

Interview Transcript

Interviewees: Carol Brown and Carol Hofmeyr

Interviewer: David Gere

Date: November 15, 2024

Location: Online

Duration: 00:58:09

Transcript

David Gere: Hello, everyone. I'm David Gere, from the Art & Global Health Center at UCLA, the University of California, Los Angeles, and along with me are two Carols, and each of them will just briefly introduce themselves. Carol Brown first.

Carol Brown: I am a curator from South Africa. I have been curating internationally for many years, and met David Gere and the Fowler Museum people in 2000, when I was director of the museum in Durban, South Africa. We had a meeting, and since then have been working with UCLA and David Gere for 24 years.

David Gere: Amazing. And the other Carol, Carol Hofmeyr, if you could introduce yourself, please.

Carol Hofmeyr: I'm Carol Hofmeyr. I'm an artist and a reluctant doctor. I founded the Keiskamma Art Project in 2000 as well, and then was deeply involved, as a doctor, in the HIV epidemic in rural South Africa. So my background is in both. And my feeling was that medicine didn't have the only answer to illness, and that had been my feeling for a long time, and that art could somehow hold it and give it meaning, and make some sort of sense of it.

David Gere: I love being with the two of you today to talk about things that go all the way back to 2005. I actually just wanted to set this up a little bit because my memory is very strong of a moment when I received an email from Carol Brown telling me about something amazing that was happening in Grahamstown, in South Africa, that she just witnessed at the arts festival.

She said that she saw an altarpiece. She described it truly as a masterpiece. It was based on an experience she had that we might replicate a little bit now by seeing a short film of the altarpiece as it was seen in 2005 at the Grahamstown Arts Festival. Let's roll it, and then we can respond to it.

[video clip of the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* opening plays]

David Gere: How amazing. It gives me shivers to see this.

Carol Hofmeyr: Me too. I won't speak, okay, when this comes on.

David Gere: Well, of course, I wasn't there. I'm now experiencing it, as others are who are watching this tape, maybe for the first time. Wow! So much was going on in the altarpiece itself,

and also, as of course, in our reactions to it, and in the audience that was there for it. Carol Hofmeyr, maybe you could just tell us about your memory of that day, and then we'll go back and we'll understand where it came from, and how it was made.

Carol Hofmeyr: The memory of that day.... The altarpiece, you'll be surprised to hear, after [it] toured America in fancy boxes with the whole crew, Justus put it on the back of a trailer up the gravel road from Hamburg, and set it up. Justus is my husband who had built the frame and had the hinges designed that had to open three ways. Apparently, that's quite special. And then put it up. We weren't even sure if the sandbags at the back were weighty enough. We sat biting our nails and terrified that the whole thing, as the doors opened, would crash on the congregation, but it didn't.

And then, we had two bus-loads of people from the village because the altarpiece tells the story of one particular village, and the people in the altarpiece are recognizable, and they're there, and the names are there. So it felt right that they should be the first ones to see it opening. But, what I didn't expect was that absolutely joyful response to it. I had no idea that they would respond like that. It really shook us all, and every time I see that clip, I'm just amazed.

David Gere: It makes life worth living. It's such a pure essence of joy to see it as it's opening. And of course, it reminds me of when I got to see it myself with my own eyes, and the joy that I felt as well.

Carol Brown, I wanted to turn to you actually, because you were there. You'd come from Durban. As you said, you were the director of the Durban Art Gallery at the time, and there you are, seeing this this work. What was going through your mind as you witnessed it?

Carol Brown: It wasn't something that was in the particular art exhibition fair that they have in Grahamstown annually. It wasn't being promoted very much because there were other people there in the other exhibitions. I was curating another exhibition. At the time, there was this small—I think it was a church—and I thought, "Oh, let me open the door and have a look [at] what's in here" without any....

There was no pomp and ceremony or signage, I don't think. I walked in there, and I was just absolutely blown away. I thought, "What?! What on earth is this? Who did this? And why is it here?" Because it just wasn't made into a big thing. You'll remember that, Carol, maybe.

Then I somehow got connected with Carol and asked her what it was all about, and what has she been doing, and so forth. [...] I think that was one of the most amazing experiences to see something that was so powerful and so authentic among everybody else's work. That really blew me away. So of course, I rushed back because I was working with David at that stage. I can't find the email. I've been trying to. I said, "David, I've seen something." What was it? You know the words, but I can't even....

David Gere: You said it was a masterpiece.

Carol Brown: A masterpiece! We got to do something about this.

So that's how it all started. And then, from there, one thing led to another, and I think it was.... Before we even took it further, I went to see where it was in Hamburg, in South Africa—a little town—and to meet Carol and the people who lived there.

It was really a.... When I talk about it, I get the shivers that it was just an amazing, amazing art piece, which, and above all, it was the power of that art piece which was doing so much about the HIV crisis and poverty, in a place which was like paradise, very far away from everywhere else. It was just such an amazing experience. It's one of my.... I think when I one day write my memoirs, it'll be one day that I'll always remember. When I say it changed my life is being a bit dramatic, but it certainly made me realize what [...] people in South Africa were going through at that time, and it was so powerful. It really is. And I think, if I can carry on, it led me later on to visit the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, which was the initial.... Sorry, I've forgot the word. The initial....

David Gere: Model, or inspiration.

Carol Brown: Yes, and when I made a lot of it, [it] was very difficult to actually make that trip, because I was in a conference [...] somewhere nearby. I think I was telling David the other day, it's the only time in my life I've actually slept in a railway station because I couldn't get a plane or a train. When I got there, I was somewhat disappointed because I thought that Carol's altarpiece was much more powerful. And it really was. Yeah, that's my part of it. (laughs)

David Gere: This leads us back to you, Carol Hofmeyr, to tell us about where it came from. I mean, how was this born out of your collective heads? I say collective, because there was, of course, this huge group of people who were making this together. Tell us how that happened.

Carol Hofmeyr: So the Keiskamma Art Project started initially in 2000 before I even imagined what AIDS would do to our community. But our community living here were very, very poor, demotivated, unemployed. Many illnesses that are manageable and treatable in the community. I had come with the idea that art could heal—making art could heal people and build self-esteem. But then, so many people joined that we had over 130 people.

I decided we had enough to make a sort of very large work. The first work was the *Keiskamma Tapestry*, which just told a story of this part of South Africa and the border wars and the settlers, and ended with the first Democratic election in 1994. But then, in that very year of making that—that was 2004—we started to see people dying.

Coming first, the young people that were working away in the cities coming home, being locked up in rooms. Then people in the clinics. And that's when I revealed to everyone in Hamburg that I was actually a medical doctor—because I hid that for a very long time—and I got a job in the local clinic. We started.... And then, if you did a rapid test, and it was positive.... I remember it was one of the worst parts of my life to tell someone, "You'll certainly die from this."

That was 2004 in South Africa, and that's when I remembered the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, and I've got here.... This is over 30 years old.

[shows card stock fold-out model of the *Isenheim Altarpiece*]

This is what my son brought back from his high school trip to Europe. He brought it for me as a gift, and that was the first time I'd become aware of the Isenheim *Altarpiece* and the overlap. This was the time I wasn't practicing medicine. I was studying art—how art could talk to medicine, could talk to sick people, and the *Isenheim Altarpiece* was made for people also with an incurable disease. Also, poor people who ate rye bread and got ergot poisoning, and had no hope of a cure, and suffered from a very, very painful illness. So somehow the idea came that there was a correlation between the two, and we could make our own showing, our people, our village, and what was happening in our village.

We started blindly, I mean crazily, because I had no idea of the complexity of the frame structure and the hinges, or how we would stretch it, and it's on masonite, which isn't very.... [...] It's acid. And there was a time when they wanted to take it off the masonite and put it on something else. We made it quickly, and we made it for ourselves. We made it to try and reimagine what the world would be like if HIV wasn't in our community. Yesterday, I was talking to someone about how that's the gift of art. It allows you to imagine something that you may not yet have the tools to make. So that was, that's how it started.

And then, from very simple drawings and photographs of people in the community, we started to build it together. A lot of people helped. And yes, that was how it worked. They put their own ideas in, of the community. I gave a basic sketch, and I use [the *Isenheim Altarpiece*] a lot in teaching and saying these were the saints. We've got saints in our own community. We made our own same one, and the saints were the old grandmothers who were ordinary people. Saints were always ordinary people who took the load of the HIV. We try to honor and give a respect to the people of the community. And dignity.

David Gere: Hmm. One point of clarification, because I think anyone who listens to this will say, "Well, it was 2004. Why would we be saying that you'll die from this?" Because by 2004, in the US, it's been about eight years where the ARV treatments, these very effective treatments, had been available. So why is it that so much later, in Hamburg, in South Africa, it was still considered to be a death sentence?

Carol Hofmeyr: Well, that's why it, as Carol mentioned, it is so hurtful to hear someone say, "the HIV virus does not cause AIDS," because that's what our government said at the time. Our government refused ARVs. Refused to acknowledge. Our Minister of Health—even when the altarpiece went to Toronto in 2006—came with her African potato, and all sorts of other.... And in a denial. And so, for many years.... Even protection of unborn babies was not allowed, and doctors were fired from their jobs if they were found to be using any kind of protection for the baby or a pregnant mother. That policy of the government led to many, many deaths, and sadly, I don't think our government has yet acknowledged or apologized for that very, very bad time.

David Gere: Hmm.

Carol Hofmeyr: Some people likened it to the cattle killing that happened, and the cause of a sort of national suicide by leaders that were leading people in the wrong direction.

David Gere: It is devastating to think about all the years that went by when medication was not made available, when doctors like yourself.... Also, it should be mentioned that your husband,

who, though he's part of this story because he built the thing and hinged it correctly, he's also a very prominent medical doctor.

Carol Hofmeyr: He also used nevirapine very, very early by ignoring, by writing to the Minister of Health, and saying he was doing a trial in pregnant women. He was one of the first people to use nevirapine without getting fired from his job, so he was very involved with it.

David Gere: And this, of course, is the drug that was protective for mothers giving birth, that their children would not have HIV at birth—a crucial part of the treatment regimen.

Carol Hofmeyr: Yes, so you can imagine how hard it was to have a mother bring a baby to us, and the first AIDS baby that I saw in the clinic.... I had no idea. I thought, this baby's getting fed. This baby's getting this, this. Why is this baby not thriving? But then, there were lots of babies that that happened to.

David Gere: I love the way you're starting to describe the saints of your community, and I think this is an invitation for us to start looking at the actual imagery of the first layer, the second layer, the third layer of the altarpiece. And I'd love, if you don't mind, if you could, Carol Hofmeyr, give us a kind of a tour of those images, and where they come from. And who are those people? And how did the community of people who were creating the altarpiece choose who would appear in it?

[photograph of first layer of the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* shown]

Carol Hofmeyr: So that's the first layer. In the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, it shows a crucifixion with two saints, Saint Sebastian and Saint Anthony on either side. Saint Anthony, because of Saint Anthony's fire, the disease that altarpiece was dealing with.

For a long time, I wondered how to deal with the crucifixion. And then, one day, I was driving up the gravel road out of the village, and I saw this young woman. [...] She's not on the cross. She's standing in front of the cross. She's in the widow's outfit, and that was very common in those days. Her husband had died. First the people who had been in the cities who were working came home and died. Then the people who hadn't been away were infected, and then they died. So she is a widow with children.

You see, on the left side, groups of children. On the right side is a real grandmother sitting in a house—it's taken from a photograph—who would then have to look after her children's children. So we were honoring the grandmothers. On either side, our saints are two women. Susan on the right hand side. Susan Poliso. She's actually still alive and turning 102, and is a remarkable woman. Lagina Mapuma is on the other side, and she's in her church uniform. And she was also.... I used to visit both of those women just because of the strength of their personalities, all the time. I think they sustained me, never mind sustaining their families.

The bottom part of the altarpiece tells the story of the death of Susan's youngest son, Susan Poliso, on the right of him, coming home from. He was out working on fishing boats. He was too ashamed to come home. I went to fetch him in a town about 300 kilometers from here, brought him home, and he was treated for TB. He got better a little bit, and then he died in Susan's home

in Hamburg. The coffins and the graveyard can be seen on the other side. So the bottom tells the story of Susan's family.

In between, which you can't really see, are embroidered names in remembrance of people who'd already died in our community. Plus, some of the embroiderer's names are also there.

David Gere: I wanted to ask a little bit about the process as you're discussing this, because it's hard to imagine how this could be planned. I mean, you know, it's one thing if there's just one person who says, "Here's where the images are." Places them, creates them, stitches them. But in this case, you talked about there being 130 people who were all participating and contributing in some way. How did you manage the balance of the overall planning, and also the contributions of the individuals?

Carol Hofmeyr: So by the time we made it, which was very early on in Keiskamma, certain people had emerged as better at drawing. I had never wanted there to be artists and not artists, because I said everyone's an artist. But Marielda Maria, an art teacher from University of Johannesburg, came regularly, and she had found that there were certain people that were really good at drawing. [inaudible] was very good at drawing people, and from very, very small photographs. She drew up Lagina and Susan, and these people.

The background, which you can see is much more naive, was done as the embroiderers worked, by the other people. They put in what they wanted to put in. There was an interplay between the artists who drew. It was done in sections. You can also see, not so well in this section, but I'll show you in the next one, that sometimes the pieces didn't meet when we put the frame together, and we had to embroider a little bit longer. Lucky for Justus, my husband's expertise, and Jonathan Bertani, who was a handyman in Hamburg, helped stretch the pieces over so that each piece was.... So here were five pieces embroidered separately.

David Gere: I'm imagining that these things are laid out. I don't know. Perhaps on a table or something?

Carol Hofmeyr: We had to lay them out on the grass, often outside the studio. It wouldn't fit, and we had to climb up ladders to get a proper view of the composition, because we had nowhere to hang it. In fact, the first time we raised it up, it was in the street in Hamburg, outside the bottle store, because there was no building in Hamburg whose ceiling was high enough for us to look at it vertically. But mostly, we have photos of us all climbing up on ladders and tables, and the work laid out on the floor, to just make sure the composition was working.

David Gere: I love hearing about the issues of scale. I'll tell you just because we'll later be talking about the tour that brought the altarpiece to various places, including to UCLA. It was meant to be at the Fowler Museum, but the ceiling was not high enough at the Fowler Museum. We ended up using a dance studio with a very high peak ceiling, and it was totally gorgeous in that dance studio, I have to say. So it was not a bad thing that it turned out that way. But yes, the matters of scale have had a big impact on how it can be shown. Should we move to the next layer and hear about the images and layer two?

Carol Hofmeyr: Yes.

[photograph of second layer of the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* shown]

This part was much more an involvement of the community. As you can see, it's more naive. A lot of people say there's quite a lot of anxiety. I don't know what commentators feel, but our aim was to reimagine Hamburg without disease. It follows.... The *Isenheim Altarpiece* has the Annunciation and the Nativity on this panel, which offer hope in a Christian sense. We were looking at what gave us hope, and how Hamburg could be in our imagination. On the left hand side is a fig tree. They're coastal figs that grow very big in Hamburg, and they [are] quite symbolic for me of growth. Then, in the middle panel, completely designed by [inaudible] women, I think, are the different religious groups. At the bottom is the traditional religion. Then the Methodist and Anglican church uniforms and the other non-aligned Christian groups.

Then, it's a funny story. You can see how our relationship [with] Nazetti Makobalo, one of the artists did.... We had a man who called himself a prophet Gaber, [who] lives in Hamburg, and ran the most beautiful patterns on the sand dunes after it rained. He was a very simple man. We thought to put him and his running patterns, because those were symbols of art being made—sort of land art being made. You can see that Nazetti drew him and drew him very, very big. You can see shadow behind. And then I said, "No, no, no. He can't be so big. He's not God. He's just a human. Make him smaller." You can see him made smaller in front, so you can see our dialogue is going between Nazetti and me.

Then, the last Nazetti design is Hamburg, surrounded by water. We have the river, and the lagoon, and the sea, and a map of Hamburg in the middle. Flourishing. It's a very beautiful place with extreme poverty. As Carol mentioned how beautiful it is. And then the other shocking side of it is how poor the people are. So we imagined it as this beautiful place.

One thing I want to show. You can see how we were working. You can see down the middle. There's the.... We had to add a strip. You can see the cows on the left hand side. Then we had to make their bums extend over onto the other once we joined them up. So we went.... It wasn't.... It was very sort of makeshift as we were making it. Trial and error.

David Gere: Right. It has a quality of improvisation about it which I love. Energetic.

Carol Hofmeyr: Yes.

David Gere: One other thing that you've mentioned, just as a point of clarification for people who are watching, is the name Keiskamma and all the water. Could you tell us where the name Keiskamma comes from?

Carol Hofmeyr: Keiskamma. There's a lot of.... There's a river. It's a river that runs down. There's a lot of discussion of where the word came from, but it probably was a Khoisan word. Those were the original inhabitants of this area before the Bantu-speaking people and the white settlers met in this area. Those people have almost disappeared. But the names of places remain. And the clicks in the Xhosa language. They're vestiges of them. Yeah. Still.

David Gere: It's so interesting that Keiskamma, of course, has this linguistic origin that you've just described. And then there's the town of Hamburg, which is the same name as a town in Germany. How did that come about? Do you know?

Carol Hofmeyr: Yes, I know very well. In 1856, the river was the border of the British colony, and the [...] Xhosa territory, which was across the river. The British cleared a huge territory of people from the Fish River to the Keiskamma River—which is a very, very big area—of all inhabitants. They moved them out to stop skirmishes across the border. And then, after the Crimean War, they had a lot of German soldiers in employ of the British army, and they settled them. They decided to settle them along the Keiskamma River, facing the Xhosa people across the river, so that the British settlers were safe behind the front line of these poor German[s]. They were all.... Germany was very poor at that time, and those people had volunteered as mercenaries for the British army. So they were given plots of land along the edge of the Keiskamma River, but really as a blockade, really, for the British settlers that were farming behind them. That's how it got the name.

There were three. We work in three villages that are part of a string of villages. Bodiam, because they first were billeted at Bodiam Castle, in the UK, and then were sent out to South Africa. Bell—I don't know how it got its name—the next village. And Hamburg, the last village.

David Gere: Hmm. So that leads us, of course, to the some more inhabitants of Hamburg, who are in the third layer. Shall we move on to the final stages?

Carol Hofmeyr: Alright.

[photograph of third layer of the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* shown]

So would you like me to carry on?

David Gere: Please, do.

Carol Hofmeyr: The *Isenheim Altarpiece* changed quite radically from Grünewald's paintings of the first two layers to the final layer, which are sculptures by Nikolaus of Hagenau, if I'm pronouncing it right. So we changed our format, our technique also, radically. We use photographs. Photographs were done by a young woman living in Hamburg at the time, helping in the project, called Tanya Jordan. She photographed grandmothers because, in many ways, this altarpiece honors the grandmothers who....

We see Susan, the one who we saw on the front is one of the saints, Susan Feliso. She's got her grandson, Lichile, who is the child of— her grandchild—the child of the young man Dumile, who's being buried in the bottom panel. [...] This little boy arrived. He was about two years old. She didn't even know he existed after Dumile had died, and she brought him up. He's now 27 and still living in Hamburg.

In the next picture is Eunice Magwane, who was a driving force of our AIDS program. Visited many places in America, and came to the first showing of the altarpiece in Toronto at the World AIDS Conference. We still joke about the story because she didn't [know] Richard Gere, David's brother, came to try and give us publicity, and she had no idea who he was. The cameras suddenly all came on to Richard, and Eunice, they [had been] on her. So she sort of tried to edge him out of the way, and then she said, "I don't know who this man was coming when I was trying to talk." So we always laugh about that. Then she's with her three grandchildren. Her

daughter was later diagnosed with HIV, and the little boy on the right is HIV-positive, but he got treatment, and he's still alive.

And then the last woman is also a grandmother, Caroline. She has four daughters, and all the daughters, instead of going as usual to the father's household, came home to her with their children. She's there because she did the beadwork at the top. The beadwork is done on wire. It's wire and beadwork. It represents trees that grow in our area. The one is the erythrina in the middle with the red flowers. And then the two thorn acacia with the thorns. That sort of also symbolizes back to the whole crucifixion with the thorn. So Caroline's there. [...] Someone—Eddie, younger—from street wires, made that complex beadwork.

The two outside panels show the Keiskamma River again with the trees, the two trees there, and the water and the fishes. And our very, very beautiful environment.

David Gere: Hmm. You know, even in this version, the digital version that we're looking at now, I feel very moved by these photographs. I remember when I first saw the altarpiece, that there was a hush that fell on the people around me as it opened, because there's something about these representations which is so affecting. And of course, there's also the personal element, because those of us who were part of the tour of this work, remember Eunice very well. Eunice was very much the star of the show, regardless of anybody else who might have gotten attention from the cameras. She was amazing as she introduced the altarpiece. She would guide people through it. She would sing. She has a fabulous, open presence, and is such an amazing person. In fact, the photograph that's in the middle of this image—I have a postcard-sized version of it, which is in my living room now, and means something to me every day that I see it and see her.

Carol Hofmeyr: I'm going to tell her, because she would....

David Gere: Please do. Please do. Yes. And actually, maybe we could take just a moment to talk a little bit more about Eunice, and about the tour that came, and her role in it. The role that Eunice played in the community—she's essentially a community health worker. Is that correct?

Carol Hofmeyr: She was. She moved back to Hamburg in the early 2000s from Cape Town. Cape Town was a little bit more advanced in HIV education, so she'd been doing some HIV education in Cape Town, whereas here nobody knew anything about HIV. She took it on and was funded. One year, she was funded by a visitor to Hamburg, John Brown. Her salary. That was the beginning of our health program for her to go around and teach people about HIV. And so she was our very first HIV educator in Hamburg. We're very grateful to John Brown for funding her. We didn't have any health funding at all then. [...]

She did take to storytelling very well, and was an ideal person to travel with the altarpiece. Soon after Toronto, I think people at the churches, where the altarpiece went, requested Nazetti and Eunice. So a lot of the time—most of the other times—I wasn't with them, and they went on their own, and did a really good job as advocates, and giving explanations of the work.

David Gere: No, we definitely fell in love with them as they traveled with the altarpiece, which actually leads us to talking about the tour.

What a wild idea to make something so big that you couldn't fit it anywhere in the town where it was made. That it had to be hauled up on the road outside the workshop because it was too big. That it had to be in a church environment when you went to Grahamstown. There must have been some aspiration to take it to large places, to places where it could be fully seen. Was that in your mind? Did you foresee a tour?

Carol Hofmeyr: I think that was in your mind, not mine. (laughs) I could never have imagined that. I mean. I would never have even imagined it going to Toronto when it was first made. It was unthinkable. Yes, I never imagined that.

David Gere: Of course, it didn't just go to Toronto. It went to about a dozen places.

Carol Hofmeyr: That was what started. ... Then it went to Chicago. [...] Eileen took on the job of moving it around and getting it to different cathedrals in America. That just astounded me and all of us. Eunice and Nazetti traveling was also quite amazing.

There are funny stories because they'd never flown before. Nazetti, she tells me, the first time she flew, she saw everyone leaving their blankets of the overnight flight on their seat and picked the whole lot up in a big pile, thinking [of] bringing that home to Hamburg, because what a waste! [She] was stopped by the steward or hostess saying, "You can't take those." She was so embarrassed they thought she was stealing the blankets. It was a huge experience for all of them to see those places and be accepted.

You see what I was saying to David the other evening. Underlying all of this is not the work, but it's the human connections that were made. For people like Nazetti and Eunice to now be in touch, and be listened to in big cities in America, made them, and the people back at home, realize that their story is valuable, and is part of the whole human story. And people want to hear it. And it's important.

I think that my old idea—which I hadn't thought through that long of saying, of building self-esteem—came from people saying, "Oh, people want to see what we make. They want to hear who we are. They want to hear our names, how we live. We're not a discarded people forgotten in some small village where nobody can work." I think that was really remarkable for us. For me even. But even more so for people who'd hardly left the Eastern Cape.

David Gere: Hmm. I do remember being in Toronto at the International AIDS Conference, which was the first big site where the altarpiece was shown on that tour, and you were there, Carol. You were there to witness it, and also there were so many people coming to see it, and wanting to know more about it. You were giving beautiful tours. We would show the layers. We would open up the altarpiece and talk about each layer, much as you have today talking to us. It was such an extraordinary experience to be there, to have that sense of being the kind of heart, if you will, of that conference. It's mostly a science conference, but activists are also there. But for the art, the altarpiece, to speak in the ways that it did, so eloquently, was very significant.

And then, of course, for months and months later, coming to UCLA, being displayed as part of a Fowler Museum show, but at the dance studio that I was mentioning at Kaufman Hall, and going to other churches. There were three churches in LA alone that took it as an opportunity to talk about HIV in another place, and to find the points of connection between the US and South

Africa, which was very significant. And sometimes to hear Eunice sing, because she has this amazing, deep, booming voice. I was just thinking of the songs that she sang. I was wishing that I had taped them and could reconjure them. At some point we may need to get her to sing on a tape so that we can have that be part of the experience of seeing the images online.

Carol Hofmeyr: One was “Shine in Your Corner.” Shine in your corner. I always remember we will shine in our corner. But yeah, she was ideal as an ambassador for us.

David Gere: She loved to perform and storytell, as you said, but she also was very humble. She was always deflecting attention to others and to the project as a whole, and to her larger community, and to the people who had made the altar. But of course, there she is when you open the thing up, she’s right there in the middle, so it was quite lovely.

Carol Hofmeyr: And you would have noticed in this clip, she and her grandchild are standing there, ready to start speaking. In the clip, on the stage right in front of it, as well.

David Gere: Right. There’s a funny expression. I think it’s called “humble-proud.” She was humble and proud at the same time as she was attending all of the tour dates.

I want to now ask if you could talk a little bit about what’s happened to the altarpiece. It’s been now almost 20 years—19 and change. It’s still very much in existence. Where is it? And what hopes do you have for where it will be 20 years from now?

Carol Hofmeyr: Twenty years from now, I don’t know, but it has.... After the tour of America, John Brown—who was the man who paid for Eunice’s salary in the very beginning—asked for it to go to London. It went to Southwark Cathedral, and that opened up a whole new help for us through British donors who saw it there. Once again, it made friends for us, amongst whom was the fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, who saw it. [He] was very, very moved because he had worked in East Africa, and in his AIDS clinics, he used music while the patients waited for their treatment. Often, they traveled and had to sit the whole day, so he was very involved with using art at the same time as medicine. He kind of sponsored us, and introduced us to other donors. So that was very, very nice for us.

Then, on its way home, it suddenly went to Hamburg, in Germany, which had always been a hope for us. The Lutheran Conference was that year in Hamburg, in Germany. Only I went, because we had no money. I paid my own fare, and we didn’t have money. Oh, no, wait. I think they paid. I can’t remember who went. Two other people went. It went to Hamburg, which was very nice.

And then it came back. Then we didn’t know what to do. Some people at Stellenbosch, at the theological college in Stellenbosch, took on trying to sell it, and it was bought by a South African financier called GT Ferreira, who now owns it. But because of its size, he doesn’t have a place for it. So it’s mostly in Hamburg now, in a building that was built for it by the South African government, in a very bizarre way.

And it has been on tour. It’s been to the retrospective in Johannesburg, and it’s going now. It’s packed up in a box to go to the Norval gallery in Cape Town, as part of an exhibition of 30 years of democracy, of seminal works of the 30 years of democracy. So people seem to get to know it,

and it's very nice when people come to Hamburg to be given a tour... to suddenly find in this funny little village at the end of a road, an artwork. So we want to try and keep it here. GT Ferreira owns it, and is very happy for us to keep it here.

David Gere: Hmm. I'm actually wanting to turn to you, Carol Brown, now. Thinking from the standpoint of an art curator—someone who worked for a major gallery, the Durban Art Gallery, for a long period of time. and now continues to work in curatorial functions—what would you wish for it? How do you see it? What role do you think it could play for another 10, 20 years and well beyond?

Carol Brown: I would love to see it in a public collection, where it was probably almost permanently kept, which could become a place of pilgrimage almost on its own. [...] It needs to be preserved as well. I think, moving it around, and perhaps in more private places, it won't perhaps be preserved as well as it should. [...] Unfortunately, the South African museum context is not great, at the moment. A lot of the museums are underfunded and not able. So it's a very difficult one, but I think its importance is just unbelievably... important. (laughs)

I would love it to be accessible to many people, say, like a pilgrimage. Wherever you are in the world, you are coming to South Africa. Ideally, have perhaps a little museum built just around that, somewhere in South Africa that was a fairly accessible place. It could be perhaps [...] somewhere which could also house other works about HIV [...] that were made during that period. But it would definitely be the star, and the main effort.

If you go back to the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, it's a place people go to [on] a pilgrimage almost, so why couldn't this one be the same thing? It certainly would hold its own against anything of....

Carol Hofmeyr: I think maybe I should look into that. And maybe because it's going to the Norval, speak to [inaudible], and ask him for ideas, because he might....

Carol Brown: And also has access to a lot of funding, and he appreciates the value of.... He would appreciate—I'm sure he does already—but he has quite a lot of power, so I think that would be a very good way to do it. This is the foundation, David, which is based in Cape Town, and he is a very prominent person who really cares about issues. He might be a good person to....

Carol Hofmeyr: I mean, I've only just thought of it now as you as you talk about it. [...] I didn't plan something for it.

Carol Brown: I think it must be preserved. I think it's really important.

Carol Hofmeyr: Maybe I should get GT Ferreira to meet [inaudible] and talk together. That might be a....

Carol Brown: It wouldn't hurt. That would work. [...] It really should have a very prominent role in the whole history of the world. When one starts thinking about how those years of the HIV/AIDS... and the whole context.... It's a wonderful story, and it would be very sad if it's lost.

David Gere: Of course, because it's thread, so it has certain inherent vulnerability, which is part of its beauty, of course.

Carol Brown: Yes. But you know, under the right conditions, it can last forever. You know, there's so much.

Carol Hofmeyr: They wanted to move it off the masonite. Carol will know. Masonite is acid, I think, and....

Carol Brown: Yes, yes.

Carol Hofmeyr: I have used masonite, but I didn't know that.

Carol Brown: But there must be ways of overcoming that. Yes, I'm sure there would be.

David Gere: Well, I love that we've ended up talking about practical concerns about how we might live for decades and centuries more, but it does bring me back just to the heart of the piece and the beauty of the piece, and the meaning of it.

I'm so grateful to you, Carol Hofmeyr, for having devised it, but also devised it in a community, that it was something that you all did together. I feel the contribution of all of those people—mostly women, the more than a hundred of them. And I'm grateful for having known this piece and having known you. Thank you so much.

Carol Hofmeyr: You and me. I'm very, very grateful to you and Carol, because without you, I don't think it would have even.... I don't know. It wouldn't even have started the journey. You were the people who put it on the world stage.

David Gere: Ours was the easy part. You're the major. (laughs)

Carol Brown: It's been such a privilege to be working with you over these years, and the project. We thank you for that privilege. It's really been the highlights of my career. Really, you know.

Carol Hofmeyr: For us, too. I said to David the other night when I was speaking to him, when I have to think of what and write about what underlies all the artworks that we have made, the thing that remains is the human connections. I use the word threads then. It's like a huge network of people that are doing right in the world, when so many people are not doing right. And they're unseen. I mean, they're not there. Their work is. And that's what gives me hope for the future in spite of what's happening all over the world at the moment.

Carol Brown: Oh, sure!

Carol Hofmeyr: Networking and doing good.

Carol Brown: An artwork like yours tells so many stories about how people have got together and what people have done and what has been achieved in that one work. So it has to be preserved.

Carol Hofmeyr: Thanks, Carol, because that gives me a way.... You know, something to think.....

Carol Brown: Again, if you start any negotiations with anybody, I'm around as well.

Carol Hofmeyr: Thanks for that.

David Gere: Oh, good. Well, thank you so much for both of you for speaking with us today, and for telling us more about the *Keiskamma*. It's amazing. Thank you so much.