

Interview: Zofia

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Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Charlie Hackett – CH

Zofia

Emotions have been added into the transcript as i.e. [*sadness*] and interviewers have been placed in bold and italicised. Any sections that need to be checked for accuracy such as phrases in other languages or names of places I couldn't confirm the spelling of have been highlighted in red.

Start of recording

CH: So we're recording everybody now.

LR: So yeah Zofia, maybe we can start from your image. From your artwork here so, can you talk us through it like you know, explain to us what you meant and yeah the meaning of this drawing?

Z: I will happily do this but can I quickly ask you what do you see in the picture before I will say it. Is that allowed?

CH: Well... Maybe we'll say afterwards?

LR: Yeah because we might influence you, maybe we should say after.

Z: Oh right ok.

CH: I mean I can see lots of things in this. It's a really fantastic piece of artwork. Yeah I like the way it's split but yeah you just tell us about it.

Z: So when Bart sent me the information about the study it was about my emotions during the Covid and as well during all that pandemics and the breaking up the EU as well so it's all what is what's happening during that crisis I would even say because it happened all over our area, like world area. Everybody was affected to it. I remember when it actually happened and first thought which I had, I was reading something, reading an article somebody research something and it was a sentence which struck me. It was like... ah I think it was a case study about something... You don't see the change within your environment, you can actually realise isolated you are and I think it was, that's why I kind of dragged my reflection being together and being isolated and my next thought was a little bit in comparison to people who are introverted and extroverted. How introverts a little bit more flourished during the epidemics because they were feeling good within their own company, many people who are already being kind of isolated kind of take back that control because there were many many good and positive things like for example Zoom meetings. For years disabled people were speaking that they want to have a meetings like within the company that they don't have to move to the company and company always say that its' not possible but once it hit the

majority it was possible very quickly. I was taking that comparison when it hit majority then it's visible. So I was playing with the collage but of course that was a very anxious time as well. It is all the time. For me it was anxious about as well, Brexit, about going out from the University, making on my own, many many things. So I was kind of looking at that, wanting to capture an image that contrast that kind of intrigue and attention that we are giving and I was playing with the collage as well like I said before about introverts and extroverts and how we take you and how people can be happy around other people and taking that joyfulness from the environment when all the people when they are called. That's why I did in a circle people and as well it was a little bit during the Brexit. I thought it was a nice comparison as well to the individual because I am reflective in my work on the value of individual and value of collaboration or value of people who are getting together and doing something. So I was playing with it, that was my kinda'...

LR: You know what...

Z: As well as that isolation I kind of wanted to capture it a little bit that more isolation and more that we focused on ourselves rather than something happening like entertainment or anything and we are focusing just on ourselves and how many people and how many people were anxious and how many people were joyful as well. It happens that we actually focused on only one person. So yep I think that was going through my mind when I was doing that artwork.

LR: So is that the lockdown, the person on his or her own on the right hand side, is that people during the lockdown?

Z: Yes and I was playing with the collage so the orange usually it's taken as a joyful, it's uplifting, green is something cools down, holds us down, relax ourselves. So I was playing that in a way of comparison. Of the people and how we could actually, how people you know how we could emphasis and find ourselves in a different environment. Totally different but kind of like working together as well, so yeah.

LR: How did you feel personally though, how did you feel during lockdown?

Z: I think my first thought it was shocked. I was shocked because of many factors, one that we felt that something is coming, second one how isolated I am because nothing much changed for me. So I think that was kind of like my... I was like I was stabilising myself, I was gaining confidence as well during the epidemic I have to say a little bit because personally it was a very hard time for me because some things happened in my personal life which I had to put it forward which I didn't do years ago and I had to deal with a very delicate and very dangerous situation. So I think I found a little bit you know when that shock, I found a little bit calmness in it. So but you can also see you know a lot of and I think that's it. Which you can see also in the colours you know, if you kind of like focus on some of it. For me as I see it, as an artist. I see that wherever you can go in the picture you can find that kinda' with that vibrance, a little bit dangerous, a little bit shocking, jumpy on you like a tiger would jump on you, kind of like this. Wherever you go, getting attention but you can also calm your eyes so it's kind of like for me.

LR: Ok, so basically if you could describe your mood during lockdown you would say shock.

Z: Mostly shocked that it actually happened and I was shocked by the information that I was getting by the research which I was kind of like I was reading quite a lot of articles and more scientific ones and the way how, for example they should start making vaccines seven years ago and that was two years ago when I was reading it but they never did and suddenly those all research which would cost little money then and we already would have all this test humans and everything and we would be

much much calmer. Everything could be resolved much much quicker but it was discarded and then it was costing government so much money towards costing other countries so much money and it was causing mental health problems with the society because people were afraid of taking something that was just done like that (*clicks fingers*). If those test would be done seven years ago when the science were saying making the research about the covid extraction because they already have the symptoms for it. That would not happen so I kind of like oh my gosh they already did know that. We felt that, it happened. I was shocked as well, pleased and shocked with the way that people started to work and I was quite positively shocked about how people get together. How you know starting to be visible things which elderly was not visible, care homes were not visible and you know all those people coming together even just transporting the food to one person and everything it just uplifting with the whole... Well I was a little bit shocked that people stand so much together and you know resistance, I was quite pleased and happy with it but also a little bit shocked like yeah! Positively so yeah.

CH: Were you on your own?

Z: Yes I am a single parent so during the first lockdown I moved with one of my friends who is a nurse and he's a single parent as well in Peterhead so he was working double shifts during that period and I moved to him to take care of the child care so we kind of move in together to help each other so he could do nothing work and I can take care of two babies and finish university with a little bit more space around as well because I was graduating then as well.

LR: Gosh, it must have been a tough time.

Z: It was a little bit travelling between Aberdeen and Peterhead a little bit. So yeah.

LR: How old is your kid?

Z: Nearly twelve, in April.

LR: Ok, so he's not a baby anymore.

Z: No not a baby anymore and then by the summer I think we were back in Aberdeen and we are just two of us.

CH: How did your, is it a boy or a girl?

Z: A boy.

CH: Ok how did he deal with Covid?

Z: Oh he's quite a homely person as well and he's got plenty of friends as well online, from Poland, I don't know I think he's got a friend from Italy or Slovakia or Czech Republic (*someone talking in the background*) and another one from California. So for this generation that was quite... Ok I think he felt a little bit anxious with you know information going around in the news and a little bit isolation that you know you don't meet your friends, you don't interact with them. So it raised a little bit anxiety but he was quite good as well. He was quite happy because he could spend more time on actually doing whatever he wants to do. He just deal with the school in the morning, just sit down, do whatever need to be done, ok so, instead of six hours in the school he was happy because he was spending just three. Then actually he can do things on his own so he was quite well enough.

CH: Do you have family in Poland then?

Z: Yes.

CH: *Ok, were you concerned for them?*

Z: Oh very much so. My parents are divorced. My mum is just by herself and she's got a little bit mental health issues as well and she's asthmatic so she was in the very high risk so my dad as well is in the very high risk. He's disabled as well and he was working, he still works in the city council so you know there is a lot of contact with the people so I was very worried but, well, my dad's got a second wife so they help each other so that was a little bit more ok they've got somebody and my mum has got good friends in Poland so we were like ok. Everything is ok, we were calling each other you know to support each other and that's what we could do by that time. Yes I was very worried about my parents. As well now! With Russia coming!

CH: *Yeah no it's very difficult.*

LR: *Absolutely yes.*

CH: *Yeah, it's shocking what's been happening. Can you tell us as well how did Brexit affect you? Did you remember the referendum, were you surprised by the result of the referendum?*

Z: [laughing] Shocked by the referendum. I thought it would be half and half. I was... I think it was, when I was working with the students at the national level as well I could see different views, I could see different interactions as well. We were in this environment so I was hoping we won't go out of the Brexit. I can understand it from the culture side, especially English side, how they want to stay independent and how they... Seeing that when it will be more, what they value will be less and they want to protect as well, they want to protect the culture like all the fishing you know, all the fishermen of course they wanted to get out from the Brexit because of the rules and legislations of Europe and I can understand it. It's very sad for me because there are many people who could flourish by immigration or even feel safe just by immigration because of other countries culture in Africa, in Eastern Europe, in Asia... People look for safety these days and it's not safe anywhere you know but if you can give that, a little bit sentiment you know, safety. For me it's much disadvantaged that we are keeping the borders one because of the economic you know, everything will become dearer. I cannot even, you know, to work with the people and from the perspective of artist which for example doesn't earn the money what they want us to be earning to come to the UK. It's impossible so for even for me to take, we wanted to do projects with my cousin. It's really hard because she doesn't have permission right now to work and to have permission unbelievable money to earn to actually have the permission for the work. So for us who want to collaborate who's got that hybrid identities and you know seeing... it's very disadvantaging and very sad it happened but I have to say I'm also the person who looks upon in here and many people did not understand that you know but like in many countries when people are given things there are also people who are using those stuff to get and as much as you know I... [laughing] You know, for example benefits that you get given, those are the stuff which yes, keep people safe or keep people noted but it is also a system that can be quite exploit by many. I can see how some of the countries, especially a country like great Britain wants to protect as well their own people from exploiting all of those stuff which keeps you safe so I can see two points but for me as a European, for me you know as a Polish person. My grandma was Estonian, second world war two to Poland and Germany and her brother flew to USA. We've emigrated from Germany, from Estonia, my father's brother is in Australia and he emigrated just before when the communists came and everything so he just ran away from Poland. So for us it's quite heart breaking because we cannot feel safe anywhere. When I was like ok I'm here for thirteen years and I had to do those documents, I had to do documents for myself and my son. Well I went to the panic, what if they say no and say oh we need to go back. I don't want to go back, I do not want to go back so I went into the panic and I went to the RGU support and said

please help me because I'm panicking, I'm sweating. *[laughing]* I'm overwhelmed you know and as much as I could calm someone else down I was panicking inside so yeah it was very anxious as well with all of that.

CH: Did you get EU settlement then?

Z: Yes we got it.

CH: You said something back there which was interesting. You said about English people protecting their culture.

Z: Their culture that, how am I going to say it. Yeah that's how they are you know. Ok continue because you wanted to finish sorry Charlie.

CH: Yeah but you didn't say, you said English but you didn't say the UK. Is there a difference between that?

Z: I think I define this by the result of the Brexit voting and the division between the Scottish and the English people how they voted so I think that's why I kinda' divide it in more English. Scottish... I don't know. I think Scottish people are more secure and more secure in their roots. They are not high (**words spoken between laughing – inaudible**) so protective and you know. I've met a few Scottish and English people who are rooted but some of them actually moved from England to Scotland so I know quite a few of them as well. I think Scottish people are more rooted and more secure in who they are and they are very open to the people. I think you know it wasn't even the Scottish people who stopped Vikings. I think it was on the English border where Vikings were stopped from the history so there's something which kind of like faff around in my mind in the division. Although I would not like to see it like that but probably there is some stereotype, racist, maybe looking in that English are less open to the people. I've seen in the Scottish culture they are more open to the people so maybe from my own experience that's how I see it.

CH: I'm interesting in something else as well. You mentioned about fishing.

Z: Yes.

CH: Why did you say that? I'm interested to know.

Z: Why did I say that? I remember it was a project as well one of the... I think it was already a ??? not student and she did a project as well on the south of the England and the fishers villagers about the Brexit. That was a few years before voting or a few years before we went, well this year. She did it and I remember I was discussing this with somebody and because of the laws how we are fishing on the sea and what areas you can take and where you can fish and if England is not in the European Union it's got more sea area to cover and just fish for themselves and it's one of the you know traditions and many people lost their jobs during Brexit and I think that's why I've kind of mentioned it as well. It's a traditions, it's a people who are fishermen's for years and years and years and generations and many of them bankrupted because of the Brexit and I think that as well was a strong vote in there in that more traditional cultures to go back to the laws which were before the Brexit and especially how the politics as well said oh we want to be just us and we will be powerful again just us. So I think you know to all that generations. The same in Poland you know, the half of the Polish populations it's the elderly, it's people are outside the city who's got only television which you know it's quite manipulated by the Governmental parties and they keep themselves. That's what they want they want that bit for themselves. They are generations who you know, they keep to the things, they won't give up because they didn't have it that this generation which was really

traumatic after the war and sons and everything. So they are very territorial if I would say and they are very tradition wise as well because they keep that culture in, they keep that family in and it broken up somehow because people right now feeling right now that family is not just the family, the family is also the friends right now and sometimes the friends are more than family. So that generations is very changing and when I see the generation that is like my son and the generation that is like my great grandparents, we see those differences. I have a friend who is seventy eight now and we sometimes speak about differences in the generation. So for the purpose my son might understand she might say something and whey that is rude and she'll reply why it's not rude! We speak to each other like that. I say ok its not rude for you but it is rude for my generation and it will be definitely very rude for the generation of (Jim?). So It most changes and the older you get the less you play golf you know. That's wrong, the older you get the less you change. The more you're firm in your beliefs.

LR: I was curious to ask you, how did you feel as a European though after the Brexit won basically. I don't know did your feelings about the UK change at all? Or your relationship with the UK?

Z: I have to say no. It didn't change in me personally but I'm a traveller. I'm the person that wherever she goes, finds something that is hers you know or find some similarities and I travel, I meet people and wherever I go you know I am safe with myself. This I can say. I am trying to be safe with myself. That's maybe how I want to view it lets say. It's not that maybe like, I'm anxious about the environment but I somehow trust within myself that it will work out that it will be good. Like I found myself once again lost in Tunisa in a place where I didn't know where I am and I... ok... I had a scarf so I put the scarf on so I'm kind of blending into the environment, I will find my way back to the home. So kind of like in this way so my relationship, no I'm always trying to see the two sides of the coin and I'm disappointed, yes, I'm sad, yes, but my relationship... Well... I'm happy that Nicola Sturgeon fighting so I think that's what it is and maybe that's I'm more on that side of the Scottish and feeling more integrated in here rather than if I would be living right now in England.

CH: Why is it safer in Scotland than in England?

Z: Because of how they voted. Although you know I can only comparison because probably if I would you know live in England I would have my friends and my environment around me as well yes. I've got friends in England. I've been to the England as well. I really like London and going in there from time to time, just lurking you know behind the trees and seeing how other people migrate and behaviour and stuff. I like wandering around the London tube although on most of the days I'm kind of like separate and I like being having just solitude of just my and no people. Erm, so... I believe that probably I would be ok, I would be ok but there is certain you know... Let me find a (watch?). Maybe because I just feel a little bit more isolated in England. Maybe it's just because you know I don't live in there and you can have that fear everywhere and you would think that you know if it's one Island, people will be very similar but in my experience, yes maybe a countryside and those neighbourhoods like how those people are you know, speaking to each other, interacting with each other yes but there is a certain difference which I've experienced which is maybe why I'm kinda' like more in here... Maybe another thing is my uncle was doing a family tree and I actually had roots in Scotland so maybe there is something there is even deeper than I realised. Rather than I don't know, rather than my racism or I don't know trying to divide those...

CH: Can I ask you another question like, your picture is like a flag. That's been divided into, well a line down the centre, well it's not quite the centre. There's more orange than there is green I think, maybe the colour thing I don't know but why is that? Why have you done that?

Z: There is a bigger one on this side, I think it was a little bit influenced by the circle but it also like I've mentioned before, with the majority. Majority is people you know and when it attaches more then it's more visible. So I think it was a little bit in here with that division. The circle yeah, when I was doing it I was trying to reach that joyfulness. You know like that extrovertism which is, I am ambivalent, I'm neither extrovert or introvert so I'm both of them. So maybe that's why I just used two colours in here which can be just taking it but I was, in here when I was doing the circle, putting that into the extrovertism I was looking at the inspiration as well. Then you've got the EU which is the flag.

LR: So that reminds me of that the EU flag.

Z: I said no it has to be that, so I was doing a little bit of research you know and what colours to use and how to kind of place it and I thought ok that will be the point. Let's use the circle holding people together, that will be you know to the European as well to the Brexit as well so.

CH: Is the Circle on the right about Europe and the left is about the UK?

Z: No, I haven't had that relationship Europe and here. I was mingling, I was going around those thoughts, you know, having a comparison between like... because just before the Epidemics as well you know I think I've mentioned to one of my friends. You know people like if they be stuck in one place for some time, not even feel badly about saying that. Maybe they will know how it is to being isolated and then epidemic came. So it's kind of like and they did see, so with that Europe it was just that circle which I preferred it. So the circle will be for the Europe, for the joy for the coming together and that's why I've placed it in there.

CH: So do you see the UK being Isolated then?

Z: Well... Probably a little bit yes. You have to agree. We are not in the European anymore yes? Right now I cannot even take... well I don't know I haven't read it exactly but as I said I cannot take someone from Poland even if it would be like a family member. I want you to provide so many documents, that person would need so and so money. Even to collaborate so right now this society, Polish society which could gain something from that type of collaboration between the artists is isolated as well because I cannot do it. I can only do it in here. Then many fundings will be isolated as well so you know I think that isolation is significant as well in that picture.

LR: Yes I mean I understand what you're saying but I'm interested also with knowing how you felt about it. About Brexit as well as covid. You told us about Covid that you felt anxious and shocked somehow. Did Brexit affect you emotionally?

Z: Brexit? I was angry, sad and disappointed.

LR: Ok but you didn't say anything changing in your every day life to a certain extent, apart from being unable to collaborated with people from Europe which is obviously something that has got quite an impact on your work I suppose.

Z: Yeah there is quite a lot of impact on the work, on fundings and international fundings as well now. It was even less than before and now it's really really bad. It's the money that comes from the European union for the creative projects as well and we will be a little bit affected by it. So yeah, for this. You know while we were in the Brexit so I did not see you know, I wasn't working then so I don't know if I have a complete comparison how it was for artists before Brexit and how it is after Brexit so I kind of say from my own experience except for me researching those things and saying

how those things within the years were minimalizing, minimalizing. So it's the only thing I can say from my experience.

CH: Can we ask you, do you feel European or do you feel British, or Scottish?

Z: *[laughing]* I am a hybrid identity. That's how I feel.

CH: do you feel you could settle anywhere then? You described yourself that you could go somewhere else and feel safe.

Z: Yes.

CH: So you could go to Ireland or go to Japan or somewhere else and just feel.

Z: Free yes.

LR: So do you have a sense of where home is? Where is home for you?

Z: Home? With my son.

LR: Ok, wherever it is, as long as it's with your son. It doesn't matter geographically, it doesn't matter the place on earth where you are.

Z: So it's wherever I can go with my son it will be my home. Although it will probably change that after he will become independent, an adult, that will probably. I already said soon you will be eighteen and go to the university and you know what, you'll stay in this home and take care of it and I'll be flying and coming back so we will change positions. So yeah I love Scotland, I love living in Scotland, I love people in Scotland. I treat it as my second home so if you ask about this, I treat Scotland as my second home so yeah my roots are in here and even within the Aberdeen a little bit more because I don't want to move any further north right now. I treat Scotland like a home right now. Knowing myself, can adapt and I love travelling. My life changes so much but I love travelling.

CH: Can I ask you why did you decide to come to the UK rather than go to another European country in mainland Europe?

Z: Because I have friends in here who are saying to us, I was married... well I was... with my partner, we did get married later on and then divorced as well but we had a very tricky situation and we had friends in here and they were like we were even for a holidays. A year or two years before we actually moved into here. So we were on the holidays so we visited Glasgow and Edinburgh and all those waterfalls just besides the border with England and Skye so we've been in here and then there was very close friends who was being come to us come to us. I said noo we've got a good job in Poland, we're ok. Then we had to run off from Poland, well we thought we had to run off because my ex-husband we thought was called to army because he wasn't studying anymore. We were basically just running away because my ex-husband was no army material so we basically was running away and we called our friends and we said we'll book our tickets in two weeks, that's what we did and we land up in Scotland in Aberdeen within two weeks. So that was the story.

CH: Can I ask you another thing, sorry just quickly. I was interested in the way you describe the different generations in Poland and how you saw the older generation in being a wee bit more conservative and because Poland was up to the 1980's a communist country, how did you think that affected people's viewpoints on Europe?

Z: Who's viewpoints on Europe?

CH: Did you think it kind of affected the way people saw Europe or anything like that? Like the older generation? Before the EU basically, before Europe.

Z: I need to get this right, me seeing Europe? Who is seeing Europe how?

CH: The older generation.

Z: The older generation yes.

CH: You spoke about your grandparents.

Z: Oh older generation.

CH: The older generation in Poland because they lived through the kind of communist era basically. You said that they found it difficult to take on new ideas and things like that or the way people are these days. Do you think communism has affected that in some way or?

Z: The whole Brexit thing?

CH: Yeah.

Z: I have to admit you know with older generation in Poland I don't know how they reacted after dividing with the Brexit from the Polish side because mostly what I had contact with during that time and knowing other peoples stories and interactions, that will mostly be young people you know who are flourishing because of the immigration. The other thing is what I do now, the prices are raising. So wherever the prices are raising, it's not good. So if the people are saying that and those people who even you know travel a little bit or even in the shops you know, they did see the affectation of the prices as well and then they see as well in flying tickets and everything. So all those kind of things probably they are disappointed but how they know. I have to admit that I haven't spoke with anyone who is more like a grandparent, because my grandparents are right now dead so. Although they probably would have ah, they probably would have had some views on it but my grandparents are dead now and I do not had anybody to actually...

LR: That's fine.

Z: The only person which I was speaking to, it would be my step mum and she has some people but they are like after sixty.

CH: Ok.

Z: So you don't see it where I don't see. I think those more conservatives, although there are quite a few of those as well, after sixty but I think those who are really really hard to change are like at their 80's probably, they are more stubborn.

CH: Ok.

Z: No they even don't like it you know there was quite a... I think there was some kind of a... In Poland there is, we like to be belong to something so when we started belonging to (NATA?) or European Union, actually we felt to belong and so I'm quite sure that you know even of those people who are quite elderly, like after their 60s they were very like sad and disappointed. I can also imagine like you know when I was speaking to my step mum there is quite a lot of us as a families right now abroad and right now people are more aware how much those type of agreements are affected countries all together.

LR: Yeah of course. Oh well, I think for me that's enough.

CH: I mean I love your orange man in the green background.

LR: Haha yeah. It does look like a flag.

CH: He looks like he's kind of lost in this space kind of, like an avalanche of green, like he's covered and can't get out.

LR: You seem to be very very sensitive or very focused on colours as well which is interesting. I don't know if it's a general thing or if it's only an Italian kind of culture but we were always told that green was the colour of hope so I was wondering whether you too green has a connotation of hope because there's quite a lot of green here.

Z: It's hope and the relaxation I was taking that you know uplifting. So there is that connotation of hope and relaxation.

LR: Yeah relaxation and hope that's right because green is the colour of nature and so that relaxes you but also in our culture I think, I don't know whether it's the same in the UK but the idea that green is the colour of hope and I thought that the fact that your green men or people on the left hand side. The fact that they are green is also very interesting whereas the isolated individual on the right is orange. It might have a lot of fire about it but there's not much hope. I don't know.

Z: That was you know, this one actually was you know to this side where people actually become anxious because they are by themselves in a home. They cannot meet people, you know they are feeling anxious so that was as well you know the thoughts around it.

LR: There is a certain combustion in being anxious yeah I agree with that.

CH: I like your pillow with home on it.

LR: Yes. So we know where your home is now.

CH: Yeah, a pillow. Not pillow, cushion.

LR: Well thanks very much Zofia.

CH: We'll send you an amazon voucher, can you send us your address?

LR: Do we have your home address?

AM: Home address? I'll send you a website to that meeting and will send that.

LR: Please thanks we'll send the voucher.

CH: Thank you so much, nice to see you again.

Z: Thank you Charlie and Lucia, thank you!

LR/CH: Bye.

End of recording

End of transcript