, and there's floor looms up back there, much natural materials as well as all, you know, working with, you know,

an awareness of the environment and connection to materials and there's some phenomenally skilled weavers. It's just an incredible kind of skill.

Jennifer: And then, it's quite rare to see a studio that supports artists with learning disabilities to have so many looms. Some of them I've seen one, like Barrington Farm has one. This is quite incredible, there's a room full ... I can see about eight or nine.

Morven: There's floor looms and I think there's probably four big four looms and I don't know Karolina if she's on here, correct me but there's yeah there's probably about 18 different looms. I think tabletop looms, and then crochet and knitting so that's textiles. There's also you know embroidery and sometimes we'll cross over into other projects as well.

Jennifer: So if we come back to the studio, there's two people working in this picture - one against big boards on the walls and then one on a long scroll of paper.

Morven: Yes, so that is Nils in the background, drawing his figures in lines in black pen and Joseph in the foreground, both working towards different pieces for different exhibitions. Actually Nils was working towards this wonderful group of people in Edinburgh, who would run a hidden door festival. And we're putting in an application for Nils for that. And he was working towards an installation piece so he had a full room so they basically find derelict buildings in Edinburgh open them up and run these phenomenal creative arts festivals open to attendees and Nils took part in that and that talking about exhibitions and you were talking about partnership Sheryll and things like that, it was really interesting because a lot of the ones that we sort of run ourselves in terms of exhibitions and really it was phenomenal for Nils to be involved in this. One day we took it down and installed it and he was able to go in there, he has difficulties with thresholds and so on. But he went down into this building site and spent one day drawing in the set up, you know, with his peers, you know without experience. I mean, it took, however long to get to that one day but for Nils it's meant so much for him and his sense of identity of who he is and who he can be and quite rightly, you know, his work sits within, you know, everyone else's So, anyway, that was brilliant to try and get it into kind of just as you say, normal contemporary visual art.

Jennifer: And he's going to be included in Glasgow International as well. Yes, he would have been exhibiting at project ability one of the brilliant organisations in Glasgow. At their Glasgow International Exhibition. They invited Nils to exhibit as part of that, so they have all the work that was sent off the week before COVID.

Sheryll: And obviously Nnena did it in 2018

Morven: I'm aware of that and know that how essential, you know for these artists to be seen, because that is quite often the challenge is getting the doors open, you know once they're opened.

Jennifer: Definitely, yeah and so now we're looking at Tracy, sitting in the art studio with her collection of...

Morven: It's a good old Scottish folk

Jennifer: It's a joyful photograph with colour bursting off the canvases that surround her sitting down.

Morven: Yeah, Tracy I'm interested in the book, you were talking about to see the scale and size as well. Tracy is someone that used to, you know, she does, beautiful drawings little watercolor drawings and then for quite a lot of people it's just opened up and up-scaled and for Tracy, it was that that led to these phenomenal sort of pieces and you know she's just a small woman. And, you know, she says sort of that big painting at the back the blue one with the figures, so it's about the height of her I think. They have wonderful titles as well their titles like, 'they're playing the guitar at half past nine at night' and 'they've been up to a bit of mischief'.

Jennifer: Really great titles and the drawings on the canvas is a sort of simple black outlines of figures, where she's like maybe coloured in the top that they're wearing, but the rest of the body is often just left without color.

Morven: Yeah. And then coloured the backgrounds.

Jennifer: Yeah. So there's a couple of exhibition photos that we've popped in for you, so this is 'naturally'. Can you talk about how you know the exhibitions that you do and why you choose the venues that you might use?

Morven: Absolutely, so I mean a lot of these will grow, sort of, organically but I there's two parts to the exhibition program. And every two or three years we try and do a large organisational exhibition, so as I say we've kind of found historically, getting opportunities were difficult, so we started doing Garvald exhibitions and our own program. And some of those were through partnerships, so we had someone on our board who worked with squash court service so we spent a year working with the squash court service and then, and then producing artwork in response to that. And then one with Botanic Gardens, which was very much more in tune with our ethos, in terms of environment, and connection to that and so it also is really lovely because we got, you know, we spent two years doing research and each workshop had their own kind of area of research and got access to the herbarium and the

archives, and we'd go back, you know to visit all the glass houses and really kind of were able to build up relationships. And then each workshop, would you know support an artist within that to respond to it. You know, for example the woodwork piece in the middle that was a tree that got fouled in a great storm that happened, so they were able to respond to that, with an aim. So we do these kind of large group shows which are really big. This one was based on the theme of play it was called play create and relate. And you can see the variety of different work - there's a wooden sailboat carved from a woodworker. There's a more assemblage piece together with the textiles birds. I'm always blown away by the variety of the members, you know to come up with ideas to facilitate. I mean we don't have a gallery space. So, it has its pros and cons. The pro being that we then have to source spaces and that allows us to make the connections with the gallery spaces in Edinburgh. But the accessible gallery spaces are few and far between.

Jennifer: I can imagine.

Morven: Talking about the small galleries and the connections that you make. The small galleries always have challenges but there's always a really positive response to the work even when it's on its own, which is good in the, you know, we go to these different spaces of Edinburgh. You know I aim to try and get the work into, you know mainstream gallery spaces like Summerhall which is a contemporary art space. So I try and focus on that. We also do smaller exhibitions and certainly over the past four or five years you know there are as you know I've been working on creating networks you know with the likes of yourselves and project ability, just to open up for artists from within the art studio, these opportunities, which has been phenomenal for them. What we're looking at now is James Allison at Jennifer's 'monochromatic minds' exhibition in London, which we were able to travel down to do and even visit. We made it. And for James again he came and stood up in front of everyone and gave a talk. He draws wonderful birds but does colour work as well. But it's black linear work here, birds that are fairly detailed and they kind of meander into you know this sort of matrix of linear bits as well.

Jennifer: He is a phenomenal artist, and he's currently got work in the London art fair as well.

Morven: Just like everyone else James has been at home for the past pretty much a year now. And, you know, we do zooms a bit. So to be able to just still have able to get work out there is definitely in this moment it's really good but I think as well what was really nice there, you know, James is a puppetry performer so you know, with the different workshops we do consider ourselves a community. We're an organization you know, people will identify as a puppeteer as well as an artist. And, you know, that allows him to be able to stand up and give this talk that he gave at your exhibition as well. So we very much, you know, value that the other work spaces that people are in and they tend to identify with their peers as well.

Jennifer: Just before we come on to John Black who's part of my online exhibition there's an interesting question that's just popped up to both of you. Have you had to turn people down wanting to use the spaces because they've got complex needs because they need you to use their direct payment for care?

Morven: I'm not involved in that part of the ins and outs but not to my knowledge, and Garvald is very accessible building with lifts to all the floors and our bathrooms have hoists.

Sheryll: Whilst you know our facilities are not as good as other studios, but I'd say probably about 60% of the people we work with have complex needs. I think the relationship we have with care managers and with social care is really important. We have a pastoral care coordinator who sort of handles recruitment and then we'll work with families or supporters to try and access the payments. We actually haven't had anyone so far, who hasn't been able to access it. Also because of the good relationship with social care they appreciate what we can bring to the artists who come to us. We get people who actually have challenging behavior and can't access other activities, we've got quite a number of people like that who I just say they're artists I mean they come to us and they're making art and we never see any challenging behavior. So, no we haven't and I can say also we've never actually excluded anyone. One of the things that Siobhan does, who is here somewhere, is if we do have any problems. She works with the artists facilitator and with families and with support workers to come up with strategies, so that people feel comfortable with us so and that's something we feel really strongly about not excluding people.

Jennifer: Yeah. And that's really important that you've got Siobhan in that role I guess because not all of the art studios have that role in place.

So back to John Black. Here he is on the screen right now. So could you tell us a little bit about John and sort of how he creates his work because the colors that he uses become so intense when he builds it up on the paper, so could you tell us a bit about him?

Morven: Sure, John is a wonderful gentleman that I have the honor of working with and have support since I began at Garvald, so we've got a long, long history working together. I've got a statement in front of me sums him I think, he says "I like bright colors. They made me feel calm and excited." Just a really nice articulation of his experience. I experience that from his work, and John has been attending for many many years, and was working in one workshop mainly. I worked in the puppetry originally with him and supported him and that's where I kind of started working on his drawing practice and supporting him. He will start with paint so he'll build up layers, so he generally starts with washes of paint. And, it's fascinating to watch quite a lot, you know his pieces can take months to make. But you know because of the process, for each there's so many points in it where the work is beautiful as well with the quality of colour.

He has such an understanding of color balance and relationships, that it's just intuitive. I was looking at that photo now, he enjoys, you know, the colour right in front of him being close to that wall of color and he also has a similar gestural mark, you know in a rhythm and a sound that you hear when you're watching him. And so it's layers of material, so it might be watercolor and then acrylic on top and then pencil on top of that and then charcoal, which is gives that density right on the top, and quite often they'll be these pulse points. What I term pulse points, so that last piece with John standing in front of, there are sort of, you know, bands of colour. So you'll see these kind of bands. I was interested for him to go bigger because usually we worked on a smaller piece and there might just be one pulse and then so again trying out new things with bigger scale. It's really interesting to see his work, you know. He sort of adapts his mark making to that larger scale, but there's still you know the yellow and the pink. There's still these kind of sort of focal points.

Jennifer: And again, there's an audio description of one of John's works within the online exhibition itself. I particularly like this image, which had a really great title which I forgot to write down but it was something about birds. Hopefully you'll have it in front of you that they're flying. I can't think what it is.

Morven: Yes John liked really long titles as well. We have conversations sometimes where they have a fairy tale aspect but this one is, "it's birds, they're flying, they're eating foods, they're eating insects. They don't eat bread." There's others I can't think of them off the top of my head, but it's things about, you know, the lions are eating fish and chips, and the people are running, you know, and they just have these kind of stories to them and the headmaster is having a day off and he is relaxing you know.

Jennifer: I think that's really fascinating, with a title like that, as soon as you read the word about birds you look at this, well I looked at this image in a completely different way. So I was like yes they are birds like the way they have you know the movement in them and everything on their head, you know, it really brought it to light with the wings and it made me look at it in a completely different way to how I was looking at it originally which I loved.

Morven: That's interesting yeah because you know I'm there for the experience, so I know so it's really interesting to hear where other people think about a piece of work. Yeah, up until about six years ago he was working on these abstract pieces and then there was a moment where he painted a person. And that started a whole thing of John sort of looking and drawing representation. It was tentative you know when you have that, you know, for me it was tentative, not for John. Because I'm just seeing how he continues and keeps his mark. But he's moving into a kind of representational way, you know, so moving from the abstract and into the pictorial, but his mark and his energy and his pulse points are still there within his work, and he

still does both. So he'll still work with abstract pieces and these large colored pieces, and he'll say you know, I want to draw a bird or a different animal.

Jennifer: I wanted to ask you both about, you know, both of your studios work with a lot of artists that might be non-verbal or have quite severe complex needs, and how your studio goes about working with these artists like how you support them through them being non-verbal.

Morven: For me, the primary aspect is listening and I mean that in its broadest sense. 've worked with some for a long time. But if someone new arrives it's about offering materials, it's seeing which ones they respond to, which pick up, which ones they don't like to touch, which ones they're enjoying the sound of and listening and then just keeping you know offering them, you know, the space to keep exploring those materials. And they might use Makaton or sign along. You know there's different levels of, you know, ways of communicating. And some people that I've worked with are not interested in the outcome, they're interested in the process. And that's another level of dialogue to have, you know.

Sheryll: Yeah, I would echo the same thing. That was why I said before that what's really important is the relationship between the facilitator and the artist, because it is all about choices but it's very much about giving informed choices. So it's about watching and observing. Sometimes you get it wrong, sometimes, you know they just don't want it at all, but it's very much about that sort of ongoing and also the fact that people come to us over a long period of time, so that they become more comfortable, and they find ways of communicating in the studio.

Jennifer: Yeah, definitely. Well we've come to the end of our hour, so I thought I'd wrap it up by talking about whether you think, I think there's a shift happening currently within the UK about how this work is being viewed in a more broader sense, so like this exhibition that these two artists feature in was picked up last week by frieze, which is amazing, if I do say so myself. But do you think that the art sector is changing, opening up more being more accepting you know how do you see it moving or shifting at the moment, I'd be interested to hear what you both think?

Sheryll: I think, because there are so many conversations about diversity and inclusion. I think there's a real will to change. It'll be interesting I mean I think we've talked about this before coming upto lock down for COVID we had Nnena at Studio Voltaire, which was covered by frieze and elephant, and all of the other magazines, we had Andrew at Camden Art Centre. You had your exhibition on which was being covered as well. I think there's a real interest in this. I think there's definitely, you know, people wanting to. I think we need to see what happens when we come out of this and if it is still there. And who does what, but I think people

are understanding, I think also we found, like with volunteers coming in who a lot of them are art students I think they're just coming in and getting it right away, there's no complication to it they just know and they very much see themselves as peers with our artists when they come in.

Morven: I mean, I echo those observations certainly I think, possibly not meaning to be bad to Scotland, but it might still be a little bit further behind in terms of the establishment kind of getting it.

Jennifer: We're all the same in that respect.

Morven: It's gonna take a while. It seems like there's a lot more going on and getting there. Yeah, I think that's gonna take a lot of weight. And I think also people are becoming less and less interested in the establishment.

Jennifer: Yeah, any closing thoughts, Sheryll and Morven.

Sheryll: Well, interestingly when I did a talk recently with two of our artists and I did say to them, because they were talking to lots of people from the sector and I said, Well, this is your chance, what do you want tell the sector what you want, and they both said right away we just want more opportunities to show our work.

Jennifer: Yeah, that's true. I wholeheartedly agree with that. When I had a conversation with Thompson from ActionSpace he said exactly that, he was like I just want my work out there more and I want more people to see it and more opportunities to show it.

Sheryll: Yes, like he said in that same talk, he said I go out and I'm in galleries and I see these galleries and I think my works is this good, why couldn't it be here?

Jennifer: Yeah, super. Well thanks very much and thanks to everyone for coming today, and the link is on the screen for both ActionSpace, and Garvald and the online exhibition if you haven't seen it. I should say thanks to the Arts Council for funding my online exhibitions for me. Thanks to Sheryll and Morven and thanks to the interpreters Siobhan and Alex, and everyone. Have a wonderful evening, morning, afternoon wherever you are in the world, and goodbye.