

## Stephen Pusey Interview Summary

Track 1 [2:22:20] [Session one: 8.04.18] Stephen Pusey [SP] born in Clapham, London, United Kingdom, now lives in New York, United States of America. Explains how SP came to live in New York; invitation to show at PS1(now MoMA PS1) in 1986; curated show with artists from London at PS1 22, New York; met SP's wife; won lottery for Green Card, Morrison Visa, also Irish citizen; became legalised; at times wonders why living in New York.

[2:53] Recounts SP's' parents moved from Clapham to Brixton, London; lived in council flat; next to Brixton Prison. Memory of weekly tin bath in 1950s. Recalls move to Abbey Wood Estate, London, in 1960, house with garden. Explains sociological shift from living in extended networks to nuclear families; SP became gang member on Estate; spent time with dog in woods and marshes; Thamesmead being built. Mentions Stanley Kubrick's film 'Clockwork Orange' being located on Thamesmead. Further recollections of running on marshes, taking building materials, constructing habitats, delinquent. Anecdote about incident with police. Mentions SP's parents bought house in Erith, Kent, lower middle-class area; Kent became home. Remarks that staying on Estate would have led to criminal behaviour, ending up in Borstal homes.

[8:03] Comments on SP's parents' immigrant backgrounds, mother from Ireland, father's family from India since early 1800s; parents worked in administration/clerical staff; father emigrated to England in 1942, followed by father's parents few years later; SP's parents married early 1950s; SP born in 1952; four younger sisters.

[9:23] Remarks about SP's parents: father's low opinion of Indian people; hard-working, creative, amateur photographer; need for father to earn livelihood and sustain household. Mother was well-read, dreamer but pragmatic; SP discovered Irish ancestry on father's side of family; SP's parents' both born in 1922; mother's family moved after collapse of family business in (??) to Dublin, other parts of Ireland and London; parents were poor; moved to Brixton (??) buildings; later moved to Abbey Wood.

[12:26] Comments on failing eleven plus; myopic, blind without contact lenses or glasses; SP questioned seeing and not seeing; attended Catholic secondary modern school, St Stephens, Kent. Anecdote about wonderful headmaster, Tatty, ensured SP and others did A Levels. Remarks on previous incompetent teachers; SP obtained A Levels in sociology, economic history, art; Tatty and SP's parents' advice to study sociology and earn decent living; SP's insistence on wanting to be an artist; in hindsight, agrees with parents.

[15:07] Remarks on difficulty being an artist and living in New York city; some rewards.

[15:37] Elaborates on SP's differing views from his father; contradictions; parents' acceptance of SP's Korean wife.

[17:21] Comments on maternal grandmother from Ireland; paternal grandparents died when SP about eight years old, very close and loving; moved to Tulse Hill with SP's uncle. Mentions ages when SP's parents and grandparents died; different attitude towards diet and health care; SP stopped smoking; frequent exercise.

[20:28] Discusses applying only to St Martins School of Art; attended St Martins Foundation Course and Degree Course, four years; interest in surrealism; imaginative writing; discovered drawing and painting at 16 years; spent most of time in art room. Recalls teacher, Robert Salmon.

[interview jumps to SP living with Brazilians, interest in Chile, about 1973]

[22:44] Story about receiving daily bulletin from International Copy Organisation about events in Chile; contrasted with reportage in London press; SP's politicisation began in childhood on Estates; founding member of group 'Artists for Democracy' with David Medalla, John Dugger & other artists; created exhibition in 1974, Royal College Gulbenkian Hall, supporting resistance in Chile MIR [Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria]. Mentions painting Salvador Allende and Pablo Neruda – left fist stuff; Hockney, Oldenburg, Matter, attended exhibition put together by SP and other artists; auction followed exhibition.

[26:19] Comments on leaving College; studio in Covent Garden, London; involvement with Covent Garden community in 1970s; two types of community - traditional, conservative working class community, the other - students living in short-life housing from London School of Economics, art schools, St Martins and Chelsea College, and architects; community and political activity; Street Aid run by David Bieda, philanthropist Christina Smith, owner of local warehouses, provided Covent Garden Community Centre where SP taught art, and provided SP with various studio spaces.

[29:09] Describes tensions between traditional Covent Garden community and yuppies; empty sites like Oldham site behind SP's studio in Long Acre; community action in area, artists and architects designed and built gardens; held festivals in area, first Camera festival, (Campaign for Real Ale).

[30:36] Comments on SP's first big mural with Covent Garden community; people building garden; Cambridge Circus; mural in Earlham Street, Covent Garden. Mentions images and people depicted in mural, David Harrison architect, Bill Lewington, the owner of the hardware shop, Ralph and others; mural called 'People Build a Garden'; used oil paints; painted in 1977 - Queen's Silver Jubilee; SP living in Peabody Buildings; shared bathrooms.

[33:31] Recalls local people's response to mural, perceived as celebration. Anecdote about obtaining permission from Jubilee Committee to use Queen's insignia; SP used insignia for sponsorship, Bollam's provided paint, SGB scaffolding provided scaffolding.

[34:55] Comments on two assistants on Covent Garden mural; process of transferring image onto mural wall at night; different process for Brixton mural.

[36:13] Mentions no need to render Covent Garden mural wall; rendered Brixton mural wall; Covent Garden mural image of garden; community gardens in Covent Garden; largest local community garden.

[38:07] Comments on sponsorship for materials, scaffolding; grant from Arts Council; mural called 'Muriel'; Janet Street Porter interview on scaffolding; radio interview; process of depicting local people in mural; exhausting; one-year duration 1976-77.

[41:18] Describes next commission from Bill Lewington to paint murals of young people playing music; Simon Rattle's orchestra for young people; series of four panels painted in oil in Christina Smith's studio behind Opera House, Covent Garden; images on panels; racist attack on mural; SP heartbroken.

[43:22] Mentions next commission painted in Christina Smith studio, Earlham Street, Covent Garden, for Royal Marsden Hospital cancer ward; tropical forest image.

[44:11] Explains Lambeth Council Arts section approached SP to paint mural; SP found wall in Brixton – Brixton Cinema; approached Lambeth Council Urban Development section - Peter Rees [became chief planner, City of London] for funds; SP received grant; researched silicate paint - from Keimfarben in Germany; scaffolding provided by STB; process of working. Mentions

previously working on construction sites to support himself through college as a bricklayer's labourer as 17 year old in Kent. Continues to speak about difficulty preparing and rendering wall; mural painting 30 foot high, 101 foot long; tension in local area after Brixton riots; SP's idea to paint racial harmony; visited schools and photographed children playing together; created composition; hates this painting. Anecdote about Ruth Miller founding London Mural Preservation Society; artist commissioned to renovate SP's mural. Mentions someone featured in mural created hip-hop music inspired by mural.

[51:05] Remarks on murals serving particular functions; become part of community identity; celebration of community.

[51:38] Comments further on hating Brixton mural painting; Cable Street mural one of best paintings; compares Covent Garden and Brixton murals; Covent Garden more interesting, shortcomings; studio in Goswell Road, next to the Barbican; SP's imagination and motivation for painting; facility to paint realistically; removed from personal reasons for becoming artist; tour of Japan; returned to London studio; experimented with painting; investigated Holocaust; Imperial War Museum photo archives; life-changing; produced paintings based on Holocaust; showed at PS1, New York in 1986.

[57:15] Mentions SP's wife Yu Yeon Kim, became curator, curated international Biennales, and independent shows; SP discovered computer programming; started an organisation called Plexus Art and Communication; involved with Net Art; founding member of Foundation for Digital Culture, now defunct; extension of mural work; how networks of people work together online; Plexus, first web-based art sites in New York City; conference 'Chalkboard'.

[59:34] Reflects on changes to SP's work; symbolic realism; work that referenced Aids crisis; drawings similar to current painting, symbolic figures. Describes piece of work about mortality. Recalls SP's painting slowing down; need to return to studio around 2000; doodled as child; from 1980s doodles, squiggles, calligraphic painting came to fore.

[1:01:27] Considers essence of SP's personal work; interest in idea of signature in resonance; evolution of human beings as expression of planet; resonance in life; string theory.

[1:06:13] Further comments on taking doodling seriously 1983/4, working symbolically; returned to figuration; [shows interviewer different images] 'Oracle'; painting of Holocaust - Palanest in 1986.

[1:09:03] Mentions influence of stained glass window in Cirencester, England, Fairford Parish Church; resurrection window; painted 14th century; finest collection of stained glass for parish church in Europe; SP's interest in medieval imagination and artists; autonomic/autogenic drawing. Refers to painting in SP's studio.

[1:11:50] Discusses Mexican muralists, Siqueiros, Orozco, Rivera; polyangular drawing; reason for starting mural painting due to political commitment and engagement with Covent Garden community. Anecdote about destruction of Covent Garden mural and community gardens. Mentions SP's involvement with Covent Garden community extended to membership of government quango before formation of GLC [Greater London Council].

[1:13:46] Considers expected life span of SP's murals; Covent Garden mural; Brixton mural; greater personal acceptance of Brixton mural. Mentions great murals on MTA (Metropolitan Transportation Authority) network; subway mural on 51st Street, New York made of tiles; abstract mural; SP's murals served to celebrate and become identifiable part of community.

[1:16:05] Remarks on Mexican murals; great works of art; Cable Street mural one of best/strongest produced in London; people's history; attacks by National Front and other organisations depicted on mural; strong composition; community murals part of political environment and political history.

[1:18:10] Mentions change in East End, London, after Second World War; SP lived in Mile End, local Asian community targeted by National Front. Anecdote about reading British newspaper in 1990s, horrified to discover member of National Front elected to Tower Hamlets Council. Comments further on Mile End; working class community, Jewish community; targeted and bombed by Hitler; exodus of working class community in East End slums to satellite housing estates like Abbey Wood in 1970s; Ugandan Asians arrived 1970s, caused resentment; rise of National Front; Cable Street mural celebrated Battle of Cable Street; historically important mural; important today with rise of right wing groups in Europe and Britain in mainstream politics.

[1:21:37] Compares United Kingdom mural movement with United States of America; UK mural movement from 1970s to 1980s more politically engaged and community-oriented; New York murals from 1970s to early 1990s Trompe-l'oeil architectural, or artwork rendered into ceramic murals; graffiti street art heyday 1970s to mid 1980s.

[1:23:19] Mentions varied jobs SP undertook: security guard for Securicor International, department stores, airport, guarding private jet, underground car park next to House of Lords, construction sites. Stories about working in dangerous trench.

[1:26:23] Reflects on SP's paintings as celebratory; celebrating community involvement and people. Comments on David Binnington and Desmond Rochford important mural under Westway; David Binnington being distraught when Cable Street mural vandalised. Anecdote about SP and Ray Walker's attempt to persuade David Binnington to return to mural; Ray Walker worked on mural, completed by Desmond Rochford, Paul Butler.

[1:27:55] Comments on different jobs after leaving college; painting; worked in betting shops, other jobs.

[1:29:04] Discusses painter, Mark Chaimowicz in Earlham Street, London.

[1:30:35] Recalls art colleagues in London, architect David Harrison, Dean of Jamaica School of Architecture; photographers who worked for BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation], local people. Difficulty recalling other artists. Comments on SP's studio spaces; [shows interviewer photograph].

[1:33:48] Mentions no opening for Earlham Street mural; opening for Brixton mural, Ken Livingstone, Mayor of Lambeth; local council members, Gabby West; plaque commemorating mural opening; SP's mother and sisters attended mural opening. Mentions SP's father working in Brixton; SP knew local area as young child.

[1:36:15] Offers advice to mural artists; importance of murals; currently thinking of producing mural in New York; openness and interest in art in New York, different to England, class-consciousness.

[1:39:17] Considers SP's wife's views about his artistic work and development. Explains SP's attempt to understand human existence; abstract work. Describes SP's current approach to creating work; autogenic; calligraphic paintings in Asia; sense of continuation; kilns in Asia; non-perfection, change, evolution, signature of life continues.

[1:44:24] Reflects on physicality of mural painting; enjoyed physical labour. Anecdote about becoming Director of Communications for internet startup but couldn't continue; SP's need to engage physically with materials.

[1:45:24] Mentions scale of different current paintings; works best on larger scale; [shows interviewer painting]; mural size pre-determined; maquette for Brixton mural; help from SP's sister; explains working on mural scaffolding. Story about dangerous encounter with proprietor of Rock Emporium in Brixton building, pointed gun at SP.

[1:51:11] Reflects on mural painting, part of SP's development; ambitious, megalomaniac; after Brixton mural, SP needed to return to studio; validity of murals; celebration of community; gave something to community; survival of silicate murals; Brian Barnes' mural; life span of murals; red colour in Brixton mural, iron oxide; [interviewer refers to peace mural in London in silicate]; Pompeii red; cross-hatching; mural completed in 1982; explains need for mural renovation; plastering wall and problems caused by urinating in sand.

[1:58:21] Comments on 'Artists for Democracy', John Dugger, SP, Stephen Sprung from St Martins, made political films, Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuna; artists came together around coup in Chile; SP met Joan Jara, Victor Jara's wife and other Chilean refugees in London; events in Chile motivated and politicised SP and other artists. Explains involvement of CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] in Chilean coup; America's national interest in Chile.

[2:01:50] Describes work produced as part of 'Artists for Democracy'; preceded SP's murals; Salvador Allende; paintings of construction workers; Cable Street mural; Binnington and Rochford, Westway; political murals. Remarks that works in social/public contexts are political paintings.

[2:03:18] Interviewer's anecdote about impetus for 'For Tongues with Walls' project; response to statement by art critic Owen Hathaway that community arts murals were municipal art. Interviewer explains project funded by Heritage Lottery Fund. Interviewer continues to explain Greenwich Mural Workshops' development; influenced by SP and Earlham Street. Story about one of first murals on Creek Road. Interviewer comments on completing Town Planning degree and scholarship to New York and Chicago in 1974; later meeting Geoff Holland who worked with GLC [Greater London Council], facilitated community work in Covent Garden.

[2:08:38] Discussion about SP's involvement in Covent Garden's redevelopment; The Forum, Christina Smith, David Bieda, possibly Geoff Holland; housing built on Oldham site and other areas; David Bieda ran Street Aid; vitality of young professionals working with local community; cut through bureaucracy; things could happen quickly; different today.

[2:10:22] Reflects on different kinds of murals; resistance, celebration of community, education. [Interviewer mentions Vasconcelos]; important historical period. SP remarks that everything has consequences, affects others; meaning of Brixton mural for local people; motivation to form London Preservation Society. Remarks that hopefully actions affect others positively.

[2:12:55] Remembering interviewer and interviewee's last meeting. Discussion about Ray Walker; SP's shock to hear about his death; SP visiting Ray's grave; Ray's funeral, relatives and life; completion of Cable Street mural. Interviewer comments on setting up London Muralists for Peace Group, Ray Walker, Paul Butler, Brian Barnes, Dale McCrae, Pauline Harding, Stephen Lobb, Carol Kenna; murals painted using Keimfarben, funded by GLC, Tony Banks; Ann and Mick Jones painted mural, Paul Butler repaired mural. Interviewer describes fond memory of Ray Walker. Final remarks on ideal conditions and technicalities of painting murals; endurance of Brixton mural.