

## 9 words for Offsite 9

### Bobby Tiwana interviews Leanne O'Connor and Ewan Johnston

Bobby: Hello I'm Bobby Tiwana, I'm a Creative Producer of Live Performance, the occasional short film and a hand full of podcasts about a thing or two. In this podcast I will be talking to contemporary artists commissioned as part of Offsite 9 to complement the touring British Art Show 9 in Wolverhampton. Welcome to 9 words.

Bobby: I'm joined by two artists Leanne O'Connor and Ewan Johnston. Today we are using Imagine as the key word for our discussion. Can you just start by, if you want to tell me a bit about yourself Leanne? Let's start with you, what kind of artist are you?

Leanne: That's such an interesting question when I came out of uni I was really interested in archives and photography and things that went on in photographic processes that people didn't want and how it linked to sort of like intergenerational memory around recording, I don't know, each other, families, their history, but then I don't know, I just went on a bit of a rabbit hole into being interested in the background to, like for example my dad taught me how to weld and I was interested in industry around Birmingham and the Black Country and why it fell out and what happened to those communities afterwards, so I went on a bit of a rabbit hole in terms of that. So, I'm kind of interested in the holes in things, like the gaps between people, now and I guess now I'm interested in labour systems and everything that informs those kind of like areas I used to be interested in and still am interested in.

Bobby: Tell me more about the holes in things? What do you mean by that?

Leanne: Yeah. So, I found a lot holes in like family albums and archives that I found quite interesting, why were they there? What was informed by them? And then I guess focussing for so long producing work off of the holes in things I just went on to look at holes in other things, so like archives I was really interested in. So,

I did some work with Sandwell Archives and I liked how there's documented bits and there's undocumented bits and it's like who chooses that and why is it informed in that way. I could get fixated on like just one little thing in the piece of work and so I did this residency at BMAG [Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery] and I was really interested in this stained-glass maker called Florence Camm and I met with this historian and they were like, I think and "do you know like she's actually painted herself into the glass work?" So that was it, everything else I'd researched went away and I was just fascinated with that for the whole period of the residency pretty much. So, yeah the holes in things and I guess with this work I'm interested in the holes in shop units as I see it, I see that as a hole in something I guess. How shop units are disappearing in Wolverhampton, popping back up for a little bit again and like going away again. And it's like what's actually informing that in the background. Like is it land locking, is it like the economy here, is it the pandemic, yeah.

Bobby: So a hole is also a sort of, void, an undocumented area that you are sort of zooming in on, investing in and seeing what you can make happen in that space or discover in that space.

Leanne: Yeah, yeah definitely, definitely.

Bobby: Ewan, what kind of artist are you?

Ewan: Well initially painter like, figurative paintings, I did that for a long time but then sort of when the pandemic hit, I just got quite a bit of time to think through things and brought into sharp contrast just the way the world, or the system of the world we live in is kind of crumbling and like trying to cling onto itself. So, kind of switched my practice up sort of quite abruptly put a Sainsbury's bag on my head, like literally and just started making really anti-capitalist sort of art, comments on consumerism and like how we product ourselves. And stuff with social media, kind of just trying to be a bit provocative maybe or just swearing a lot. Also sort of started like a sort of punk band at time, so gone from painting to being quite like... So, I don't really know what sort of artist I am at the moment just doing anything and everything whereas before I was like it was just me, on my own in a room, I'll paint paintings

they'll be good and people will like 'em and I realised there's shit loads of good paintings and most people don't actually give a fuck unless they paint. And like no one's really gonna buy it because it still had a hint of politics so I was like I just learnt to accept no one is going to buy my shit and just make really political stuff so that's what I've been doing.

**Bobby:** You talked about the pandemic being a turning point, what do you mean the world's system is crumbling?

**Ewan:** To me it feels like, like capitalism the system, is what I mean by the system like our system. I've always been and been brought up to be aware of like the sharp contrast of inequality between people and classes and been bought with a very like sort of class conscious conversations in my family a lot, but then you go out into the real world and you just live and you okay, but this is what you do: you go to uni you get a job, this happens, then this happens, and then you hit thirty and like none of that shit happened really, I've got two degrees and I still work at a bar, like I did before I did the degrees. And then the pandemic hit and it brought even into sharper contrast how actually the people at the top of our structures and systems actually see people and how they treat them, like disabled people, refugees, like anyone who's other, did really get the shit end of the stick. And then the whole time it really, really brought into focus I was watching TV you'd see these journalists going "this is really hard," and acting they're in isolation or like the lockdowns really taken a toll but they're in a studio saying this. My partner was still going to work every single day, my brother was still going to work, because someone has to clean the flats and then in the summer 'Eat Out to Help Out' hit and some of the highest rates and then I was going to work. And people were like why you not wearing the mask, like it's a social decision. Well I'm at work and like people are coming in to get pissed and like it just felt like quite a charade, made me think like about what am I doing with my art, like I was trying to be quite genuine before like this is where I'm from, I paint a lot of pictures of Whitmore Reans or Wolverhampton and try and just portray what I saw. It had like a little bit of naivety to it. It just made me think if I continue my practice in the same way after something

that was brought into such sharp focus how fucked the world still is, then I'm not really taking part or involved in the conversation. The bag on my head thing was kind of the way just making people look at me without and look at what I'm trying to say without looking at who I am and who I am saying it, sort of thing.

Bobby: And where were you wearing your bag on your head, where were you?

Ewan: Well predominantly it's online really so it's like a sort of avatar so like I do this interview I'm not calling myself Bag Lord, that's the name I go by. There's like selfies of me with a bags on my head, like music videos of me with bags on my head, paintings of other people with bags on their heads. I did a series of paintings about Greek myths but put bags on their heads. And then I did an exhibition which is just loads of stuff with bags on their heads.

Leanne: I have one and it's a group of people and they've all got bags on their heads.

Ewan: Then like, it's getting to the point now where it's crossing over, because the world opened up again a few months ago and then I'm going out to like events and people are coming up to me "are you the Bag Lord?" But I'm not gonna say no but yes. It's not about necessarily about anonymity, it's not like I'm a graffiti artist trying to hide. It's just about making a point about how we product ourselves and how it's almost unavoidable. Someone said to me, my friend Matt said to me a few weeks ago, what's it is that "you're not against the system, you're just going for the anti-dollar dollar" that's still part of the market right like. I was just really interested in the way that we co-opt ourselves and get co-opted by it all. I don't really have answers to it or whatever I'm not really sure what I'm doing I'm just investigating, I think.

Bobby: From a sort of artistic political point of view are we still in bag period, are you still making bag-expressions?

Ewan: Well, I tried to get out of it, but then I just, I think I became a bit too obsessed by it. I've never done a project this long before so it's been going for over a year now and then like after New Year's I was like I'll take the bag off and do different stuff, or I'll just paint

really good paintings again, cos I get more likes on Instagram or something, probably sell it for more even though no one has got any money. And then I ended up being in-between studios, so haven't made much stuff about a month and then I've got into the studio the other day and said I'm going to make stuff not related to this and then there was a bag there so I put it over my head and filmed myself saying "ahh!" so apparently, I'm stuck for now. I think it's hard to remove something, that's got a little bit more traction in some ways and I think it's got a little bit more interest coming my way in terms of like "What the hell's he on about? What's he doing?" or "This guy's an idiot," or like. Before, people would just tell me they liked my stuff, now people tell me they dislike it. And that to me makes me feel I'm doing something right, if they have to tell me that they dislike it and miss the stuff I was doing before then clearly I'm provoking some sort of reaction whereas before it was just "Ooh, that's nice," now it's like, "I really like what you are doing it's cool," or "What the hell are you doing, it's a sack of shit," literally.

Leanne: It's still a reaction, I guess isn't it

Ewan: Yeah yeah, I think that's when you know you are onto something. If you're just pleasing, I don't think your actually touching an issue or touching a nerve.

Leanne: If somebody said to one of my pieces of work, "Oh that's nice," I'd be a bit like...

Ewan: Well, that's what I was getting for years because they were oil paintings it was what people expect of art isn't it. And it's figurative, and they're like "Oh yeah, I like this, this is cool, wow, you can do, that's good, that's impressive." It's really just showing off. But now, people are getting annoyed, I had one person get annoyed with me because they were like I spent like ten hours on this thing and you got more traction from this selfie with a bag on your head.

Bobby: I guess the bag on the head, is making people think "What's this?" "What does it mean?" Or you know whatever it might...

Ewan: Triggers a conversation. I think that's what I'm interested in, making people think about, there may be preconceptions about art if they're not artists because I think if you are an artist or in art education this isn't, what I'm doing isn't actually that shocking, it's been done before in different forms, but if you're not and it's like I know a lot of people who aren't, it makes them at least stop for a second, maybe.

Bobby: Just out of curiosity, and briefly, are there a range of bags?

Ewan: Sainsbury's bag, I like a Sainsbury's bag because I like Sainsbury's, I like the blue bags, that's what you get the alcohol in in corner shops. Also the little black bags, I like those ones as well. I started putting Amazon, you know the smiley face onto the bags so I stuck some of those on there. There's lots of different bags, I'm a real fan of the strong and stable one with the elephant on, they're great. Greggs bags as well, big fan.

Bobby: Tell me about your commissioned project as part of Offsite 9? What's that about?

Ewan: I was gonna say where it started, like it started with a conversation about the like I really wanted to put a sword in a shopping trolley and I was talking to Leanne about how we do that because I'm not really a sculptor so I don't understand like materials.

Leanne: I left that out at the beginning, what I actually make, like sculpture, like print making and everything across that, so you were like painting and I don't know how the fuck to do that, we were thinking about this mythology of Wolverhampton or like because we're like in this really weird time in the pandemic of not knowing, not exactly not knowing what's real but the possibility of it being real. Well, how can we kind of like fuse Wolverhampton with the mythological sort of feeling. Because there's so much around here which is weird and in between and lay lines and whatnot so we've got really obsessed with the roundabout and sword in the stone, and that sort of like story of renewal. I guess.

Ewan: My thinking of it was like that Sword in the Stone is like a champion, someone pulls a sword from a stone and they're a

champion and always I'm always thinking like the right wing always gets these champions but the left wing never gets them because they either get shot or too shook because they are going to get shot or they just like kind of self-effacing in that why would I be the leader because it's tied up in in all that socialism sort of, I'm no better than anyone else stuff and I was thinking a sword in a shopping trolley, I was like, there's something to it, we both liked the idea. But this project that started ages ago and then by the time we got to actually applying for the project it was completely different. Because we'd had different conversation about a parade, like a march, and then the bill was being passed. I think that's where it shifted, it's like that bill that passed, what's it called?

Leanne: Police Crime Sentences in court bill or something.

Ewan: Yeah. Tried to criminalize protests, so we were like that'd be interesting to do a protest in the frame of an art thing, so it's not really a protest.

Leanne: It's reimagining ways to protest, undercover, what not. Which was interesting because there's lots of people being extremely brave and taking to the streets and challenging that in the original form of protest. But it's just you know there's lots of way people have had to reimagine ways of protesting, or standing up for an issue throughout history.

Bobby: But that version didn't happen in the end.

Ewan: No. So, we applied for the project which was initially going to be a certain amount of money, so we had this big vast idea of what we were gonna do, this ambitious thing and then they halved the amount of money so we were like well I work, I've got an art practice, same with you. And it's like I could have dedicated more time to it, if there was more money involved, which is kind of a sad fact.

Leanne: It's kind of a comment on our artistic labour though, I guess. Like you know, you need the beans really.

Bobby: So what did you do? Describe to me what you did?

Ewan: So we did some with some workshops playing with the idea of protests and stuff. So we decided to make some placards and I was like I'll write on the placards, because I'm an egotist. I can just write things that are political then obviously you're, just more open to collaboration because I've never really done this before, and we get people in to do that. So that was quite cool.

Leanne: Conversations are work.

Ewan: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Leanne: It's quite interesting.

Ewan: This whole work's been a conversation really and it's come out in the form of words rather than images. But then it is also sculptural.

Leanne: In a way. Yeah.

Ewan: So it's like we did three workshops with just like with the doors open people came in and the question was 'Imagine Wolves, how would you improve your city?'

Leanne: 'How would you change it? Or if change it?'

Ewan: When we asked people that question and they were like specifically and I was like well it can be specific, but also world peace could make Wolverhampton better or a change of political system would make Wolverhampton better, or funding or so it could be as broad as possible. So, we just let people just write whatever they wanted and I think that because it was advertised through our networks, people that came had a pretty similar political leaning to us and so it ended up having quite like an anti-Tory.

Leanne: vibe, you could say.

Ewan: Pretty much. But also like it was funny as well.

Leanne: It was quite funny because the thing is, you put in the post which I really liked 'it can be as fantastical as you like', and I think that was really important to explain because the framework from British Art Show 9 is like care, togetherness, re-imagining new futures and people really took that as a source of like wow, "I'm at the



centre point in this reimagined narrative now what can I do with it?" And there was some...there was that group of kids that ran in and who were about to get chucked out by security and we were like "No come in here instead and make a placard." And they were just so dumbfounded that like "We could imagine anything we want, on this, for free?" We're like "Yeah," it's just "What would you change?" There was that one person that was like "I'd get rid of pigeons. I don't like pigeons. That's what I do. I'd make a Hunger Games but pigeons against pigeons. So, there would be no more." She was like fifteen or something.

Bobby: She might have got pooped on a lot maybe.

Leanne: Maybe yeah.

Ewan: The best one though was 'pay me to go to school'.

Leanne: Yeah, 'pay me to go to school'.

Ewan: It's like why not?

Leanne: Yeah, why not? They used to be, like when I was at college and my sister's year, EMA. Paid thirty pound a week. And that went with the cuts, so.

Bobby: What was EMA?

Ewan: Education Maintenance Allowance, every week you got like thirty quid. And why not pay people to go to school.

Leanne: Supporting people through education. I think that was the underlying factor with that conversation, support, like everything that those young people sort of wrote about was an element of lacking or needing support in one way or another. So, these really broad concepts came out because I think originally, we thought individualism might come out: what they want, what I want but actually the underlining topics you can say, were very, I don't know held people together, through support. There was one that was beautiful, like 'plant a community orchard', the workshops, there were so many, we were impressed with how many people turned up so at the end it was just me and Ewan in this empty unit looking at this floor of 45 to 50 placards going right. And also to

bring that sculptural element back in we are casting hands as well of the people who created the placards.

Bobby: Every hand?

Leanne: Not every hand because it was bedlam at one point.

Ewan: We'd never done hand casting before and so got twelve in the end. It actually worked quite well.

Leanne: It was quite good actually. But trying to mix all this alginate up while people were like making placards and then "I've got to go now." It was madness but it was really nice because...

Ewan: It was fun

Leanne: Through the kind of resistance that we've seen from that PCS bill or whatever it's called. There's sort of been I don't know a solidarity around protest and we thought it would be interesting if you cast the people's hands so it's quite cemented to what that they're holding but then through what's transpired being tried to snook back in in different ways and different epithets of that bill being very vicious against certain sections.

Ewan: They got rid of the words, of the ones that sounded bad for people, like people like us. You can't protest, you can't be a voice. But they've just left the one in which is gonna criminalize Traveller communities. I guarantee there won't be as much as an outpouring of support for that one last thing.

Leanne: because it's basically criminalising...

Ewan: They're calling it trespass

Leanne: But that's how people have lived their lives over so many years. You know stuff like that, we then thought like there are certain people's hands that are disconnected somewhat from the placards, I guess. So, when we were playing around with the display there is some hands that are connected to them and there are some hands that aren't because there's a gap I guess.

Ewan: So, it's out of people's hands.

Leanne: If that makes sense.

Ewan: You can have all these dreams and ideas about how to change the world but ultimately, it's just whether the Lords pass it or whether they decide that it's a bill they want to put through.

Leanne: Yeah

Ewan: Going to a protest is really empowering but the result of those protests doesn't always play out. So you can shout all you want, but mostly the issues you are shouting about will be taken out of your hands and decided by someone else. And if they want to bomb the fuck out of someone, they are going to do it whether you shout about it or not.

Leanne: It's difficult isn't it, cos like are we getting really cynical or are we damning the idea of this power of collective reimagining and dreaming?

Ewan: I don't know, I don't think it's cynical to understand that those things don't necessarily play out how they do. It just has to force you to be like okay what is the actual role of politicising people and getting them to reimagine the ways they think things should be.

Leanne: What's the function?

Ewan: Well, I think class wars are in the mind. I don't think it's on the street with a placard up in your hand and I think it's in every conversation you have with someone and about adjusting that and sort of attempting to allow people to un-programme themselves from what they believe life is and the pattern of life is and how you're supposed to live. And try and get everyone to think, like okay the BBC does lie a lot or like getting a degree won't get you a job.

Leanne: What degrees get you a job as well because...

Ewan: You are told that it will or told that you will, this path will lead this way or being in a marriage or monogamous straight relationship is that the best thing or...I think the war is in conversation rather than in sort of mass action at this point.

Bobby: The power for change is in one-to-one conversations.

Ewan: Well, I think that's the seed of change is. To be honest I think mass organising, educating and agitating and it's like, I always think as an individual even though I like the idea of being anti-individualist as an individual what can you do in those situations, I've got any art practice so what can I do. I can agitate, I can write things on walls, and piss people off and I can educate to some degree or open up a space for conversation.

Leanne: Absolutely.

Ewan: Organising. I am not very good at that but I think that's what political organisations are for.

Leanne: Collaboration.

Ewan: Community organisation are for.

Leanne: It's pooling resources and skills around.

Ewan: Essentially for this the project we did agitate, we did organise and we have, maybe in some way opened up a space for education.

Leanne: I think we definitely have; we facilitated an open space for people to come in to. Because we kept it simple so loose, people just dreamt in it. You know if that was not liking pigeons or if that was wanting to flood the ring road because it doesn't work. They could put anything that they wanted down on those placards.

Bobby: Did they say why it didn't work?

Leanne: Not sure why.

Ewan: Just imagine, yeah, just imagine the ring road as an extension of the canal. Like a riviera with grass banks around it, encircling the city.

Leanne: Nice.

Ewan: It would be amazing.

Leanne: You should be a town planner.

Ewan: Also want to make you know those underpasses, put domes over those and plant lots of tropical plants in them.

Leanne: That would be nice.

Ewan: That would be amazing.

Leanne: It would be like those utopian illustrations.

Leanne: Those eighties films like 'this is the future'.

Bobby: So tell me about the reaction you've had from people. Who's come to see the exhibition?

Ewan: We got one complaint, didn't we?

Leanne: Yeah. Fascinating, fascinating.

Ewan: We've been asked to see if we could turn some of the placards round, there was one. I haven't seen the actual complaint we just got an email the other day from this woman at the Mander Centre. I don't know what it said.

Leanne: Says something, yeah, somebody was a conservative and they didn't like the 'Ban the Tories' placards cos they thought that they would be banned from the shopping centre. Which is such a...I'm not laughing at them, they can feel however they want but it's interesting that a proposition like that can make a public space that they are currently in feel unwelcome like which, no one wants to feel unwelcome for sure but I think a lot of Conservative politicians make masses of people unwelcome, you know, so, what is the payoff here and what is the payoff as well if we turn those placards round and in a wider sort of field as well. I don't know if you're aware that you know of what is happening at the Whitworth, in terms of that branch of British Art Show 9 but there are a number of artists have pulled their work as a solidarity of censorship. And it's just like right, so if we turn our placards round what does that say?

Ewan: Well, turning it round is quite interesting though because it's still there or we could turn all of them round apart from the 'Ban the Tories'.

Leanne: We could, couldn't we?

Ewan: I think there's space to play with something like that. I was hoping for complaints though.

Bobby: Or it could have something on the other side.

Ewan: Yeah yeah.

Leanne: What the placard?

Ewan: Yeah yeah.

Leanne: It could say exactly the same thing. We turned it round.

Ewan: We could write something on the back of it. I think to be fair if someone complained that they don't like it I think...

Leanne: That's a reaction.

Ewan: Ignoring them is one thing but also reaction to their reaction is...

Bobby: Is a valid response to?

Ewan/

Leanne: Yeah

Leanne: It's completely valid.

Ewan: We should change it to 'Don't ban Tories' and see if anyone complains about that.

Leanne: Give them exactly what they want.

Bobby: 'You mustn't...'

Ewan: Well, it's a very Tory voting place isn't it?

Leanne: For the first time.

Bobby: Well, it is now, yeah. Wasn't historically...

Leanne: I'm not from round here so it's interesting to learn more.

Ewan: I just think it's a very working-class place and Tories have managed to, partly due to Labour's failings, become the current voice or assumed voice of the working class. I think it's really funny when you consult Tories, people who voted Tory think they are Tories. Whereas I don't think people who voted Tory are Tories, I think there's only a small amount of Tories. People who voted Tory are just

Leanne: lost.

Ewan: tricked people.

Leanne: yeah.

Ewan: I've never collaborated or done anything before really for this long, outside of like a day of fun with someone, like making a painting or something. And I've struggled with it quite a bit because I'm quite like you know, a bit of man who lives in a box that paints, sort of thing but I really enjoyed it, I enjoyed working with people and then I thought the project would end but it feels like this project is actually just a seed for a sort of wider thing and we can organise larger sorts of workshops.

Leanne: Like imagine a placard the size of a wall.

Ewan: Or just thousands of them.

Leanne: Yeah thousands.

Ewan: In a room.

Leanne: Oh yeah

Bobby: They're all on display? All the...?

Ewan: We made the decision just to go forward with even the ones that were quite radical or maybe on the line. But we did put them at the back so the most positive ones at the front, so to engage with the ones that are like shocking you have to actually look through the window of the shop and look, have a look so the only people that are going to get really ultimately annoyed are the ones that managed to get through the initial idea of it being...

Leanne: And they've paid a lot of attention

Bobby: Just to understand, you can walk in the shop?

Leanne: No just from outside.

Bobby: You know the way you're talking Ewan about this collaboration being very positive is this the beginning of a longer-term collaboration with Leanne and vice versa Leanne.

Ewan: I think so.

Leanne: I think so

Ewan: I think it went well. I think for me it was a teething experience and I found it quite stressful at points. Not because of you individually but just because of working with someone else.

Leanne: That's good to know. No. Genuinely it is quite stressful working under programmes. Like the sort of work Ewan, I don't want to speak for you, tell me if I'm describing it wrong, you had a different kind of like experience of me, I guess. Like I've worked in organisations or had to work, understand how it sort of like works to get work done which is the opposite sort of like, facilitator I guess and you have the beauty of being alone in your studio for ages making.

Ewan: I just get an idea and execute it.

Leanne: And then do it, you know.

Ewan: This was like you have an idea and then six months later.

Leanne: I've be in the admin of having to programme that idea or facilitate that idea, sometimes raise the invoices for the idea and stuff. It's really helped me learn to unthink that sort of stuck way of like ticking the boxes, making sure the emails are sent sort of vibe and the actually being a lot more go with the, I hate to be cliché but go with the flow of making something because I get, I'm very highly strung around my making and I work myself over the top making something, but like the way that you approached ideas and the way things could go and outputs and stuff, was really freeing. It's just a method that worked really, so we're chalk and cheese sort of approaches.

Ewan: It works though.

Leanne: Came out well.

Bobby: So, like complementary is what you're saying.

Ewan: It was complementary.

Leanne: Yeah, and people have asked us to do other stuff now and it's just like people obviously like it, one way or another.

Bobby: What do you now know that you didn't know before since working on this project?



- Ewan: That not everyone's as political as I am. I think, I just thought everyone was really angry, but apparently people are quite nice, and positive, and hopeful, and funny.
- Leanne: I know how to cast hands now which is great and I remember when I was picking the materials up they were just like, you could set up something you know cast baby's hands like you know but no, that's not gonna happen.
- Bobby: That's a thing isn't it. You can get it on the internet where they do feet especially, I think.
- Leanne: People pop up in shopping centres and cast like people holding each other's hands or whatever, so I don't know, it's a much different use of that material. The materiality of that has been skewed somewhat. Because we had to like, when we were figuring out how, learning how to do that it was so much fun. That's another thing I guess I stressed myself out with making and everything have to be like so, with fabricating metal and those modes of production that when we were just like messing about with how to cast a hand because we didn't have a clue it was just funny you know making can be fun, you don't have to stress yourself out. And I kind of lost that I guess. Getting really serious about sculpture and that.
- Ewan: Also, I think I learned a lot about how peoples coping mechanisms leak into like how they see the world.
- Leanne: Defo.
- Ewan: So, when you ask someone a question, some people give a funny response then that is kind of generally their way of coping with the world is humour. Some people will give an angry response, that's their coping mechanism. Some people give a hopeful, positive response that's their coping mechanism.
- Leanne: Yeah.
- Ewan: And none of those essentially are the wrong approach.
- Leanne: Young people came in and they were shocked because I guess they're used to instructive, perhaps education.

Ewan: "You can't write that."

Leanne: "You can't write that, you need to copy from this text book, you need to, this is module for today." Whatever, however they teach people. Erm, they kind of just looked at us, like "We can just do what do you want?" I think there was one kid who was saying that apple juice sucks and orange juice is so much better. Get rid of apple juice.

Ewan: Don't trust people who like apple juice.

Leanne: And there was another one where they just like white vans scare me, there was nothing else, there was a protest of owning that situation for them which was really important. So, yeah it's understanding that if you give somebody a very open or anybody a very open space to understand who they are and then that as a departure point for what they want their world to be. Pretty interesting stuff.

Bobby: When did the actual workshops take place?

Leanne: It was the first 3 weeks of February.

Bobby: Do you remember what was happening in the world at the time?

Leanne: It was the parties.

Ewan: It was partygate thing. But that's been going on for a while. It felt like a bit of a quiet period, the pandemic was waning on the news and then there's just a bit about partygate, maybe.

Leanne: And then the crescendo of partygate.

Ewan: And then, out comes the war. It was like a little gap in between those two things. Cos when we finished it and then war breaks out in Ukraine, we haven't got any anti-war placards here.

Leanne: No. Just Boris gonna go, Boris not gonna go. Some sort of like get rid of this person, get rid of that person. I think a lot of people just became, you'd see certain things on the news people came across as very disenfranchised within whoever was running it perhaps didn't know who they was.

Bobby: It's hard isn't it. I think I found myself getting angry with partygate. My dad passed away probably two years, coming up to two years in May in Wolverhampton and you now my Mum's on her own. So, when I'm here I visit her and were very safe. She's one of those who's been shielding and recently I deal with her mail and things and recently I was sifting through some mail and I found a letter from the Prime Minister which was talking about. An earlier letter about how 'everyone needs to do their bit. People need to stay indoors, not go out, I know it's hard, we are gonna get through this and if we all do it together'. It just felt like such a big fat lie. Reading it in the context of partygate, I mean I have kept it, you know I've taken it back home because I'm gonna kind of archive it. I'm not sure what I'm going to do with it yet.

Ewan: Did you ever see those sports, Jonny Banger, Sports Banger on Instagram? Those letters and other letters from the start of the pandemic from Boris, he got a load of kids to deface them. They did a big exhibition with it. And there's so political stuff and some flowers on...

Leanne: Someone did some bomb print on it in Tory blue, which was fantastic.

Bobby: Now where do we find ourselves?

Ewan: For me, obviously from a detached point of view, obviously a lot solidarity with the people of Ukraine and whatever is happening, for the citizens and stuff. But also for me, all I can see is a load of white Europeans going "We'll accept refugees." Solidarity with Ukraine, but where was that for Syria, where was that for Palestine, where was that for like all the fuckery that America and Britain have been doing, NATO have been doing all over the world?

Leanne: But I think there is a lack of reporting on African students not being let through and being violently opposed on the Polish borders. I think that's really really distressing to see. And is very distressing to see that not being covered to the same extent. Absolute solidarity with anyone whose been affected with that

war. And I really hope it comes to a peaceful resolution which sees people not living underground in a city they call their home.

Ewan: It's more cracks isn't it?

Leanne: It's just showing the cracks of a system that...

Ewan: For me personally, this conflict isn't a separate conflict like I don't think like the terms World Wars and stuff and everyone's like 'oh shit third World War's coming'. To me the Second World War never ended it just moved and all that's happened is it's come back round to roost and, and that's what it does, it will be there for a while and it will move somewhere else for a while and it's, it's just for money isn't it, all of it ultimately.

Bobby: Can we imagine, what can the future be, what will be the aftermath of the current conflict in Eastern Europe?

Ewan: I think if you're going to imagine in the sense of the way, because I think, our whole sort of media structure and film industry and enforcing of a hegemonic idea of how things play out, they want us to be shit scared and fearful of say like nuclear war or something. But I think that just serves the purpose to keep us, like shook and not really assess the situation. I don't see that as a future. I don't see like a big conflict unless it's an orchestrated one like a 1984esque situation. Like them and us. I don't like I don't see why they would ever nuke each other.

Leanne: It's difficult to predict.

Ewan: The war will just move, a mix of barbarism and hope maybe. The world's always equally or not even equally just brutal and barbaric and shit and also hopeful and beautiful.

Leanne: I see hope in the way like how Ukrainians have taken up arms like I think there's a massive hope in that, in a way. I don't know I'm just really scared for them from the fear, you can sort of dream out of it, but can you get rid of that feeling if that's constantly on going in way or another. Like they must be terrified. It is terrifying.

Bobby: And their spirit at the minute, there's resolve but what does it take to break that, how many lives have to be lost in the process. I find it utterly shocking to see the landscape decimated, buildings

that once stood up, that level of arrogance to be able to do that. Just destroy, to flatten lives, histories, place. What about more locally so what's our imagined future here, that's domestically but also Wolverhampton?

Ewan: I'm from here, been here most of my life, apart from when I went away for Uni and stuff and came back and for me, I love my friends, my community, my family, little things you get to know about Wolverhampton that you would only know by living here for a long time

Bobby: Are you going to share one?

Ewan: Some of them are illegal and secret.

Ewan: But like I don't, I think historically places like the Midlands are purposely kept shit and underfunded because the way we structure our country is to have one powerhouse like London, that basically is the engine and runs the place and that's where everyone flocks to live and until we divvy up that sort of and have like Manchester in the North, Birmingham in the Midlands as equal partners on how our country is run places like Wolverhampton will remain shit. Ultimately like they will remain poor, remain underfunded and like I can switch on some sort of positive, it will be great in the future but frankly it won't. Like, I've watched it do, it's not it's never done this and got really good, it's just done this my whole life and sometimes there's been more clubs and sometimes there's been less clubs and stuff to do. But it's never got, it's never gonna become a desirable place to live unless you actually know how, it's got a lot of greenspaces, it's got good schools, it's got lovely people. Like I'm from Whitmore Reans and one of the things about that I love is like I just think it's beautiful how integrated it is and how many different communities there is and how you can walk around and never, not hearing English language for like a whole day and it's like when you see films and that, 'you could live in Paris', 'you could live in Berlin', 'you could live in New York'. And for me Whitmore Reans is like an eye to the world because you can stop and have a conversation with someone from Ukraine and you can have a conversation with someone from Palestine, you can talk to

someone from South America, like every time there's a conflict in the world, a big group of them will end up in a place like Whitmore Reans.

Bobby: Thank you both Leanne O'Connor, Ewan Johnston, thanks.

Leanne: Thank you

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