

CCAC interview with Patrick Rorke on 16/11/2021 - transcript

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Interviewer name (and acronym): Francois Lion-Cachet (FLC)

Interviewee name (and acronym): Patrick Rorke (PR), Armand (ADM)

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START OF AUDIO RECORDING: 00:00:31

FLC: Yeah, let's jump into it. First one is, please tell us a bit about where you grew up and how you became an artist.

PR: Okay, so Francois, I grew up in Lesotho. On my mother's side, we are French missionaries that came to Lesotho in the 1800s. My mother was an artist, so I grew up with her painting around me. Well, I was watching her paint consistently. And in time I just continued painting, that didn't seem to be any question about me doing anything else, you know? I was a painter right from the beginning; this was in Lesotho. My parents were traders, we lived at a place called Pitseng Ha Tau, where I spent some 20 years of my life. So basically, to translate that would be "the cave of the land". Pitseng is a cave and in fact, very close to where we live there is this huge cave that we would go and stay in with rock paintings and everything. I grew up in Lesotho simply because that's where I found myself to be, you know. I became an artist because my mother was a painter and then my great-uncle, Georges Duby was a painter as well. He was, I think, a very important part of

my upbringing, he mentored me more than my mother. Even though my mother never discouraged me, I think she usually thought that it wasn't the wisest choice, but she never discouraged me. Whereas Georges was a great mentor and somebody who really pushed me forward.

ADM: Was he your grandmother's brother, Georges?

PR: He was my grandmother's brother, exactly yes. My maternal grandmother's brother. In fact, I think a lot of the artistic gene, if you like, that comes through in the family comes from that side of the family because he was an artist. My own mother did a lot of drawing as well and my brother, you know. My father did some stuff but not much. My mother painted consistently. Is that fair enough, Francois?

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:05:01

FLC: Yes, thank you. You did mention Lesotho and so I want to ask about your history of living and working in Johannesburg, but being from Lesotho originally.

PR: Well, Francois, I met my wife, Aasha, in Cape Town. She was from Johannesburg initially and she felt, and I agreed with her, that perhaps to go back to Johannesburg to educate the children might make more sense than trying to educate them in Lesotho. So in 1989, I got an invitation from Bill Ainslie to come up and teach ceramics at the Alexandra Art Centre. I was at the Alex Art Centre teaching ceramics for around about five years from 1989 until about 1992, '93, '94. It was over that period where Alex was the central point of the fight between Inkatha and the ANC. So it was quite hectic but it was amazing. I worked with police—

ADM: From when did you start in Alex Art Centre?

PR: About 1989, Armand.

ADM: Nine, yeah.

PR: Okay. Yes, yes, yes.

ADM: Our offices were next to Alexandra from 1985 to 1988. But really like—

PR: It was a hectic time.

ADM: The army was camping on the hill down the—

PR: The army was camping on the door. If we went into the school we'd have the policemen taking photos. I think I've got my face on quite a number of police files somewhere, you know, but I think the most hectic thing was the politicisation of the students who would go on strike at the drop of a hat, the students would all be on strike. You'd say, oh, here we go again. But there were some extraordinary students that came out of that system. So I was there for four or five years and then the art centre closed down. And I thought to myself, I either need to go back to find another teaching job somewhere, or I'd begin treating myself as an artist. That was the point where I thought that's it, I'm just going to make art from now on. Aasha wasn't very pleased. In fact, very few people were very pleased but that's what I did, you know, from that time.

FLC: Is that the point where you then moved back to Lesotho in '94?

PR: No, no, no. We stayed in Johannesburg until 2010. I was in Johannesburg for a number of years and I spent many of those years in a kind of almost like a, what's the word? Isolation if you like, as an artist because I think a lot of people would say, if I was pushing my art, people would say to me, well, in fact, hold on, you're a potter. You're not an artist, you know. And if I was pushing my pots, they would say well, hold on, you're an artist, you're not a potter, so you don't actually, this is not [laughs], this is not your place. So for a long time I have worked in a kind of isolation. It wasn't a complete isolation but it was enough to perhaps let my art go in fairly idiosyncratic ways, I think, yeah. Okay. Do you want me to carry on with that?

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:10:37

FLC: Thank you. It does lead into the next question: can you tell us more about how, when and why the *Sunscreen*s were made? Was there a specific brief and proposal?

PR: All right, well, Francois, I was approached by the architects who were doing work at the new Metro Mall.

FLC: New Metro Mall?

PR: New Metro Mall, exactly. That's the taxi rank just as you cross over Nelson Mandela bridge, you come to a taxi rank there and you'll see there's a lot of mosaic on pillars and what have you and if you go inside, there are mosaics all over the place and various artworks.

FLC: That you made?

PR: Not me completely but I was brought on specifically because I was doing mosaic and possibly because of my experience at Alex, that I had worked a lot with artists there. So I was brought in as an artist and in a sense as a kind of facilitator, I think. So we did a lot of work at the new Metro Mall and the artists that were working there were from many different paths and that's where I met... Oh my gosh, my mind has gone completely blank.

FLC: Andrew Makin?

PR: Not Andrew Makin.

FLC: Paul Wygers.

PR: No, no, no. [laughs]

FLC: Janina Masojada.

PR: Yes, yes, I'm talking about the guy that I worked with on the screens, Lewis Levin.

FLC: Lewis Levin, that architect, okay.

PR: Lewis was working on the new Metro Mall and we became friends. Initially I got a hold of him to design me a momentum pottery wheel. He did that and then he said, listen, there's a possibility to put together a maquette for the Constitutional Court. So we did that, myself and Lewis. Incredibly enough it was chosen as one of the artworks. I had already, in making the maquette, begun the process of short histories or histories of ideas, histories of thoughts, histories of, in a sense, narratives. So the question that comes a little bit later, but it might be quite good to think about now, is that in making the maquettes and in beginning to work on the screens, I had already developed a number of ideas. Before the architects approached Lewis and myself and said, please

make sure somehow that the public is involved in the construction or in the making of the screens, so that nobody's going to come and actually deface the screens. Some people have done but not badly. I have no problem with the marks that people have put onto the screens and I don't think that we should try and take them off. We obviously shouldn't encourage people to come and make marks too, but I have no problem with what has happened.

FLC: To thus far it's been very small and innocent markings, it's not defacement.

PR: Yes, that's right. It's hardly a defacement and in a sense this is not a bad thing.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:15:43

FLC: I want to go back to, you mentioned you made a maquette, do those maquettes still exist?

PR: Francois, I wish I knew. I think it might have ended up with Lewis, I'm not totally sure but I know that they were made from just plain steel, not stainless steel.

FLC: Okay.

PR: Even at a certain point they had become very rusty and were in a sense disintegrating. I think that Lewis would have photos of the maquettes.

FLC: I'll ask him, we're interviewing him on Thursday.

ADM: Oh, did you manage to find him?

FLC: Yes, he's—

ADM: He's in America?

FLC: He's in the Netherlands.

PR: Netherlands, okay. Well, that's good. I'm happy that you found him because I have felt quite discomforted by the fact that we have not really connected and not really spoken at all after all that

time and everything that we did. So it'll be really good if you do speak to him, yeah. He might know where the maquettes are.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:17:13

FLC: And on the brief from the building architects: you said after your proposal was chosen they asked that you please involve the public?

PR: Well, actually, it was another way into the making of the screens, not immediately. So as I said, I had already begun to develop ideas, develop narratives, and so there is that sense of two things happening in the imagery: on the one hand, interviews with people and interviews with the kind of getting people's stories. And on the other hand, as you said, the more existential musings, right. [laughs]. I think my entire life has always had a sort of dualistic approach, as well as having two things going at any given time. At the moment, I'm making art and making pizza ovens, you know, and I'm hoping to get rid of the pizza ovens to focus entirely on the art, right. It's proving quite difficult but we'll see, we'll see.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:18:57

FLC: I think we can go on because some of the later questions will fill in the picture more. The next question: please tell us about your working relationship with Lewis Levin, who did what involving the concept and execution of the project?

PR: Lewis approached me initially with the idea of putting the maquette together. He had some very clear ideas and very clear notions as to what he wanted to do. In other words, the mechanical or the way that the screens actually hung. And I then came up with a sense of the narratives that would go with the screens. So I think the initial idea was largely Lewis'. The idea of doing the narratives and the histories, that I brought to what he had done or that I brought to his sense of what the maquette was going to be. So there was a long period where Lewis was laying out the way that the different screens actually fitted together, the angles and all of that. And then I fitted my narratives within the layout of the screens. I think it was a very good working relationship when we actually put everything together, it seemed to work very nicely.

FLC: Can you recall how long it took to put together the proposal?

PR: That didn't take that long, Francois. I would say probably a month, month and a half. Again, I think Lewis had very clear ideas in his head right from the beginning of what he wanted to do .

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:21:38

FLC: It relates to my next question which is, when did you start with the *Sunscreens* project and how long did it take to completion? Which also relates to the execution of it.

PR: Once we got the go ahead, there was a period of getting the plates anodized and getting all of that together. But I would say, roughly speaking, that it took me about a year to do all of the imagery. And every project that I've ever been involved with, it ended up with people getting very irate and very upset with me and saying, if you don't finish these things we're going to take them down and get something else in their place and that sort of stuff. That's a constant in my life. But I did finish and I think I was actually very happy in the end. But it took a long time. I was working with a jeweller's grinder, which was quite labour intensive. I think, in hindsight, that I might have been happier doing acid engraving or something like that. But that's not how we approached it and I had no experience with that kind of engraving anyway. So the jeweller's grinder, in a sense, mimicked my own drawing style or technique, you know. So I drew with a grinder.

FLC: And were all the metal sunscreens taken to your studio and you worked on it there and then all of them brought—

PR: Exactly.

FLC: At once and installed?

PR: I wish it would have been that easy. [laughs] No, it's kind of in bits and pieces and I would do a story and get them to Lewis and Donovan who would begin putting them together. So it was a kind of a growing project as opposed to... Francois, we don't have that kind of organisational skill, I certainly don't. [Laughs] Not at all. Lewis had to take them, drive them out to me, you know. But at the same time, for me, it was an extraordinary and a very powerful project to be involved with. Powerful in as much as I had to draw the stuff from quite deep inside, you know. It wasn't a sense of just doing something very simple and very quickly and very easily. Yeah, there was never that sense at all.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:26:02

FLC: Patrick, I have two follow up questions before we go on. You mentioned Donovan, who's Donovan?

PR: Okay, Donovan. Quite interestingly, I lived in Cape Town in Gardens, in a flat. And in that flat, I became friends with Donovan, Donovan Dymond, who was living there at the time. Well, I don't know if he was called Dymond at that point but his business is Donovan Dymond Engineering. Yeah. So Donovan and Lewis worked very closely together for a long time before the *Sunscreens*. They had done a number of projects together. In fact the work at the new Metro Mall, Lewis designed and Donovan manufactured. He's like an engineer but an extraordinary individual. When Lewis spoke to me initially he said the man that we're going to get involved in putting this together is Donovan. But I think we've got just my name and Lewis. I'm not sure whether Donovan's name actually appears on the screens.

FLC: No, it doesn't.

PR: Yeah, but it should.

ADM: It should, yeah.

PR: And I don't know whether he's still in Johannesburg or not, I'm not sure.

FLC: We worked with Donovan, I don't know if it might be the same person, I'll follow up?

PR: Yeah, follow up, it probably is. He manufactured the momentum wheels that I designed. He and Lewis put those together. And we still using those, in fact, up until today in Morija, in the Morija Art Centre. And they're still functioning, up until today they're extraordinary mechanics.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:28:57

FLC: My other question was: you mentioned the *Sunscreens* took about a year to complete and there were time pressures, and I know the Constitutional Court building was officially opened around March, 2004. So would have all this work been done mostly in 2003?

PR: I think I had it right down to probably a week or two before the opening for putting screens on. It was quite hectic, Francois. I was getting some blistering phone calls but I was working. I was doing [laughs].

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:29:46

FLC: Okay, next question. Please tell us about how, when, and with whom you conducted the interviews that inspired some of your sketches?

PR: Okay, so Francois, one of the things about growing up in Lesotho is that I speak Sesotho. So for me to approach people in the streets of Hillbrow, which is what I did, it was very easy. And to speak to them in Sesotho. I spoke mostly to people on the street level, if you like, people who are not particularly affluent, who were street people really. And in Johannesburg, I mean one of the extraordinary things is that everyone, virtually everyone speaks Sesotho. So for me to approach people and speak to them in Sesotho, it helped me a lot. In a sense it leveled things out between myself and the people that I spoke to. Rightly or wrongly, I think perhaps at this point, I'm realising that it was not the best thing to do, if I didn't... I kept people anonymous. I didn't really say this is so and so and this is their story. To a degree I think I did that with some, but mostly they were anonymous people in the streets and I thought that at the time that was what I should do, in a sense not to, how can I put it, to make things less individual, make things more about an interaction between myself and people. I don't know if that makes sense but it made sense to me at the time.

FLC: So to make it a more of a collective thing.

PR: More of a collective thing, exactly. And more of a collective understanding of people's interaction with the Constitution and with the Constitutional Court, and their lives and their understanding of what had happened in their lives, and how this related to the changing times in South Africa, and the changing times at the Constitutional Court. And as you point out their understanding of what this all meant to them, right. What I did, in the process of doing this, I simply spoke to people and listened to their responses and that generated images in my head, which is what I've been drawing down. So it was more of a visual process than a written process, if that makes sense.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:33:04

FLC: I think we will get to this but you did take notes. You did write down thoughts and you did make sketches as you were speaking to the people, or did you do that afterwards?

PR: As I was speaking to the people, as I was talking, yeah. Some of it I did afterwards. Some of the stories that are on the screens actually come from Lewis, he asked me to do a particular story which I

would do. But not many, there were two or three I think that actually came from Lewis. And the others, as they came from my own understanding of that particular process of generating narrative that somehow made sense to me and to the overall process.

FLC: And how long did you spend in Hillbrow? Was it a day, a week, a few weeks, months? How often would you go and speak to people?

PR: Months, it was months. One of the things that I've always done Francois, and I think I do this as an artist anyway, is to walk the streets. I mean Johannesburg, I found my own inspiration on the streets, not in the studio that much. So that particular process that I was busy with was really a continuation of something that I've always done. I think that for me, it has always been a matter of getting inspiration from people, not at a higher level or a lower level but people that are in the sense, on the street. These are people that are living very close to the ground. I've always responded to that. And the wealthier folk, I don't understand them that much or that well. [laughs] And therefore, I think that a lot of my time has been at that level. That's my understanding.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:36:54

FLC: One more question: was it specifically and only in Hillbrow, or did it also include other areas?

PR: No, it included other areas. I mean Hillbrow, obviously, initially, because of the idea from the architects that the population or the community around the *Sunscreens* or around the court, that they'd feel that kind of sense of ownership in the screens and in the artwork there. Initially, I had the idea of perhaps getting school kids involved and getting them to make the work, but I decided, because I had been given the responsibility to do this that I should do it myself. So that's how come I didn't make it more community-based. It became my interpretation of people rather than the community's interpretation. I'm not sure whether that was right or wrong but that's again, working very much from instinct in what I was doing. Yeah.

FLC: What questions did you ask those you interviewed? And then I did note here that the two recurring questions seem to be the life story of the interviewee as well as what they thought of the new Constitution.

PR: Yes, that's right. I mean, that was basically the basis of what I asked. I would get people to tell me their past stories and then as the last stories evolved and came to whatever point they were at, then I would ask them, how do you feel about the new country? I mean, I couldn't really speak about the

Constitution that much, I spoke about the changing face of South Africa. Because a lot of the understanding of the Constitution or my understanding of the Constitutional Court is that it reflects a larger change in South African society, even in Southern African society because I think that being a Mosotho from Lesotho, I felt that whatever's happening at the Constitutional Court reflected on everyone. Perhaps it did afford me a kind of an outsider's view, somehow that I was able to see things in a more detached way. All these things need to be picked apart, I guess.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:40:32

FLC: Two follow up questions. One is more of a reminder. I found it quite profound that you said the "changing face of South Africa" and I'm very interested in how the Constitutional Court presents that face. The Constitution being the supreme power, the Constitutional Court being the guardian of that power and the visuality of the building, also the *Sunscreens*, adding to this multifaceted, very diverse changing face.

PR: Yes, yes.

FLC: It really is an exercise of almost branding the new country and—

PR: Okay. Yeah, well look, there's a particular series in the screens where, above the city I have these big clouds, right and then the rain falls down. And my understanding, I don't know if I'm right or wrong but this is something that I heard, is that the Constitutional Court itself sits on a watershed. In other words, the rain falls on one side of the Constitutional Court and ends up in the Indian Ocean, the other side ends up in the Atlantic, which to me, it's extraordinary. It's an extraordinary place for that to happen and in a sense, my whole understanding of the Constitutional Court is just that, that it was a profound moment in history. I believe that high points in history are when art and architecture work very closely together, where there's almost an inability to tell the one from the other. Low points are when the architects and the artists actually have nothing [inaudible]. I think that seems to reflect a kind of a real high point in the unfolding of what's happened in South Africa.

FLC: Symbiosis.

PR: Yes, yes, yes, yes, exactly.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:43:01

FLC: When you were speaking about the rain and how it kind of flows in different directions, it's almost like the work of the Constitutional Court, if a judgment is made by the court, it also goes into all directions. And you spoke about how the influence, maybe even the impact of the Constitutional Court, is felt as far as Lesotho in the southern—

PR: Well, absolutely. I really don't think that it's confined just to South Africa, I think it's Southern Africa. I think it's actually more than that. I think what's happened at the Constitutional Court is something that resonates worldwide, really. And I don't know of any other building anywhere that has that same, as you said, symbiosis, you know that same integration of art and architecture. Certainly, I've not come across, perhaps in the older Greek buildings, some of the buildings in India, I don't know. But it's an extraordinary thing and it's an extraordinary place.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:44:12

FLC: Before we go on, I did want to ask you about that thing you mentioned, having an outsider's view, and the impact that was felt in Lesotho, and how you perceive the relationship between Lesotho and South Africa, connecting to the Constitutional Court and to art and to politics. I'm interested in that relationship. Because, you know, it's a relationship you know really well, it's a relationship you live.

PR: Yes, it's a relationship that I experienced and no doubt about that. I mean, I know that every time I cross the border that I have a very definite sense that I'm in a completely different country, completely different, the whole sense is very different. And yet at the same time, we, you know, Lesotho and South Africa have a common history, right. And I think that so many people in Lesotho, elsewhere, see the Constitutional Court as a kind of a visual representation of that whole process of change, right.

FLC: Beacon, just throwing the word—

PR: Yes, that's right. Certainly, I was seeing that in a lot of the... I mean not seeing that but I was very much aware of that in the process of making the screens. That I had a sense of the, if you like, the gravity of what I was busy with, that it wasn't just a decorative exercise. But certainly, I mean Lesotho is a funny place, because people in Lesotho love to think of themselves as completely independent of the world. They're not really at all but they do like to think that. We are very much a part of the Southern African experience.

FLC: And South Africa is actually also dependent on Lesotho for water and I think when you speak about the Constitutional Court as a watershed, the water we have in our taps at the Constitutional Court comes from Lesotho.

PR: It comes from Lesotho, exactly, that's right. It's an amazingly kind of intertwined relationship between the two countries, you know. And at the height of Covid, the height of the pandemic, it was like a December, and everyone was crossing the border and you just cross the river, you don't go through the border, you just cross the river.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:47:41

FLC: One more quick question, the sketches you have on the *Sunscreens*, some of them do depict mountains and natural scenes. Are some of those scenes depictions of Lesotho? Is it of Lesotho or is it more South African? Can you draw the distinction?

PR: I think probably, Francois, I think probably it has a fair amount of Lesotho in the drawings. I've tried not to make it too obviously Lesotho, but it's in my blood, you know, it's in my genes, just about. I'm now sitting on a farm in the Free State and I have canvas and I have brushes with me and I'm going to be doing some painting, and it'll be a painting of the Free State as opposed to Lesotho. And I'd be interested to see the difference. But certainly, what's a part of you tends to come out. My approach to making art has always been to try and take as many of the filters away and allow what seemed to come out. Regardless of how it actually comes out. So I think that there is a bridge there between South Africa and Lesotho in those screens.

FLC: It's very special because I think the work incorporating visualities of Lesotho then also speaks to the court's influence on a broader subcontinental, but also an international scale because our court does influence international jurisprudence, and other Southern African countries do rely on the court's example and the intellectual endeavour that happens here.

PR: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Absolutely. I mean, I don't see the Constitutional Court as being an isolated place. I mean it really does reflect so many different realities. And I think perhaps that particular kind of metaphor or that particular idea, is reflected somewhat in the screens, in the multifacetedness of the screens, they do bring in so many different portions of ideas, right. Hopefully, to become a complete idea in the end.

FLC: And they remain open to interpretation, but we'll get to that. That's another question.

PR: Well, absolutely.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:50:43

FLC: The next question, and this relates to what we've been speaking about, what did you think of the Constitution at the time of making the *Sunscreens*? And how did your thinking influence the creation of the public artwork?

PR: Well, Francois, I came to Johannesburg in 1989. And at the time in Alex, where I was teaching, it seemed to be that all hell's breaking loose, you know. People were shooting one another. It was really quite hectic, and then that kind of inevitable change happened. And for me, it was a profound process. I felt very privileged to actually be there at that particular time, witnessing what was happening. So my own thoughts of the Constitution and the Constitutional Court are very deeply respectful. I think that it represents, as I said, the apex of thought, feeling, and ideas at the time, you know. And there's something very human about it. For me, the extraordinary thing about the court is that the building itself is quite minimalist. You don't see much of the structure of the building. You see the artworks that are there. But the actual building itself seems to be quite open. And this is something that I've always thought, it's something that one should aim at in any kind of architectural process, that the building itself should hardly exist. It should exist as a framework rather than a monolith, right?

FLC: Or as a tree in the case of the Constitutional Court.

PR: Well, exactly. Exactly, that's right. So it becomes far more natural in a way and for me, the building seemed to breathe very well or breathe very freely. So while I was initially quite overawed with the project that we had been given, I became more and more comfortable with it as I went along. Because it seemed to me to be quite a human given project, or seemed to have a human scale to it, rather than this grandiose monolithic kind of sense. Yeah, I think that makes sense, yes?

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:54:16

FLC: Yes, next question. Your notes do not always include the names of those you interviewed. For example, "young woman", "man on street", and you did speak to this before, but I wanted to ask you still. Maybe there's something you want to add?

PR: Well, absolutely. I think a lot of the people that I did interview actually asked me to keep their particular identity out. And a lot of the people... In a sense, I think that in the process of interviewing people it became less about the individual and more about a collective kind of sense of people. So the individual stories or the individual unfolding of events seem to reflect, in my mind, a larger picture. And to be honest, when we were asked, as I said before, when we were asked to make sure to involve the local society, I had already come quite a long way in the actual working out of these ideas. And so somehow, for me the interviews needed to dovetail in with the existing ideas, right, and become less about interviews with individuals and more about visual representations of people's ideas or people's experiences, people's feelings. So the idea of making individuals that prominent in the process seemed to make less and less sense or seemed to be, it was something that I hadn't been doing, something that I continued not doing if you know what I mean, yeah?

FLC: Yes and it would've brought up the question, why them? Why not others?

PR: Yes, exactly. And it would have brought up the question of some people saying, "Well, I'm on the screens." And others saying, "Well why am I not on the screens?" In a sense a kind of exclusivity, which I think doesn't really, doesn't reflect in the philosophy of the Constitutional Court. And it's more about something for everyone, you know?

FLC: Yeah, the collective does play a big role.

PR: It plays a huge role.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:57:16

FLC: I wanted to ask, you spoke to many people and I'm sure not all of their stories made it onto the screens. How did you go about deciding what to include and what to leave out?

PR: Well, simply by the richness of the visual imagery that occurred to me in speaking to people. Some people didn't really evoke that much in me. But the people who did, those images were very clear in my head, those I put down and became part of the screens. I think that as an artist, I'm not that much a verbal individual as a visual individual, you know, that it's more about the pictures that occur to me than the words that go with the pictures, yeah. Even though I do like to write as well.

FLC: To what extent did your race, yours and those you interviewed, play a role in making this work?

PR: Right, that's a good question. Francois, I've never considered myself to be that much of a white person, if you like, or a European. I've always thought of myself as a Masotho. And I mean, it's a kind of ambivalent thing because in Lesotho I'm a white face who speaks Sesotho, you know. And across the board as well. I see myself as a Masotho first before I see myself as anything else. And in fact, if we talk about language, I understand that the first language I spoke was Sesotho before I spoke English. I mean this is what I've been told. Whether that's actually true or not, I'm not sure but I don't see myself that much as a European, I see myself as a Masotho and my comfort or not so much my comfort, I think that I'm very much interested in the experiences of people on the street. And these tend to be people who are not necessarily European. These tend to be people of colour, if you like. I'm not sure what the terminology is but people that I have approached and people that I speak to quite regularly are people that I feel quite comfortable with. So my race, if you like, as you say, it didn't really occur that much to me. I mean, as in an intellectual kind of branding where I am and where I'm not.

FLC: Language plays a huge role and I think that's definitely something worth exploring with the *Sunscreens*. I'm interested in why your notes are in English but the conversations would have happened in—

PR: In Sesotho. Yes, mainly in Sesotho. That's a very good observation. I mean my home language is English. That's what I speak, initially. If I'm at home with my family, I speak English and so I write in English. But I speak in Sesotho and I don't write that much in Sesotho. I mean you're right. I should perhaps have written in the language of the interview because I certainly interviewed people in Sesotho as opposed to English. That's quite an interesting observation, yes. [laughs] Discomforting, one. [laughs]

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:01:45

FLC: And adding to that same trail of thought, what is the relationship between your notes, sketches and the final engraved panels?

PR: I think it was close, Francois. I mean I didn't change that much in what I initially drew and what I initially wrote down, I think that remained quite clear. Because I would interview and go immediately and write it down or go immediately and begin engraving it. So I didn't do the interviews first and then go back to the interviews and do the engravings, it was an unfolding process. I would do a story, if you like or a narrative and then I would go ask them, do another narrative and come back and engrave it. So it wasn't done holistically, it was done... It was an evolving process. Yeah.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:03:01

FLC: How big a role does participatory storytelling play in your work?

PR: Well, Francois, I'm from Lesotho and Lesotho is a country or a nation of oral history. People don't write that much down, people tell stories. Something that I naturally go back to. I have also been involved in animations, which have the kind of narrative element. The whole sense of narrative is something that I go back to regularly. Even in my painting practice, a lot of what I do is narrative in nature. So certainly, the streams and the whole idea of the streams seem to fit very clearly into that particular aspect of my practice, right.

FLC: As I understand, the Constitutional Court architects then asked you to please involve the local community but that is something that you already did and is innate to your artistic practice.

PR: Yes, yes, yes. But I think that the initial ideas were less about the community and more about, as you say, existential ramblings or whatever you want to call them. I mean, I think the art making process is about allowing an evolution of ideas to occur in one's thinking which then reflect in the work that one is doing, right. I think it seemed to fit in very clearly in what I was doing and in what I... What I'm saying is that I think that the worth of the streams seem to slot in very nicely or very clearly into my own practice. My own way of doing. So I didn't have to change a lot in getting to do, experience. And if you note, the work at the new Metro Mall also has narrative elements in it. And I think that the court was just an evolution of that.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:06:18

FLC: Relating to this, a number of the sketches appear to be based on your own existential musings. How did it come to be that you included this element to the *Sunscreens*? You have said that that was the initial idea and it evolved and it morphed and—

PR: Exactly. When I actually came to doing the screens, those kind of narratives have always been present in my work. And so I think it wasn't easy enough, not an easy enough thing to do but it seemed like a natural thing to do, to continue with that and to continue with that whole, and not to change my whole approach because I was doing *Sunscreens*. And when I did the pieces of the drawing on the maquette, these drawings appear very much in amongst the first of the *Sunscreens*. So they are a national outgrowth of an existing practice, if you like.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:07:41

FLC: And we spoke about this a bit earlier. How do you perceive the significance of this public artwork and what it represents in context of the Constitutional Court building and its placement?

PR: Now that's quite an interesting one, Francois, because for a long time, I thought I had blown it, you know. I thought I made a whole lot of screens that didn't have any relevance at all to the court. But at the same time, consistently, whenever I came to the court to look at the screens again, there would always be people looking at them. But the tours wouldn't take people past there for some reason and so I kind of felt that it was perhaps disjointed somehow but my thinking has changed and I think, obviously, you know, the work that Armand has done and the work that you're doing underlines that in a sense, perhaps there is significance there, right. I think as artists, we tend to question ourselves quite a lot, you know. We tend not to believe that clearly in our own work, whereas we should. So I'm happy, I am deeply sort of gratified that this process is underway. But I must admit that every time I came there, every time I saw them again, I was blown away. This is something. It's really something. Whether people are seeing them or talking about them didn't really make that much, wasn't that important. My own sense was that it was a significant work. Certainly in my own life. So we'll see, we'll see what happens.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:10:05

FLC: You mentioned Armand, who is in the room with us and it's not on the questions list but I do want to ask and I think it would be valuable. How did your paths cross?

PR: Well. [laughs] Armand, yeah you need to speak, Armand. You're sitting there all quiet.

ADM: I only remember it was I think in the mid 80s and maybe '88, '89. You were, I think my wife was friends with the mayor who was an architect and you were connected somehow with Damir. And that's how I came in touch with your work actually, initially. So—

PR: How we were connected with Damir initially, was that Jonah worked with Aasha, my wife.

ADM: Oh, yes.

PR: Jonah would get back with Aasha from work every day and then we became friends with Damir and then we became friends with you. And so it goes right back.

ADM: Okay, okay.

PR: Who's also an architect as a matter of interest and—

ADM: He's an architect and a filmmaker, yeah.

PR: Yes, yes. No, you carry on, carry on Armand.

ADM: Yeah and then, yeah I started... I went to, I suppose I think I went to an exhibition in Parkhurst where you had an exhibition with a gallery that doesn't exist anymore but he had an exhibition there. I started buying some work. I started collecting Patrick, when you did an exhibition with Joburg landscapes and I bought a few of these. And we kept in touch and then we lost touch when you went to Lesotho. Yeah and Valerie died and, yeah. So we were out of touch and then we reconnected when I came with two of my boys, I came to see you in Morija. We did actually a good job with photographing and all the panels, actually.

PR: Yes

ADM: The panels of the court. So he's got—

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:13:53

FLC: My question is: what point did you become aware of the *Sunscreens*, Armand?

ADM: Well, Patrick mentioned them to me some time ago but I became aware only when I came back from Lesotho, when I reconnected with Patrick and then he said that I must go, 'cause we were talking already about me helping him to sell his work and he said you should go to the Constitutional Court and I had no idea what to expect, and then I saw this facade with all these screen. I was completely blacked out. I think it's a magnificent piece of art that should be known and you know, more in tourist guides and stuff like that because I think it's a major thing in public artwork.

FLC: Around what year is it that you saw the works?

ADM: Oh, recently. I mean, probably, what? Four or five years ago I saw the work for the first time because I had been to the Constitutional Court for exhibition and so on but I never actually knew that there was this. I didn't realise that it was there until maybe four or five years ago.

PR: Amazing, yeah. That's interesting. I wasn't aware of the fact that you didn't know them, you know.

ADM: No, yeah. [laughs]

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:15:50

FLC: Patrick, your notes of the *Sunscreens* have titles. Are these also titles for the series appearing in the larger collection that make up the *Sunscreens*? So on the notes you normally have at the top underlined text which I perceive to be titles, and are these then titles for the individual series that appear? Well not necessarily all. Is the title of *Sunscreens*, is that the title of the artwork? Because it's also a very pragmatic title because they are sunscreens.

PR: The title of *Sunscreens* comes from Lewis because the idea with the blocks of metal was to screen the sun from the gallery behind them. I mean, apparently the people who had deliberated about the screens were very close to actually saying no, that it's too heavy, it's too metallic, it's too... It's not going to just serve its purpose as a screen of the sun. But thankfully, the positive thoughts prevailed. But the actual title for the stories, I think a lot of them I simply put there, in a sense that I knew what the stories were about. Also just thinking, a matter of being aware of a kind of cataloguing in my mind, if you like. I sometimes become quite organised. [laughs]

FLC: So of any of the series, if there's like four blocks or three blocks do they form a series—

PR: Yes.

FLC: If they're reproduced without the rest of the sunscreens, then would that be the title for those three works?

PR: Well, those particular blocks. Exactly, yeah. But you must understand, Francois, that in the process of making, I was working quite closely with Lewis and, you know, he would say, listen, we've got X amount of blocks here and then I'd work a story into those blocks. So it was very much a case of working within an existing grid, if you like, or an existing pattern. Lewis laid out the pattern quite

decisively and I followed that particular process or I followed that particular thought, if you like, of Lewis'.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:19:08

FLC: That is my next question, what considerations inform the placing of the engraved screens? But that's also something we'll ask Lewis in his interview.

PR: Yes that's right, yeah. No that's right, I mean I think that Lewis has some very clear ideas as to the placement of the screens. My kind of own understanding of his thought process is not that clear. I think that he would have a much more lucid response. But for me, you know, I worked within the parameters, if you like, of how the screens were laid out. So it was quite reactive to the screens themselves.

FLC: Again a collaborative effort.

PR: It was very much a collaborative effort. Absolutely. We did work very closely together all the way through. Right up until the end, you know, when Lewis would be coming to me and saying, listen, they're going to tear everything down if you don't finish. [laughs] Rushed back to the studio and got back to the engraving, you know. It was quite hectic towards the end. [laughs]

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:20:50

FLC: What is your sense of how people interpret and relate to these sketches?

PR: Well for me, that's an interesting question because I think as any artist there is always that triangle, you know, between yourself and the work and the people who perceive the work. And you know, if there is a sense of people actually understanding what one has done or reacting favourably to what one has done, that's always quite affirmative. And I must admit that I have not come across any negative response to the art. The response that I've gotten has always been very, enormously encouraging and enormously positive. I did find it strange that the guides wouldn't take people past the screens but I think that was because they weren't able to actually interpret them themselves. Or didn't feel confident enough to do that. But this whole process that we're busy with now, I think might change that particular aspect or that people will pass, be taken there and the work spoken about.

FLC: I do think that will help, yeah. Signage and contextual awareness. I think what also contributes to it is if you visit the court, you tend to want to go in instead of first going further away from the entrance.

And it isn't the way where you will walk up if you parked. So it's kind of out of the way, but to another extent, it's also where all the people that walk and that don't enter the site from a car frequently use.

PR: That's a very interesting perception. It's very interesting because in fact, those are the people that I would have been, the people that I would have spoken to. Not the people arriving in fancy cars, you know, but the people actually walking there from the street. That's a very interesting observation and for me, it's a pleasing observation. It does give me an element of continuity there, you know. Yes.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:23:42

FLC: How strongly do you regard the link between the original stories and the drawings? So the question is, is it open to interpretation or how important is it to note the background? Your notes say what you were thinking and what inspired the sketches, but if you're just looking at the sketches, you wouldn't know, and how important is it to have that contextual information on signage to make people understand? But then again, how definitive are the drawings? How open are they?

PR: The person who's actually observing the screens, I don't think needs to have everything spelt out to him or her. As far as I'm concerned, the interpretive element is as important as my own ideas in making the screens. I would like to see somehow, people being given much more of a sense of, please, you know, interpret this as you see it. In fact it might be an interesting process to actually... I seem to have switched on the TV. I'm just going to move somewhere else. Let me move away from the TV. I mean my sense is that people should be allowed to interpret or should be encouraged to interpret and shouldn't be my particular meanings or my particular thoughts in the process are almost secondary to the process itself, right? If that makes sense.

FLC: Yeah, it isn't either or. I think, mutually beneficial. It's insightful to know what inspired the story and I really think there's a lot of value to draw from that to get people thinking and they can add their own interpretations and narratives to that.

PR: Absolutely.

FLC: But I'm thinking, for example about that one, the one series of blocks where you're looking up to the sky through the skyscrapers and you see a plane flying by and then the sky is clear again. When you were at the court, you told us about the possibility that that plane might be hijacked and realising that you can't do anything about that in that moment. It's the same with the ship and the viewer standing on the shore and seeing the burning ship pass.

PR: Exactly, there is a lot more of that, yeah. There's a lot of that within the process of artmaking, you see things happening, you are an observer. You're not necessarily directly involved in whatever process is unfolding. And that for me, happens a lot in artmaking, that one has the role of the observer, of somebody looking at what's happening and putting down what is happening without necessarily being that much of an interpreter. You don't interpret, you simply state this is what's happening, right? The interpretation of what has been put down, I think quite often needs to be interpreted by the person looking at it to a large degree. But as you say, it's a dual process. Yeah.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:27:58

FLC: The next question I want to ask adds to that. How do you see art as being connected to justice or human rights in South Africa or more universally? And I did want to add to that.

PR: Yes.

FLC: Because you worked at the Alex Art Centre at the time of great political upheaval, and looking at the role of resistance art in apartheid South Africa, and also the artist as observer, not being involved; I do think that simply by looking and recording one also takes a position.

PR: Yes.

FLC: So I'm interested about your thoughts on art generally and how it relates to justice and to activism, but also in your own work and how, because you were surrounded and you've been very involved with art's role as a form of activism, but also in societal development. There's a lot of elements to that. How does that come through in your own work and in the *Sunscreens*?

PR: Yes, that's very interesting, Francois. I think that my own particular approach to artmaking has always been communal rather than individual. Whether this stems from having worked in places like Alex, I'm not sure but certainly all along, I do perceive art as being a kind of a process that brings some sense of community or some sense of, what would I say? I mean, if I consider my work at the moment in Lesotho, it's largely studio work but at the same time, I'm doing a lot of work in the schools, in the community, working with people who don't necessarily do art themselves. So I do think that art has a very important role to play other than just the role of the artist or the individual. So I think the idea of the old, I think it's a 19th century idea, you know, the artist being alone, working alone, doesn't really hold water anymore. I think one arrives at ideas communally rather than individually. So I think that the work

at the court certainly had a large role to play in that for me, you know. When I was working at the court, having just very recently come out of the Alex experience and that was extraordinary. I mean, it was tough but it was an extraordinary experience.

FLC: So I gather that your approach to artmaking is not outright political or doesn't—

PR: No, not at all. Not at all. I'm quite apolitical in my approach. I'm also non-judgmental in my approach. I don't take particular positions. I'm quite reactive in my approach. In other words, I react to what I see and I react to what I feel about what I see. And the actual, the sense of it being a particular political position is almost non-existent. But at the same time, I mean the whole idea of the Constitutional Court is a profound one and it's one that I'm very happy to have been a part of, you know.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:32:55

FLC: How do you feel about having your work part of the Constitutional Court Art Collection today?

PR: Well, I'm obviously very humbled and very honoured to have my work as a part of the Constitutional Court, you know. I mean, you're talking about the screens itself, right?

FLC: Yes.

PR: Yeah, because I think also, I mean I need to speak to Armand about this but that we should have other work as part of the collection as well, you know.

FLC: You spoke about the video work and how that could bring the outside inside and vice versa.

PR: Yes, yes, yes. I do believe and I think, particularly in my case, that things never happen very quickly. And I think that my involvement with the work at the Constitutional Court has perhaps not come to an end yet. So it'll be interesting to see what transpires. What actually comes out of the whole thing.
[laughs]

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:34:17

FLC: This question we'll also ask Lewis, and you can say how much you have to speak about it. Please tell us about the technical process of making these works.

PR: That was very much in Lewis' hands. He knew about the process of anodising stainless steel and he was the person who went and charmed the people who would do the anodising. And they have done the whole process of having some screens darker, some screens lighter, different colours. That was something that happened because of the amount of time left in the acid bath and the amount of time taken afterwards. So it was quite random in a way. But all of that was Lewis' idea initially and Lewis' thinking. So, I mean it was a very interesting process. In hindsight, as I said earlier, I might have changed one or two things. But perhaps not.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:35:47

FLC: Are you mindful of conservation when making art, for the preservation and restoration requirements, and do you have specific recommendations on the conservation of these works? I think it also relates to graffiti of which we have spoken about.

PR: So Francois, the graffiti that has happened on one or two of the screens, that doesn't worry me at all. The fact that the screens are done on stainless steel, I think, is indicative of the fact that they'll be around for a while, you know. They're not going to disappear very quickly. And in fact, every time I go back to them I'm amazed at how well they've stayed, you know. They've hardly changed. And I think that has to be due to Lewis' own making of the work, or making of the armature.

FLC: It is quite special because in our monograph series, we have a conservation section and we were confronted with, well these works aren't damaged, how we're going to write about how we restored them. But I think it's looking at it from the other side, that if you're mindful of conservation and about how it will age before and when it's being made, then you don't have as much conservation problems going ahead. So I do think the value lies in Lewis' foresight.

PR: Absolutely. But I think that that is something that I have also been particularly wary of all along, is the preservation of work. I mean, in my own work, as a painter I think that I'm fairly mindful of that. But—

ADM: Can I ask one question?

PR: Yes.

ADM: The process of drawing on screens was new to you, right. You've never done that before. You mentioned the grinder and did it take a long time for you to be comfortable with it? 'Cause it seems to be drawn like if you were drawing on paper but it's not. It's completely different.

PR: No, Armand, not at all. In fact, I mean, I've always been a drawer. I think you'd know that. My whole artmaking process rests in drawing. And so to bring the screens into that seemed very easy and very...
[interruption]

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:41:42

PR: Okay, my apologies. Sorry, Armand. Can I just just respond more clearly to your question? I've always been a drawer and this goes right back, again, I would say to Georges Duby who drew incredibly. And I was just watching him draw. And so the idea with the screens. Initially when we did the maquette, I actually was scratching into the maquette with just a sharp point, you know. At that point then Donovan said, "No, hold on, use a jeweller's grinder." And he brought a jeweller's grinder and it seemed to work perfectly. Yeah. So is this the continuation of my own, I mean I'm drawing all the time.

ADM: Okay, yeah. It was natural, it was a natural transition.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:43:01

FLC: I've got another question here. So Thina's particularly working on the conservation section.

PR: Yeah.

FLC: Was it clear in the brief or from the start of the project that the *Sunscreens* would contribute to preserving artworks display inside the court? And how did this influence your... Did it influence your thinking in making the screens?

PR: It was quite clear that what we were busy with was screens to screen the sun from the collection. Personally, I was quite concerned when Lewis put together the maquette, if you like, or the amature of the initial maquette because it seemed to me that a lot of sun would actually still go through them. But, you know, he's a very persuasive individual and we continued with that particular idea. And I think that practically they've actually worked.

FLC: We had to treat the windows, the windows were treated to not let through any UV and we added window film that reduces the amount of visible light let through, and I think that in addition to the *Sunscreens* does help.

PR: Good. So do you find that they actually do fulfill their role?

FLC: So they're placed in front of the window sections but not the door sections. So you have the light coming through and there are times of day when the sun is setting, it shines directly into the public gallery. All the little perforated little holes, the sun just goes through, so you would have direct sunlight on artworks.

PR: Okay.

FLC: But I think it does reduce, not completely but it does help.

PR: Yes, yes.

FLC: Ideally in a museum you wouldn't have windows.

PR: Yes, exactly.

FLC: But that goes against the whole idea of the court being open.

PR: Yeah, the whole whole idea of the court is in fact to have no walls at all. If I understand it correctly, that it's open, you know. And certainly, it's the first court building that I've ever felt comfortable going into. [laughs] So I think, in my mind, it's a visual representation of a philosophical idea which seems to work very well.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:46:20

FLC: Do you have any recommendations on the preservation or presentation of the *Sunscreens*?

PR: The only recommendation that I would have would be that they are dusted off. There have been a couple of times that I have come there and I have found them quite dusty. That would be an easy enough thing to do. Beyond that, I believe that the anodising process and the fact that they are stainless steel means that they are going to last. They'll last a long time. Yeah.

FLC: I agree about the dusting, we just need to find somebody to do it. Such a simple thing that somebody physically does need to go stand there and dust.

PR: And dust, yeah with a feather duster. [laughs]

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:47:25

FLC: Very last question, we've reached the end. Is there anything you would like to add to be recorded in this interview?

PR: Gosh, yeah, I should have thought about that. [laughs] I think that you asked very elaborate and very concise questions, Francois and I'm very happy with what you've done. I would like very much, somehow, that the screens are part of the tours. Somehow, if that's at all possible. But however that happens, I'm not sure, it's in your hands.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 01:48:25

FLC: Thank you for your time.

END OF AUDIO RECORDING: 01:50:31