

CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ART & CULTURE

TRANSCRIPT

Name: Michaelie Crawford

Date: 9 May 2013

Place: O'Connor Street, Chippendale

Interviewer: Deborah Beck

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **DB:** This is an interview with Michaelie Crawford. My name is Deborah Beck and the interview is taking place in her studio in O'Connor Street, Chippendale. It's the 9th of May 2013 and the interview is part of the Art & Artists in Sydney Oral History Project which is

being conducted on behalf of the City of Sydney's History Programme.

So I'd particularly like to talk to you today about the public art projects that you've completed in the City of Sydney but before we get to that I want you to give me a bit of background about your life if you could. So before you started working with Jenny [Turpin] basically.

MC: So before I started working with Jenny I studied sculpture at Sydney College of the Arts and prior to that I did an arts degree at Sydney University, majoring in Fine Arts. And Jenny in the same way had done an arts degree at Sydney College of the Arts, majoring in Fine Arts but prior to me.

DB: At a different time?

MC: And had also studied Fine Arts as a major in an arts degree at Sydney Uni prior to me but we met each other working at an art dealer. So we were both research assistants for an art dealer called Frank McDonald in a gallery, Thirty Victoria Street in Potts Point.

DB: What was the gallery called?

MC: Thirty Victoria Street.

DB: That was it? I've never heard of it.

MC: It was called Thirty Victoria Street.

DB: So do you remember what year that was that you met?

MC: In the '80s, mid '80s. I don't remember the year – I'm bad with dates.

DB: That's all right. And what high school did you go to? We'll go back a bit further.

MC: Do you want to know what high school?

DB: Yes. Did you do art at high school?

MC: I did art at high school, yes, I did.

DB: And did you start getting interested in three dimensional work then or what was your interest?

MC: No, I wasn't. I was interested mainly in drawing and painting; we didn't really even have sculpture at school. And then when I left school I was actually planning to do more curatorial work and once I sort of pursued that path I felt the urge to continue with practice. And I had planned to

do painting again at Sydney College but Jenny convinced me otherwise and I pursued sculpture and never looked back.

2.17 **DB: So did you meet Jenny in that first stint that you did at the university?**

MC: I met Jenny at the art dealer's. So we were both working there; that's when we met each other. So I think from memory she was still finishing, maybe doing postgraduate at Sydney College of the Arts when I met her or anyway she was at least studying sculpture at Sydney College and then I pursued that afterwards.

DB: So did you have any particular people that influenced you, teachers that you thought made a difference to the way you thought about art?

MC: Well, I did get quite a bit from the teachers I had at Sydney College but perhaps the most sort of defining experience was an art project that I was involved with at the Children's Hospital, which was a project called Art injection which the then artist in residence who was a good friend of mine, Amanda Buckland, and I sort of conceived of as a joint project between the adolescents. So teachers who influenced me at Sydney College: probably at the time I had a lecturer, Frances Joseph and also Nigel Helyer. There was a number of other staff members there but they were the staff members I had most to do with and I think just by the very nature that they're your lecturers that you sort of become quite influenced by what they propose and what's on the table. Nigel was interesting because he was interested in work outside of the gallery and Frances was interesting because she was quite embracing of work that involved people, sort of communities, and that's where with Frances Joseph we devised the project at the Children's Hospital which was called Artists in Residence, an art project that worked between some of the students at the art college and the young people who had chronic illnesses so were kind of almost living at the hospital.

4.21 **DB: Is this the new Children's Hospital?**

MC: No, it was when it was at Camperdown. So this is quite a long time ago now, twenty years ago. And when I think now what I've done and what Jenny and I have done, both of those sort of approaches have had quite a lot of influence on what I've done and what we've done together.

DB: So I just noticed that after you've both finished your BAs [Bachelor of Arts] at Sydney you ended up studying in London but at separate times again, was it?

MC: Yes. Jenny studied in London probably a lot more significantly than I did. I sort of did courses in London with a particular group. Jenny, I think, maybe did a couple of years' study in London but, yes, separate times. We sort of followed really similar paths but we didn't even really know each other at that stage; it was only later we went "Oh, look at that".

DB: That's funny, isn't it?

MC: It is kind of funny.

DB: So was that encouraged from the university to then go and do some study overseas?

MC: I think in Jenny's case she won a scholarship. After finishing Fine Arts at Sydney Uni she worked with Tom Bass [sculptor], she studied at the Tom Bass Studio, and then – I might get this bit wrong – but in any case she won a scholarship to study overseas and went to Italy, studied in Urbino and then after that went to London and also worked with a really interesting performance group there, Station House Opera. So her experience in Europe was really quite intense in terms of study and practice, mine much less so.

DB: What did you do?

6.00 MC: I travelled. I had a great time and I spent time studying and looking but my study there was much less of serious work, yes.

DB: Do you think those trips overseas make a difference to your work and the way you see your own work?

MC: I think they make a difference in the sense that you're exposed to other parts of life and having studied Art History for a long time you get to see a lot of it in the flesh and that's pretty exciting. But, yes, it's a bit of a rite of passage. Well, it certainly was and I guess it continues to be for a lot of young Australians to do the European trip, the year overseas. So I did that along with everybody else.

DB: That's right. And when you came back was that about the same time as Jenny or how was the timing?

MC: No. I went overseas between doing the arts degree at Sydney University and starting Sydney College of the Arts. So I came back at the end of the '80s. Jenny came back probably mid '80s. In fact, Jenny had been overseas before I met her. I think that's right. So Jenny would have come back in the mid '80s and I would have come

back in the late '80s. So there's six or seven years' age difference between us and that's the kind of time lag.

DB: That's the difference, yes.

MC: That's the difference.

DB: So were you both interested in site specific kinetic works at that time or when did that interest come in?

MC: We were both interested in site specific work. Site specific work was absolutely the idea of the time and studying everything was about site specificity and installation. The course we studied is called Sculpture Performance Installation and Performance with Higher Elements and site specificity was really strong. In terms of movement, I think we possibly came at that from different angles but we were both interested in that in our own way and that just sort of merged together.

8.06

There was quite a strong influence on technology at art college and certainly when I was studying there was a lot of people who had backgrounds who had come from like a mechanical background or some other kind of background before studying sculpture so there was a lot of interesting students there who were bringing electronics and mechanical work and also it was the burgeoning of video art and that kind of time, so there was a lot of sense of movement as part of that period.

DB: What about teaching? Have either of you ever taught?

MC: Jenny's done quite a lot of teaching. She was teaching Art Theory at Sydney College I think at the same time I was there but I was never in any of her classes and other than that Jenny's done a lot of lecturing and continues to do so and I have to a lesser, much lesser, degree done that kind of talks and that sort of teaching as opposed to formal teaching.

DB: And I noticed that Jenny, one of her first works was Shifting Ground or Big Pieces at Walsh Bay. Did you see that piece in 1988?

MC: No, I was away.

DB: You were away at the time?

MC: Yes.

DB: O.K. So I didn't know she was still a student then.

MC: I think that was a graduate show.

DB: A graduate show, yes, O.K. So what was your first piece that you did with Jenny?

MC: Jenny and I, the first piece we did together was Green Noise which was a sort of sound and water - although you didn't see water, the water created the sound – installation that we did at Annandale Galleries and then that went on to a couple of other places. I think it went to Orange Regional Gallery and then we reinstalled it in a new way in Auckland.

10.02 So it was a kind of interesting work for us because it started our process of – we had actually worked together on some commissions that Jenny had received at Luna Park and I was sort of working with her.

DB: What work was that at Luna Park?

MC: Jenny was commissioned to do an artwork called The Footbridge which was like a rear entrance to Luna Park, the other end from the face, which really sadly the plug was pulled on that at the eleventh hour, which happens, I'm afraid. But that was one piece which I wasn't working on but then she was also commissioned to do a design for the River Caves and I started working with her on that one. So that was our sort of first experience of working together. I think I was still at art college or I was close to the end of art college, some time around then, I can't quite remember.

DB: Is that still there, that thing?

MC: No, it also wasn't built.

DB: It wasn't built.

MC: There's so many things in public art that are never built. There's much more that's not built.

DB: No, I'm sure.

MC: But then we did that. And then after Green Noise probably like the first really important project for us – so Green Noise was a gallery piece and we've sort of since really done gallery works – at a similar kind of time we did a project called Restoring the Waters which was a restoration of a landscape, a water landscape, a creek basically that had been turned into a concrete stormwater canal in Fairfield in western Sydney. And it was fundamentally a landscape architecture project where the landscape architects were working with the Australian Conservation Foundation and the council to restore this

section into a creek, which did actually happen and has been phenomenally successful. But one of the problems that they were facing was the local community were really unsure about the project, they were quite antagonistic in some ways, a lot of fear about what would happen, there was a lot of fear about safety.

12.03

There was a sense that with more trees and a more natural environment there could be more muggings, for example, that people could hide and also that if it went back to a creek that there could be a lot of flooding. So we worked with the community, like hundreds and hundreds, maybe a thousand people in the end on a series of sort of community art environmental, they were together projects to inform the community on what was really happening and why it was happening. And learning about it through a creative process was incredibly different to learning about it in community lectures and in the end now the same community is pushing the council to do the next reach of the creek.

DB: Great, that's fantastic.

MC: So it's really exciting, it's really exciting.

DB: So how do you go when you're working together? I mean most artists sort of value their independence and decision-making on their own, so how do you feel about the compromises? Do you have to make compromises when you're working with another artist?

MC: I don't see it as a compromise at all. A collaboration is not a compromise, it's a decision to work together and in that sense that's the artist, the collaboration is what creates the artwork. So even though there are obviously two independent people who don't always agree on everything – and we certainly don't and we have different perspectives on things – we have a joint vision of what the outcome is and we have a joint vision of what our concerns are and we'll fight it out if we need to or we let things slide if we kind of intuitively know that they're actually not that great anyway in terms of ideas. And we sort of feel that the collaborative process actually rather than being compromised is much more about helping us distil what we want to achieve better. It's like the critique involved in two people throwing that around, we feel confident that we've got a better outcome from that.

14.07

DB: And what about working with other artists? Do the two of you ever work with other people as well?

MC: Don't really work with other artists but we certainly work with other people all the time. In our own team we have assistants in the studio and then all of our projects because they're kinetic and because they're in the public domain they require engineers of a number of sorts. So we work with structural engineers, mechanical engineers, wind engineers, fluvial geomorphologists, we've worked with a lot of different people. So they're big teams and then of course you've got to work with a client, and the people who we probably mainly work with in terms of design are architects and landscape architects and we work with them a lot.

DB: So what about say your 1997 work 'Tank'? That's quite a major work. Was that the first installation that you did together in the city?

MC: I think 'Tied to Tide', is 'Tied to Tide' – which one's first?

DB: I've got it in '99.

MC: 'Tank's first?

JT [Jenny Turpin]: 'Tank's '97 and Tied to Tide was '99.

MC: Thank you. See, I'm getting old. O.K, Tank was, so it was, it was the first work we did together in the city.

DB: Can you just describe the genesis of the idea for it and just the process of making that one?

MC: The genesis of the idea. Basically Tied to Tide [means 'Tank'?] is an artwork, it's a light installation that was held inside the old display cases in the Mark Foy's Tunnel which was underneath the Downing Centre Law Courts and is one of the entrances to the Museum Station.

DB: So the display cases were already there?

MC: So the display cases were already there. They're heritage display cases, absolutely beautiful, really lovely heritage display cases - they're thirty-odd metres long and on one side of the tunnel and on the other side of the tunnel were sort of smaller display cases where in the past they would have had sort of information about the store.

16.16

And the tunnel was completely disused and there was a heritage architect, Diane Jones from Peddle Thorp & Walker and she invited us to work on the project. And because the tunnel is fundamentally subterranean, you go downstairs to enter it and it's in quite a dark space and there was this glass sort of latrine basically, a really long one, we both immediately just felt like water; it's like a subterranean

space, it should be full of water and that's what we set out to do. We wanted it to be incredibly simple, we wanted it to be really about water and the rhythm of water and not about anything that might be in water. So a lot of people were suggesting we have dolphins or fish or swimmers or things but really the essence of it was to create an installation that was quite mesmerising and meditative and a kind of enigmatic space – that's what we were looking for. So the installation in the end is a kind of – well, it's not there now but it was kind of a rhythmic, moving, watery light behind this glass and it looked like the surface of water. Although the surface of water would be horizontal, this was in the vertical plane, so it's quite intriguing.

DB: I saw the photographs. So it doesn't exist anymore?

MC: No. What happened was the Attorney General's Department who now own it or who have always owned it, who now own the building, they've had issues about how they're going to do some work on the tunnel and at the moment it's just in a state of haven't decided what they're going to do, so waiting about issues about disabled access and things for that, so it's in limbo at the moment.

18.09 **DB: So physically it can sit there, waiting to come back on again?**

MC: Yes, it could but because it's a mechanical work, there's lights behind there, there'll need to be work done on that. So it's a kind of maintenance issue. The work was supposed to sort of have a ten year life span, which it did, and then the work now needs to have work done to it and until all other decisions are made about what's happening with the tunnel that's on hold.

DB: So is that a normal sort of lifespan for your works, ten years, or do you plan them to be longer or are they different?

MC: Each commission will set how many years they want the work to go for. Sometimes a client doesn't want it to be more than that period. They wanted it to be ten years with the option at the end to maybe engage another artist or to continue with the work but they didn't want to commit beyond that. But at the end of that ten year period their choice was to sort of re-energise the work but unfortunately with other things in the building that's all on hold. In other projects it's a lifetime, which I think really constitutes twenty years, I think.

JT: Fifty sometimes.

MC: Fifty. But, you know, longevity and maintenance free – well, not maintenance free but low maintenance is what we constantly aim for. The public domain is a rough and ready place, really, and the works

are outside and they're moving so they need to at every level be as simple as possible to care for.

DB: Probably your best-known work is 'Tied to Tide'. That's what people say when they hear your name.

MC: O.K.

DB: And at Pyrmont Point Park, so that was 1999.

MC: I'm glad you knew that.

DB: So it was made fourteen years ago now so how's it holding up to the ravages of weather?

20.00 MC: It's great.

DB: And tides for that matter.

MC: It's holding up really well. It's regularly maintained. Our studio maintained the work for a large period of that time and now it's maintained by another company but it's regular and it's in perfect condition. The timbers are oiled all the time, everything is checked to make sure – if there's ever any damage, which has been very small amounts, that's fixed very quickly so it's in good condition.

DB: So who commissioned that one?

MC: That was Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority. Jenny – commission?

JT: Yes, Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority.

MC: It was. Thank you.

JT: And then the City of Sydney took it over about seven years ago.

MC: That's right. O.K, so the commissioning body was the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority and now it's owned by the City of Sydney.

DB: O.K, so it's part of their public artworks.

MC: Part of their collection, that's right.

DB: But some of your work like 'Holy Ghost' is really ephemeral and your 'Water Works' are sometimes installations that are one-offs, is that right?

MC: O.K, so the Holy Ghost and Water Works here is, they're Jenny's works, they're independent works. The Water Works series, Jenny really did all of those works before we started collaborating and they were not

intended to be permanent work; they were all temporary works. So there was one for Perspecta at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and then there was another series in various galleries but they were gallery pieces for exhibition.

DB: Do you do individual gallery pieces yourself?

MC: We talk about it often but we never have time. We've just been totally consumed by public art for the last couple of almost decades.

DB: Well, that's not a bad thing, really.

MC: No, no, it's been fantastic.

DB: So I really love this piece, 'Water Swing'. It's really beautiful and moves really gently and I love all that but have there been any hitches with the mechanics because I keep thinking it's so gentle it'd be hard to sort that one out.

22.13 MC: Water Swing isn't there anymore. So the Water Swing did have a hitch and it was removed.

DB: Is that right?

MC: Yes.

DB: I saw it years ago but it was removed?

MC: Yes.

DB: I didn't realise that.

MC: We really loved it and the idea was that it's like a pendulum movement but the pendulum we slowed it down really, really slow.

DB: I loved that.

MC: So when we're working with movement that's actually what we're trying to do all the time, is to take a movement and just pull it down below the natural pace of that movement so to almost kind of slow your own pace with that because you have an expectation of something like the swing should move faster but it actually moves almost at a walking pace. If left to its own device it would be flicking backwards and forwards.

DB: Yes.

MC: So it was a really calm, kind of almost held floating motion but unfortunately there was a structural problem that had to be dealt with and they decided not to reinstall it.

DB: That's a shame.

MC: It was.

DB: So it was 2000 it was made. How many years did it operate, do you know? Was it very long?

MC: Only a short time.

DB: A short time. That's a shame.

MC: Yes, so the problem was found early, yes.

DB: So I'd like to ask you now about the two more recent ones but they also deal with motion. So there's 'Wind Lines' 2011 and 'Halo' 2012. Now, Wind Lines is situated at Scout Place in Circular Quay, obviously.

MC: That's right.

DB: And was commissioned by the City of Sydney and Scouts Australia. So how did that commission work with the two of them working together?

MC: With two clients?

DB: M'mm.

MC: From our perspective it was more difficult having two clients. It's just double the number. So I think that's a fairly obvious thing that it would be a more complex situation to be in. That said, the Scouts were always really interested in what was happening – they were really engaged – and we worked with them quite a lot particularly on the text – there's text in the ground plane which are a series of riddles, I guess, which are kind of poetic orienteering for a compass.

24.31

So there's a compass ground plane with sixteen points and there's sixteen riddles that go with it and the riddles have place names all around Sydney; they're sort of hidden in sentences and you have to discover them. And the Scouts and Dick Smith in particular – because Dick Smith had provided the money for the sculpture and the Scouts were his representative but Dick Smith and his wife, Pip, were also involved in the process, so there was quite a lot.

DB: There's a lot, yes.

MC: But they were actually really interested in what places, what place names we chose and whilst they didn't tell us which ones to choose we sort of worked together on what would be good but they were very

respectful about in the end what we wanted to do as well so they were good. But having two clients just makes it more laborious in a way and then sometimes, particularly, I guess, in the production phase the lines of communication are not so clear. We had two project managers and ideally that wouldn't be the case; ideally you'd have one. So, so many people can make it really difficult in that sort of process. So all over there was a number of stages of the project and lots of different people who were sort of accountable at different times and ideally you'd have one client, one project manager and that would make life easier but in the end we're really happy with the outcome.

26.02 **DB: How long would it take from when you first came up with the idea to when it was completed, something like that?**

MC: Wind Lines, I think, was about three years, Halo was about three years, Tied to Tide was considerably less than that. But I think what happens, well in the case of working with a developer over a project things can change for the developer where they're not doing that space now or they want to put a hole in it for something so we just sat there for a year actually within both projects; there was a big time lag from design to the next phase. And in Wind Lines that also occurred. We had a big gap where there was no go-ahead for the project and that's common.

DB: Were they commissioned, did they approach you?

MC: It was a competition, it was a limited competition. Anne Loxley was the curator employed by the City of Sydney. I think there were six of us, six artists maybe, something like that, and we won the commission from the competition and then we went straight into the – so the concept for the competition and then design development occurred and that all went ahead and then at the end of design development there was a long lag before we then went into the construction and installation.

DB: And how did you work on the concept, how did you research and things like that?

MC: It was really fun. The concept was at one point just discussed the compass in the ground but there's also like a wind vane which is a feather in the centre of this circle. So the idea is in a way it's a sort of wind compass, which doesn't really exist but we kind of created it. So we've used the wind and the compass; they come together in a sort of poetic like game in a way.

28.08 The wind blows the compass in a direction and points to a direction on the ground, on the compass on the ground, and so the idea is the wind

will take you there. There's a sort of whimsy of wind in some ways and then there's also lots of things about wind. It's powerful, it's whimsical, it does unexpected things and we wanted to pick up on that and that sense of actually being at Circular Quay, a place where it is a place of exploring. You come into the harbour on a boat and we often think about coming and going from there, so it's a sort of a place where you're already thinking about journey and exploration and so we wanted to sort of pick up on that spirit there and think about places in and around Sydney. So that was the idea. And then we just got all the maps around Sydney as a sort of research process and it's incredible, the naming of places in and around Sydney is extraordinary, particularly when you go out to the mountains and they're very evocative and they were wonderful, wonderful names, so it was hard to choose in the end but that was the process.

DB: And physically do you do maquettes?

MC: We do a lot of model-making, yes.

DB: Do you do drawings as well?

MC: We do drawings, we do drawings and sketches and scribbles and a lot of model-making. So in the studio we go from one to a hundred, one to ten. We have things hanging off the roof and out the window and we do full scale sections of things, we test colour and how things work in the light. And we've gone down to yards and hoisted things on cranes to see what dimension something should be or how high off the ground so that we can make a sort of felt understanding, you know, that when we decide how high or how wide or something it's not just on a piece of paper, it's a really strongly sort of bodily sense of where that should be so that's really important for us but fundamentally we don't fabricate.

30.25 **DB: But I assume you're very hands-on when they're actually installing.**

MC: And when they're fabricating. So we'll go out to the factory all the time, checking, getting things done again. There's a lot of things have to be reworked and improved. And drawings don't always get interpreted the right way and you think you've got information and it was never enough information, so that happens all the time. And then in the installation we're always checking things and if it needs to be redone it needs to be redone so we're very close to the process, yes.

DB: And do you have an opening launch? What do you do when it's open to the public basically when it's finished?

MC: Generally, yes, we have an opening a lot and it's fun, it's great, particularly after three years you need something.

DB: Yes, of course. It's like doing a whole show in one work.

MC: It is. It's kind of interesting, though, because when I think about 'Halo' we had a fabulous launch for Halo and it was great but the landscape architects who'd done the park around it said "We don't have a launch" and I thought artists in some ways are quite privileged in that sense; they do get a lot of attention.

DB: Yes, absolutely. So how did the public respond to Wind Lines? Do you have any idea or do you get any idea of how they respond?

MC: It's really hard to know, actually. I don't know how they respond.

DB: Do you watch them?

MC: I often go down and watch people and I think different times of the day you get different – if it's busy and it's peak hour people just walk through. If it's a quieter time or if it's the weekend people will stop and read it.

32.03

So I think that it's a lot about if you see it every day you see it every day, it's just what you do. If it's new and it's not a hectic moment you can spend time with it. So hopefully it's enjoyable for people but it's really hard to know. I have to go down there and do a vox pop.

DB: That's right. I think it'd be really interesting because in galleries you sort of do that, that you hear people's comments but I don't know if this thing about public art's quite different because it's out there all the time.

MC: It is out there, yes. And, of course, when a work first comes up there's often something in the paper but it's not a review, for example. It tends to be more - - -

DB: Description?

MC: - - - a description or "This is happening", it's an event happening in the city. So it's a different kind of – it's more like the page three picture or the back page picture – it's a very different sort of order. And critics tend not a lot to deal with public art, they're much more interested in what's happening in the galleries so there's not a lot written on artwork, I don't think. But then you pick up more stuff on blogs these days; there'll be references to it so it's got some nice comments on blogs for example.

DB: Good.

MC: So that's actually really interesting to get a different kind of conversation which you wouldn't have got sort of ten years ago.

DB: And what about feedback from the council? Do you get anything from how they feel about it?

MC: Yes. I think they're happy with it but it's not sort of really specific but, yes, I would generally say they're pretty happy with it.

DB: And Halo's actually had a fair bit of publicity, really, because it's such a huge piece too.

MC: Yes.

DB: So it doesn't surprise me that it took three years. So I'll just say it's basically situated at Central Park and it's at the site of the Fraser Studios Residency or near there.

34.10 MC: Yes.

DB: Did you have anything to do with the studios?

MC: No, we didn't but that was run by Frasers and there was a group called Queen Street Studios were working for Frasers to run Fraser Studio. So they did fantastic work there, they were really brilliant. But that's not operating anymore; that had a period of time. So the space was available and it was always going to be a short term thing and I think it was going to be twelve months to start with and then it actually got extended it could have been twelve or eighteen months, I'm not sure but a lot of artists went through that; incredibly popular, it was great.

DB: It just shows the need for studios, doesn't it?

MC: Yes, and of course with a great model for what developers can do when buildings are waiting to be redeveloped, that they can actually be used and not just lie dormant.

DB: Yes.

MC: And there's some expense for the developer there because they need to make sure it's safe for example but other than that it's a bonus; it's a bonus for the developers, a bonus for everyone.

DB: So basically can you just tell me a little bit more about Halo? I know that the engineering side must have been incredibly complicated.

MC: Yes, it was.

DB: How did that work and where did you get help with that?

MC: We got a lot of help. What happened was we did the concept for Halo and the concept sort of evolved out of – we had prior to designing Halo and conceiving of Halo we had done the public art strategy for Central Park so we'd done a lot of research already into the site and the history of the site. It was a really fascinating history. It was a brewery for a hundred and seventy years so it's like this really long period of time that the site had one activity. And we were particularly interested in sort of the ideas of brewing and the motion and the stirring of brewing and the vats and the structures that were supporting them and they actually ended up as a visual reference, the support structures for vats were actually really sort of a strong visual reference for us and the idea of something turning and stirring.

36.20

And then we were kind of keen on the idea of something being like a little bit drunk and a little bit off balance and tipsy. So that was our sort of beginning thoughts around it. And then right from the word go the sculpture always had that sort of great simplicity in what we were thinking about and when I look at the very first models and the final work they're actually not that far apart, so we'd really strived to maintain that simplicity all through the process. And because it's a kinetic work that is only powered by the wind, there's no sort of mechanism that keeps it turning, we worked with wind engineers, mechanical engineers, structural engineers and also carbon fibre engineers because of the material it was made from. But that team was put together by a guy called Jeremy Sparks – he's a mechanical engineer with a company, Partridge Events – and they delivered the project. So they took the responsibility of all of the engineering, all of that kind of design, and there was a really fabulous industrial designer, Conrad Hartman, who we worked with and he really helped us to realise what we want in the sculpture and translate all the different wind and mechanical and structural elements into the final form. So it was a really big team, a lot of people working, but it was a fantastic team. It was like, you know, sometimes in the past trying to get disparate engineers talking to each other is actually really difficult. They're not in the same company, they have all these issues about responsibility and they just haven't necessarily worked brilliantly together whereas in this context it was under the umbrella of one company and everybody worked really well together and everybody wanted to know about each other's area. So it was a very fluid and dynamic team; it was great to work with.

38.12 **DB: And it's enormous. How wide is the circumference?**

MC: The diameter of the ring's twelve metres.

DB: Twelve metres, yes.

MC: Yes.

DB: Because I've seen the photograph of it on the ground. It's just huge.

MC: Yes. It is really big but I think that the reality will be by the time all the buildings are built, are up around it I think its scale will feel somewhat less than it is now.

DB: So it's in open space now but it'll have buildings on either side?

MC: It's in an open space but it will be surrounded by buildings, yes. So at the moment it's quite open so you don't have the final sense of that space which is a somewhat exposed space. It's within a park but it's not an enormous park. It's quite a lovely site but it will be in the end surrounded by relatively tall buildings.

DB: So people will look down on it and see a different angle.

MC: You'll look down on it. So we were always really conscious of what the experience would be from the buildings above and we were keen to create something that would provide a sort of intermediate scale for people on the ground. Because the buildings are as tall as the UTS Tower, the tallest building is as tall as the UTS Tower and others are also very tall so in that space the individual feels quite sort of diminutive in a way. So our sense of Halo also at a spatial level was that it could kind of frame that space and create an intermediary space.

DB: It's right near White Rabbit Gallery.

MC: It is.

DB: Any link to that?

MC: You can see it from - - -

DB: You can see it. I saw that the other day. So have you had anything to do with White Rabbit or it's just circumstance that it's sort of ended up near it?

MC: It's just circumstance, it's just circumstance. We positioned it, we had the opportunity to position where it should be and we wanted it to be sort of at the crossroads of all the roads.

40.06

So there's a road that goes through to Broadway, another road that comes through to Abercrombie, and a road that goes through so it's a cross axis and so positioning it in the centre and it's turning you've sort

of got something that can kind of pull people in from outside so it relates to internal and external space as well.

DB: So using the elements of wind and water in your works makes them quite trancelike and they've got a lot of feeling of movement. Do you ever link the work to dance or choreography? Do you think about that at all?

MC: Well, yes, actually, quite a lot. We both think of them in many ways as performative sculptures and we've both got sort of strong interest in not being dancers but in dance and in that sort of rhythmic movement so maybe we should have both been dancers.

DB: Would you be interested in doing work for dancers or with them?

MC: Yes. I think that would be fantastic.

DB: That'd be good?

MC: That would be a really exciting thing to do. I've often thought about something like the way Halo moves with a dance group would just be fantastic.

DB: It just makes me think of it straight away when I see it.

MC: Yes. No, we're really interested in the idea, particularly of rhythm that's slowed so I've said it before but it's just trying to drop the pace, just shift the rhythm slightly so that it kind of pulls the pace down a notch and allows you to be a little bit more sort of in the time of the work. It almost allows you physically to sink in time with that and then shift your space. So we're kind of interested in rhythm and a rhythm that actually is directed by nature or is like a collaboration with nature. So the works also define how it will move.

42.02

So it's not just that like Halo's not just there and then the wind works on it, we do an awful lot of work to figure how we want the wind to make it move. So in the instance of Wind Lines we wanted the vane to turn into the wind so in a sense it points to a direction, whereas with Halo we wanted the ring to not do that, we wanted it to continuously turn so when there was enough momentum, there was enough wind on the site, that it would be sort of spinning and it spins off axis and it also tips and turns. So there's a lot in the weighting and the counterbalance and the mechanisms that actually define that but then once the wind works with it it's not like a mechanical movement because the wind's always changing and there's a kind of really exciting energy that happens there.

DB: I think it's quite a beautiful work but it's interesting that it's also quite close to your studio as well.

MC: Yes, that was fantastic.

DB: That must have been handing, going back and forth.

MC: Well, it's just such a dream – well, not in the construction of it because that was in Nowra.

DB: Was it Nowra? I was wondering where it was. O.K.

MC: Yes, it was constructed - - -

DB: In sections?

MC: - - - in three sections, yes. So there was a mould constructed in Queensland and then that mould was sent to Nowra. It was like a boat-building yard and they did a really fabulous job - I mean they worked above and beyond – and it was made in two halves but in three pieces.

DB: And then brought up on a truck, I suppose?

MC: And it was brought up on a truck. We all tried really hard to have it brought up as one piece but that wasn't possible and then it was put together on site. So the carbon fibre had to be welded together on site which was really tricky because you can't get dust in it and it was a building site. So we had to build these special little airtight tents or dust-free tents around each of the joins – it was kind of crazy – and then after that it had to be painted, so the paint had to be perfectly matched to the paint that was already there - it was a kind of complex, fiddly process.

44.11 **DB: And was it constructed with a crane – did you use a crane to put it in place?**

MC: Oh, yes, yes.

DB: It's hugely difficult.

MC: I think we had the biggest crane in the southern hemisphere lift it into place. We didn't really need that but it was on-site so it was kind of exciting.

DB: Already had one, yes. That's good. So we're sitting here in the studio. I expect the overheads are huge. Are you able to survive on your artworks?

MC: We do, just.

DB: Just, yes. This is rare in Australia that anybody does.

MC: Yes. We're self-funded but it's not in any kind of plush way.

DB: And you said you've got some assistants.

MC: M'mm.

DB: So you're able to obviously afford to have them, pay them to work for you.

MC: Yes, we pay them, yes, definitely.

DB: Isn't that great?

MC: So we've had assistants all the time but not full time. So at the moment we've got sort of two to three assistants and they work a day each and then if there's extra work on and they're available they'll come in and do extra work. But they tend to be architecture students who've got the skillset that we need and they're great.

DB: Good.

MC: Yes, really good.

DB: And the studio is shared by other artists. Who are they?

MC: Yes, so there's Janet Laurence and Caroline Ross as well. Yes, so we've all got our own space.

DB: So you're up here on this floor but you've got working space downstairs?

MC: There's a workshop downstairs, yes.

DB: Workshop?

MC: Yes.

DB: Do you share that or how does it work?

MC: Well, that's our workshop but everybody, whoever needs to use it uses it, but predominantly it's ours, yes.

DB: And how long have you been here?

MC: Around about ten years-ish.

DB: But you rent it, it's rented? Do you live nearby?

46.01 MC: I don't live nearby. The building's owned by Jennifer and Jenny.

DB: That makes a difference because it's such a great spot, so close to the city. I was going to ask Jenny about her Churchill Fellowship but maybe you can tell me about it. I just read that she's just received one.

MC: She has. She's just won a fellowship, which is fantastic. So her plan is to travel to see water, how water's been used culturally in different contexts and she's looking at going to Japan and India but that may change but that's the current plan.

DB: And that would be soon?

MC: So that will be between now and the end of the year and it's just sort of waiting to fix a date in, so just trying to fit it in around projects, which is actually not that easy but that's the plan. So I think it'll be really exciting and great sort of research for the studio as well, just to kind of feed into the process.

DB: So will you continue on or will you have a break yourself while she's away?

MC: I think I might have a break. It'll just depend on what we're doing at the time.

DB: Have you got any – many projects, I should say? It sounds like you've got plenty.

MC: We've been working on a number of things but we've just put in a proposal. So there's work, there's certainly work around, yes; we're working on various things, yes.

DB: Are there any in the city that you're working on?

MC: Well, the project we're working on most in the city is actually a master plan project for Barangaroo, Central Barangaroo, Barangaroo Central, and we do a lot of this work where we work in a sort of multidisciplinary team. We're working with a company called Skidmore Owings & Merrell from Chicago who are urban designers and also Anderson Hunter Horne who are a Sydney based group of landscape architects. So it's a sort to do the master plan of Barangaroo Central and we're artists working on the project. So that's been a fantastic process and we're sort of midstream of that at the moment.

48.07 **DB: So you've been putting a proposal in for a piece on the site?**

MC: No, no, no. It's completely different. So it's not a process of design, of designing buildings or artworks, it's a process of designing the urban design of the space and that's been fantastic. And it's really interesting

to work as artists in that capacity. It's not about creating an artwork but it's about bringing the artist's perspective to the design process.

DB: Have you done that before in other spaces?

MC: We have. We've worked in sort of a whole lot of different capacities but we've worked a lot with architects and landscape architects on sort of considerably smaller precincts than that in design competitions, yes.

DB: So do you give lectures and talks to students or anything about your work just to sort of spread the word about what you're doing?

MC: Yes, we do but Jenny does by absolutely far the lion's share of that. She's a fantastic presenter, I think, and has done lots and lots of lectures.

DB: Would that be in art schools or in high schools?

MC: To some degree, certainly art schools, high schools but also at conferences, art conferences and non-art conferences, environmental, water to architects. An awful lot of people have asked for talks and from sort of different perspectives, yes.

DB: That'd be quite interesting.

JT: But not so many art schools.

DB: Not too many art schools?

MC: Not too many art schools?

DB: Should be.

JT: No, no. It's always architecture or, yes, as Michaelie said, conferences that are coming from the sort of scientific or environmental angle. The art schools, I haven't been approached by an art school and I don't think Michaelie has either, not Sydney College of the Arts or COFA for a long, long, long time.

50.09 MC: So most of the lectures that Jen's done and that I've done have been primarily not really with the art schools. Some of the art schools, National Art School, but not Sydney College of the Arts or COFA. The interest is more from a scientific or environmental background or architecture and landscape architecture and we work primarily within the domain of architecture and landscape architecture and environment and science and I guess that's how it falls into place. So I think art schools have been primarily interested in the galleries and that notion of the art world. I think that's shifting.

DB: I think it's shifting.

MC: I think it's shifting quite a lot but that's sort of interesting.

DB: I'm very surprised that SCA hasn't got you back.

MC: Yes, it's funny, isn't it?

DB: Successful students coming back.

MC: I know, I know. Are you listening?

DB: Well, is there anything else that I have not covered that you can think of?

MC: No, I'm sure you've covered it.

DB: Covered most things.

MC: Covered most things.

DB: Well, thank you very much for that. That was really good.

MC: That's a pleasure. I'm really sorry that everything turned out the way it did.

DB: So we'll just say Jenny couldn't talk today because she was busy on a project that had to be done at a particular time.

MC: Like in an hour, it's due in an hour.

DB: Due in an hour. But we got a lot from you, thank you, Michaelie.

MC: Thank you.

Interview ends