

Questions - Maria/Rohini Conversation

- Maria, I can't quite believe that it's been almost two years since Iniva and Towner awarded you the third and final Future Collect commission. It's such a joy to be sitting here with you today to reflect on the thoughts and processes behind the making of your incredibly moving new work, and the exhibition upstairs. I wonder if to start with, you could take us back to your original proposal and tell us why the Future Collect commission at Towner Eastbourne appealed to you.
- As your ideas evolved from your original proposal, the work you finally made for your commission was 26,778,780 minutes, which I hope everyone here has had the chance to see and experience. I'd like to acknowledge the significance of this work, which feels simultaneously monumental and exceptionally delicate, being acquired by Towner and entering the collection. One of the key aims of Future Collect was for galleries to commission and acquire works that better represent our society, and while this is a very personal work about love, absence and longing it has an emotional resonance for us all, inviting us to listen and pay close attention even if we don't fully understand. What was it that compelled you to make this work?
- The notion of 'desire lines' has underpinned your thinking for this commission, from your initial expression of interest, to the final realisation of the work. Can you give us an insight into your personal interpretation of the term 'desire lines'?
- The workings of memory, and in particular how we feel memories in our bodies, seems to be central to your work. During the research phase for your commission, you told us about your experience of coming across a sweet shop in Eastbourne that you remembered from your childhood - it had quite a visceral impact. I wonder if you could share that anecdote with us today.
- Along with the memories we carry in our bodies, words and voice also seem to play a significant part in your practice, in particular the impact that words can have - whether written, spoken, heard, remembered or misremembered. Can you tell us about why and how words have become so important to your work?
- In relation to the power of words, there is a beautiful anecdote which I wonder if you could share, about the impact recording the audio for 26,778,780 minutes had on you.
- Your interest in the relationship between words, writing and paper is evident in both the works on display upstairs. There are over a thousand sheets of handmade paper in 26,778,780 minutes, and you have described making the paper as a labour of love. Can you tell us about the paper making process and what it is about the inherent properties of paper that make it such an evocative material for you?
- Do you see any similarities between paper and glass, the material that was central to your practice earlier in your career? For example, both can appear to be simultaneously fragile and resilient?

- With the materials you use, you create powerful emotional registers in your work - through the intricacies of voice and touch, and also through your use of colour. Can you tell us about the significance of the colour indigo?
- Both your works at Towner involve the interaction of the viewer in some way, whether inadvertently or by invitation. How did the idea for the activation of 26,778,780 minutes come about, and the unspoken invitation to audiences to participate in a gesture of tenderness and collective care?
- With episode(s), audiences unavoidably and inadvertently activate the disintegration of the work. You have spoken about this work referencing carelessness, in contrast to the highlighting of care in 26,778,780 minutes. Can you say some more about this?
- How would you feel about taking episode(s) back after the exhibition in its disintegrated state?
- I'd like to ask about the titles you have given the works and also the exhibition - '26,778,780 minutes', 'episode(s)' and 'in the perpetual back and forth'. Each seems to relate to temporality in some way: 26 million, seven hundred and seventy eight thousand, seven hundred and eighty minutes is a very precisely measured period of time, while in the perpetual back and forth suggests a non-linear experience of time and episode(s) refers to specific moments. Could you tell us about how you came up with the titles, and also about how you explore temporality in your work?
- It seems that in making your work you are undertaking a process of retrieval and reclamation - this relates to processes of archiving and collecting, and connects to the wider themes of Future Collect, and also to your own interest in what is on public display and what is not, what is treasured and what is discarded. As part of your commission, you spent time with the archives and collections at both iniva and Towner - I wonder if you could say something about what you discovered?
- Before we open up to questions from the audience, my final question relates to the work being acquired and being shown again in the future. The way 26,778,780 minutes was installed in Gallery 1 definitely added to the experience of the work. If it were to be shown again in another space, what do you consider the essence of the work to be? Have you written instructions to accompany the work now that it is part of Towner's collection?

Rohini Malik Okon