



Roxana Meechan: Hello. My name is Roxana Meechan. I have three hearts: I have the heart of a practising artist, but part time; and also as the Arts Development Officer for the Highland Council for the area of Sutherland – it is a very remote area of Scotland, as you know; and also as the Tribesnet Director – it is a voluntary organisation that I set up as a mechanism to facilitate young people's multi-cultural experiences through art projects involving other European young people.

It is very difficult for me, given five minutes to talk about my work, to decide in where I wanted to pitch it. So, when I was making the poster here – this is an outline of Sutherland – what I have done here is actually ... Spain was obviously very important to me because I am Spanish, and I came here to Britain 30 years ago, Spain has resonated in my work this last 30 years.

One of the projects I have been working is called 'The Virtual and the Real Story Teller'. It is a very interesting metaphorical expression to describe, I think, the role of an artist. I consider myself a virtual and a real storyteller because my background started in experimental drama and, because I was brought up in a dictatorship, art is very important to me – it is the freedom of expression. One of the great things when I came to Britain was Speakers' Corner in London and I was really very drawn to that. Since then, for me, working in the arts is to give people, who have something in common that they want to share the opportunity to come together and to meet – to me that is a very, very, very important part of the work that I do.

As a project designer and developer, I am going into communities and interacting with people, first building up their trust, perhaps instilling in them some energy because it might be slightly different to the energy that already exists in that particular space; in that particular land. Together, we can make things happen because I think there is always a magic in both involvement and in the particular project. It is very difficult to explain, even though we are here to do that. It is actually quite difficult to explain and you just have to feel it. You have to actually be there.

'The Virtual and the Real Story Project' is a real project that is taking place over two years and it was about local people deciding on five local legends in history. It is about bringing the past and the future together, through the present, of course. This project is an inter-generational project. Three-year olds and eighty-year olds have been involved in this project. They have chosen five histories, deconstructed them, and then constructed, through story-boards, making them into animations. There have been a lot of story-telling projects, meetings, and final events because we are working with partners in the Hebrides and Shetland and Ireland. It is also the opportunity to share methods of working. This is very important.

[50:17] Within my work in the EC Project – the EC Scotland Video – there is a dialogue, and a distance. I am working with Sutherland youth (this is in my voluntary work, by the way). I am working with young people in the area who are actually starting a conversation via video with young people from the slums in Brazil. They are actually talking about what life is in their local communities – what is life like in Sutherland. They sent a video to Brazil and they responded with what life like in the slums of Rio. Now the young people in Sutherland have to respond after they have seen what life in Rio is about. They actually started to realise that life in Sutherland is not that bad, after all, in that they started to reflect in, why are people so happy in their video in Rio de Janeiro. They are talking about having to live with shootings going on in the streets and poverty, and lack of opportunities – but, why are they so happy? Where did they get that inspiration to be happy? They are actually able to observe how important it is that people are coming together and enjoy being together.

Anyway, in my work, I think that the most important element is that I bring people together to do what they want to do – and then I just help them to make it happen and I do that in many different ways. These two projects are only just two examples of the way that I do it.

Thank you very much.

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