

**PANIC! Bursaries**  
**Transcript of Interview with Kevin Devonport**  
**July 2021, Assembly House**



Georgia 0:07

Hello everyone, my name is Georgia Taylor Aguilar and I am the artist development curator at the Tetley in Leeds. My pronouns are she/her and I am really delighted to welcome you to this PANIC! Promoting an Artist Network in the Crisis interview with Kevin Devonport, one of our bursary artists. So before we start just a little bit about PANIC! PANIC! stands for Promoting an Artist Network in the Crisis. It is led by, with and for artists within the Leeds City region. PANIC! shares, learning resources, awards, bursaries, and also offers training and mentorship opportunities too. Today we are here with the brilliant Kevin Devonport, one of our bursary awardee artists. And we're here in his studio at Assembly House and Armley to talk a bit about his work and his bursary project. And also just so you can get to know him a little bit more. Hi, Kev, you alright?

Kevin 1:12

Yeah, I'm great.

Georgia 1:14

Good. So we're currently kind of in front of your new bursary painting.

Kevin 1:21

Yeah.

Georgia 1:21

Which you're doing for PANIC. So can you just describe and tell us a little bit about the artwork? Yeah. What is it about?

Kevin 1:29

Yeah, the subject matter, overall, is the pandemic, which I was a bit reluctant to do a painting. You know, based on that, because it's just been bombarded as you can see, you know, on the internet, but my whole idea of it was then I thought, it's a big moment in history. And if 20 years time comes by, and me as an artist I'd never contributed anything to this, you know, big moment, big thing that's happening at the time, it just won't seem right. So I thought I'd just do one painting and one painting only, with the pandemic. And this is a style that's evolving, really, I've got a

bit of a fondness for still life. I like traditional forms. Yeah. Yeah. So yeah, our telling the story, basically with objects. So if you go through the, obviously, we know the face masks, and the locks represent the lockdown. I've used the Tarot quite a lot in other projects that I've been using

Georgia 2:39

Yeah, yeah.

Kevin 2:40

And the tower card is significant. It means a cataclysm, where everything falls in around you, you know, a big upheaval, which is exactly what we're all experiencing now.

Georgia 2:51

Yeah. Yeah.

Kevin 2:52

And I've got the handcuffs here. And that just represents where people think where a lot of things where we've can be going is I think we're losing a lot of social freedoms, social gatherings, people heading towards a cashless economy. Yeah. Where a cashless economy would, I think, would just make us all into slaves to a system really, I mean, how would a travelling community survive? you won't have a choice to do that.

Georgia 3:20

So in terms of like, the starting point for this work, it's starting from the pandemic, but also, you're thinking about all of the wider ideas around kind of the concept and just all of these other really challenging points, where it's like, really good opportunities to reflect on this past year, year and a bit, two years now.

Kevin 3:43

Yeah. Basically, it's telling a story with objects. And the idea I've got behind that it's similar to my Tarot paintings that I've done in the past where, what when I studied my sociology degree, one of the interests that I had was people's attachment to materiality, the different meanings we put to objects, and now they can basically get a life of their own. And it's been so I can tell a story with just material objects. And the paint, paints and brushes that comes in like it just seemed so many people have just ways of dealing with lockdown, which I know for myself, I am more equipped dealing with seclusion and isolation was one of the things was creativity maybe reading or that's the type of escapism from this.

Georgia 4:37

So where's your kind of starting point for choosing and selecting all of these different objects, you kind of because the pandemic is such a huge, overarching

complicated thing that, you know, we're really struggling to get our heads around it. So how do you go about, you know, from the pandemic, which is so huge kind of selecting which objects to to kind of put into your paintings, and what narrowing it down.

Kevin 5:03

it's just the objects that are said like that have them meanings that represent certain things. And the Tarot was a really good tool because if you look at the Major Arcana, it does the life's journey. And this is somewhat like upheaval. I mean, it doesn't necessarily have to be perfectly fitting for the pandemic, but it could be someone's relationship breaking down and losing the home and just a big upheaval, we experienced the whole things in our different ways. Yeah. Yeah, it's so good tool the Tarot because it don't matter how different we are as people. You see, there's certain little cycles in life that we all experience. A good way of pointing do you remember one of the other PANIC! artists, Thahmina. You've seen a bit of art she did with the negative labels. Yeah. Now look how completely different we are as people. She's from a different ethnic background, different gender, I mean she's that tall I'm this tall. I'm like, working class ex-villain, completely different people. Yeah, she did a bit of artwork, where she's negatively labelled and I've had that same experiences with my past being negatively labelled. Yeah, we all have the same experiences in life. Yeah. But just in our own ways.

Georgia 6:25

Yeah, definitely. I think, you know, everyone's got their challenges, their barriers, and actually, they're so complex, and they're so intersectional because race and class, ethnicity, gender, disability, you know, they all kind of, you know, interact with one another and very differently, different people.

Kevin 6:48

Different ways. Yeah, but we all experience life. We still experienced the same patterns. People fall in love they fall out of love, you know, we experienced treachery we all experienced the same things regardless of us ethnicity and gender and such

Georgia 7:05

So what is the significance of the Tarot Archana to you personally?

Kevin 7:11

Significance it just a big change in point in my life as before, a lot of things were changed my life from all come together at the same time. Yeah, so yeah, before that I was quite atheist, quite a nihilistic didn't believe life or meaningless. It was just a speck in the universe but complete chance. And I went for a tarot reading and everything really come out, you know, I realised that it weren't complete rubbish.

Yeah. And there is quite a bit of a changing point. So that really started making me tune into a more spiritual side of myself. I realised there is that aspect to life now.

Georgia 7:56

Yeah. Yeah.

Kevin 7:57

So yeah, it's a lot of my artworks evolved from these paintings, you know, the Tarot projects, I was doing of my life story. And they only like evolved from just a still life study of learning how to paint. And then now I'm using this again, I mean, like the off canvas composition, which I've used in the paint brushes there. And the dog, so yeah, each painting I'm like, evolving and moving on to the next. Where it's taking me I still don't know myself.

Georgia 8:27

Yeah. So I guess, Kevin, what's next for your work? What else you're up to at the moment?

Unknown Speaker 8:34

I'm doing this design in a tarot card for Leeds Tarot project, which, that's going to be an actual tarot deck 78 artists because there's 78 tarot cards so a different artist for every card, which is going to be good, that I don't think it's ever been done. Every Tarot, there's hundreds of different Tarot decks, but it's an artist that's done this specific deck. They haven't done a deck where it's a different artist for every card.

Georgia 8:59

Yeah. Wow.

Kevin 9:00

So yeah, I've got the Eight of Cups and in true Tarot style we've had them just drawn for us. We never got to choose a card and the Eight of Cups, believe it or not means moving on in life, moving away from something and going on to other things. I thought what more appropriate could I have picked? Yeah, yeah. Well, I didn't pick myself, what I had chosen for me. That's why, that's what the trainers represent, they're moving onwards.

Georgia 9:26

Yeah. Because you've got in your previous paintings, you've got a series of, kind of trainers and sneakers at different points in your life. So that's a kind of a real Hallmark for you and that characterization, but also a way that you could maybe that you use self you know, use these objects to help yourself portraiture I guess, because it is kind of like self portrait really

Kevin 9:49

Yeah, the train is to represent the self. In life I see the self model of the soul. The identities are just different things we attach to ourselves. When you look at the self, what are you? It's just a jumble of thoughts, experiences, memories, and we just create a narrative out of all that to get a sense of selfhood, of who we are. Yeah. Yeah. Big changes throughout life. Yeah, sure. Like that within my Tarot series, it just shows you all the different identities, the different objects that I use represent a certain identity, while it's the trainers themselves that make the movement through life moving through all these different identities.

Georgia 10:31

Yeah. Okay. And I guess one other question I had was the development of your artwork as well, because you started working in acrylics now you're working in oils, and you started working slightly smaller, but now you're working slightly bigger is your plan to keep working at this kind of similar scale?

Kevin 10:49

I just like to try new things. As you can see, I mainly paid traditional art forms, I'll paint landscapes, portraiture, very fond for still life. But I just like experimenting with new things. So just try new things complete. I've had discussions down here with other artists where they say, oh painting, there's nowhere to take it, everything's been done. And that's one thing I like traditional art forms, because like, where's the rules where we have to discover something completely new what nobody's been done? Don't everything happen in cycles anyway? History always repeats itself?

You know, like a lot of the traditional art forms I do with them all got a contemporary essence about them any way you can tell it to more of a modern day, but in a traditional artform.

Georgia 11:39

Yeah, yeah. And I guess that's your strength in that you keep responding to either yourself or external happenings and external situations such as this, for example.

Kevin 11:49

That's where I get a lot of influences.

Georgia 11:51

Yeah, exactly.

Kevin 11:52

But I'm never short of ideas, to be honest, I can't understand an artist that says, oh I don't know what to paint, because I always say well just paint that then. You

know, just pick a paintbrush and paint whatever. But I've always got thousands of ideas. So I'm always like, two, three, four paintings behind. You know what, I've got to go on by then up for new ideas what I want to do

Georgia 12:13

Yeah, yeah, you got to have like a parking space where you park everything

Kevin 12:16

I don't look for ideas to just come to me. Yeah. So I can just be driving and then something pops in me head, and yeah that would be a good painting.

Georgia 12:26

Yeah. Yeah. That's pretty brilliant. Fantastic. Oh, well it's been like a pleasure to speak with you Kevin and also to see your studio and Assembly House as well. So yeah, I guess we wish you well for your next painting. And yeah, we look forward to seeing this kind of presented online and seeing what people make of it as well within the PANIC! network.

Kevin 12:48

So it's been a pleasure working with you.

Georgia 12:51

Kevin, it has been amazing. Yeah. So yeah. Thanks.

Kevin 12:55

Okay. Thanks.

Georgia 12:56

Thanks.