

Interview: Erika

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Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Charlie Hackett – CH

Erika

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.

CH: Ok we're recording now.

E: No that's fine. So anyway I was just there for six months and that security my children's dual nationality and then I was there after Brexit happened I was there for about ten months working for the Danish government but came back. So yeah, I've just had very brief spells in Denmark in all those years so I'm a bit of a funny hybrid by now I think.

CH: Ok.

LR: Yeah of course. Ok. Well thanks, shall we start. Can I share the screen with the artwork.

CH: Yeah, two secs Lucia.

LR: I can do it if you want?

CH: Yeah you do it.

LR: There you go. Maybe I'll try and make it a bit bigger. It's an amazing artwork.

CH: Yeah it's fantastic.

E: It's 3D, I've actually got it here next to me.

LR: I can see that yeah.

CH: It's great, we love it.

LR: It's amazing. Did you use the art pack for that?

E: That metallic stuff is from the art pack yeah and the card but the hat is really basically just a Christmas decoration.

LR: Yes.

E: That got tortured and yeah.

LR: That's very good. So many we'll start from there, can you just take us through the artwork and what it represents for you.

E: Yeah it was, I found it quite sort of challenging initially, thinking how do I really sum up the enormity of how I felt. I was trying to remember how I felt just on the morning after the referendum and that was kind of very sharp in my memory. I was trying to think about how I feel after and what was the attitude I would meet from others around me and most people could not comprehend why I felt the way I did. Ah you know, it's not going to affect you, you've been here for such a long time and all that kind of stuff, but it kind of sparked just this massive feelings inside which I think that metallic stuff that actually represents. I felt very split as well, I had an almost splitting in two halves and thought well what am I really. Do I belong here, do I belong somewhere else? Often I felt it was just, I couldn't keep it in but people just didn't understand really when I was talking about it. I felt really hurt. Really! I thought how could you do this, you know what I mean?

LR: Yes, it's really expressive your artwork. It's amazing. I was really struck by it when I saw it first because yeah, is it you trying to say things and they're not...

E: Yeah and feeling I couldn't really contain it within but it couldn't go anywhere else either because it's really only other European citizens who understood how I felt. Of course it came in the aftermath as well of the Scottish referendum which I was really active in campaigning for independence and yet there was all these groups popping up here and there about you know Scottish heritage and the Scottishness and Scottish ancient history. I thought I'm not really part of that, how can I ... *[laughing]* I think I'm finding it difficult to express it because it was very difficult to express at the time. There's all these people that really, I mean they're true Scots and you know ha hah and I wasn't. Then came Brexit and all of a sudden it became sort of dangerous to identify too much as a foreigner. For the first time ever after the referendum I started to think of myself as an immigrant, as a foreigner. You know as somebody not quite belonging and that of course was very compounding following in the media, referring to us as citizens from nowhere and you know que jumpers and all that kind of crap that was just going around. Today the way I feel about it today is a kind of almost slightly disconnected. It feels like... I don't belong here completely and I certainly don't belong in Denmark either so where do I belong. So I suppose I've taken refuge in I've always been really really interested in history but I've taken refuge in delving deep into Danish history. Going back hundreds of years in particular, the Viking age and all that kind of stuff and that's my refuge. That's where I go when I need to, in a sense find out where do I belong.

LR: So can I ask, I mean that stuff that is coming out of you in the picture is all tangled. So is it because your feelings were tangled or because you couldn't actually untangle them in a way that people could understand. What is it, what were those feelings. I think you said something before which I didn't quite catch that something coming out of you that other people could not understand.

E: Yeah they couldn't understand the depth of feeling I guess I had and my difficulty with expressing it. But nothing's going to happen to you they said and I started feeling... It's really difficult it's really taken me quite a few years to completely from a distance understand. I mean I can remember the night before, the evening of the referendum and I was going out to meet some friends in the pub and there was a bookies right next door. I went into the bookies and I said I want to place a bet for Scotland becoming independent in 2018 I think I said at the time. Because I thought surely Brexit, surely the Scots are going to say that's just enough now and then they didn't but the bookie wouldn't take the bet. He even phoned head office and said nah we're not going to take this bet and I'm like why not? Just because. I then said well how about I then place a bet instead on Brexit leavers

actually winning the referendum. One of my friends said don't waste your money on that, it's a given that we're going to stay and I could have won a pile of money if I actually had placed that bet but I thought nah yeah he's right. Of course we're going to stay. Then I didn't even bother sitting up and watching the results because I was so convinced that, although there was that deeper uncertainty you know, thinking hmm. Then I woke up about five o'clock and I looked at my phone just to double check and when I saw what had happened... It was like pfft, like a punch in the... I thought, no! What?! I was completely all over the place and thought... honestly could not believe it and I think that picture there is just this huge mesh of disbelief and anger and hurt and upset and people not understanding what I was saying because nothing is going to change. I think looking back things have change quite a lot and all of a sudden having to apply... I mean I have lived here forever. I got indefinite leave to remain I think in 1985 when I got married and all of a sudden I have to go through it all again. I never never thought I would have to think about this again and all of a sudden... you know I've become registered kind of... not even a real citizens you know, you're just... yeah. It had a very profound effect on me and I think the picture really... I think I'm really trying to say I really don't understand a lot of it still.

LR: Yeah, no I mean what you described about that night or the day before the results, really mirrors my experience. I went to bed thinking gosh I don't need to stay up to see the results because we'll win you know, we'll stay then I couldn't believe it. I think I woke up at six o'clock, a bit later than you and when I saw that I just, just couldn't believe it and I hadn't been here so long but for me also it was a complete... it was such a harsh blow you know.

E: It was and the fact that we weren't even allowed to have an opinion or say you know. We were all excluded. I never had the... I mean I can vote in Scotland for some elections but...

LR: Exactly yes.

E: You think what... Yeah. I still sometimes loose words to really even properly describe it you know and then of course a few years ago the home office came up with this idea that we should all now apply for settled status... I'm afraid I hit a few front pages of papers because of my reaction on Twitter where I basically called the home office a bunch of shits. How they could do this. Unfortunately at that time I still had my Twitter account in my own name you know so EU citizen Erika Kruhoffer said on Twitter you know and it was urgh. So I actually went and deleted my Twitter account and set another one up where it was... I work in the legal sector so you have to be a bit careful you know, but a year and a half ago I came off Twitter completely because I couldn't take it anymore. I could not take it anymore, all that stuff.

CH: How do you feel about applying for the re-settlement scheme?

E: Well initially my reaction was nah they could F off, I'm not going to do that yeah. Catch me and deport me, do what you want but then I found out about the Windrush scheme where you basically can send a paper application in and it was completely free. It wasn't just for people from the West Indies but for anybody who had been here over a certain length of time and because I'd been here so long I qualified under the Windrush scheme so I got that first. That meant that I got a very nice little biometric card, with my photo and everything on it so I've even got proof of that and then last year I thought ach, I may as well just do the settled scheme as well. So I've actually got two and I've not yet been asked to show my settled scheme proof. I've been across in Denmark a couple of times during the pandemic, I even got stranded over there for a few months which was quite an interesting experience but I've never been asked yet in passport control to prove my status and I'm a

bit disappointed about it because I'd quite like to have an argument about it. *[laughing]* No such luck yet.

LR: Same here! I've been back to Italy a few times and nobody ever asked me when I came back about my status, I just went through the machine with my passport, not even a human interaction so.

E: It's a bit... I don't know... *[sigh]* urm... It means that I felt that, although I was really angry about having to apply to these things it's lifted a great burden because it's given me a... I know I could go to Denmark and stay there for a year or two and come back without any kind of problem so in many ways it has kind of removed that concern there. The anger has kind of subsided quite a lot which is quite good.

LR: Did that change the way you feel about Britain thought? Did the referendum change what you think and feel about the UK?

E: Yeah, I've distanced myself quite a lot. I was a member of the SNP for many years and I cancelled my membership, I kind of got out of the whole independent movement. I don't really engage in politics anymore at all. I don't often bother... I read the headlines, the news I read the Danish news as well every day but more for my sort of, yeah I suppose you need to know exactly sort of what's going on but I don't engage in the deeper political processes. I do vote when I'm entitled to vote in something, then I go and have a vote but it's really more to kind of acknowledge how hard women had to fight to even get a vote. So I don't want to waste it. Yeah I've distanced myself quite a lot. I feel like I'm kind of much more suspended in mid air now and not really engaging in things. It's a shame because my five sons are very engaged in the political process, they're very critical of a lot of things that are going on and they'd like to sort of involve me and half the time I just... you know I don't really want have an opinion, I don't want to get into deeper discussions about it. I kind of lost that and I think that's really regrettable because I've always been really engaged with society around me but I think to an extent I despise UK on some level. I just think... *[deep sigh]* Yeah there's an element of me thinking God this is a nation of an awful lot of very very ignorant people.

LR: Yeah.

CH: I'm interested Erika, you spoke about you suddenly felt like an immigrant so could you take that a wee bit further and explain what you meant by that?

E: Well I suppose I began to become more aware. There were a couple of incidents where people told me directly to bugger off home, when are you leaving... Some of my clients, I work in the legal sector so I see client face to face and there were a few that kind of, almost like without even being aware, they know I'm Danish that's never been a secret but they would all of a sudden tell me oh yeah I voted to leave EU because I can never get an appointment at the doctor and that kind of stuff and it's because of all these foreigners and stuff like that. So it was kind of reinforced in a very sort of hidden way I suppose that you know foreigners and I would sort of gently say to them you know well I'm foreign. No no you're one of us, we don't mean you and I would say to myself but you mean people like me... So you know there was this kind of underlining the fact that even though they didn't mean me because they quite liked me, other people that they didn't know, they could bugger off you know. So I suppose I became aware because what's the criteria for being an immigrant, well I was born in a different country to a family of Danes, I left my native country and came to this country to... well because I met a Scot over in Denmark and he said come stay with me for a while and we'll see how we get on and we got on so well that we decided to get married and have children and all that kind of stuff. I just stayed and I loved it here. In Denmark you know you have to ask

permission to do anything and I would sort of say when we got a house and I wanted to put in a greenhouse and I said well who do we ask for permission and he just laughed at me and he said permission? You just put it up! I couldn't understand it initially I was like wow this is amazing! You don't have to ask permission. In Denmark we have a national database where we're all entered at birth and have our national pin number and you didn't have that here and I thought this is a very wide degree of freedom and to me it was amazing you know. Then after Brexit you begin to think well that's all very well but it doesn't, no matter how much I want to be Scottish, no matter how much people say to me, oh you're more Scottish than the rest of us and all that kind of stuff, it still didn't make me you know, a Scot. No matter how you twist it, bend it, at the end of the day I am a Danish person and I always will be. I was born Danish even with some modifications you know.

LR: I love the way you put it. Yeah! It's so much resonates with me.

E: I suppose sometimes people... If I say a word and my Danish accent pops through people used to sort of, not tease me but mention it you know and I think I've become more hard nosed in not loosing my Danish accent. I think sometimes I try to let it come through because I know my accent is a bit of a mish-mash of all sorts of stuff you know *[laughing]* but it's almost like there's that stronger will to retain much more of my Danish identity and be proud of it and try and expose my friends. I was doing a post grad diploma last year and I made some really good friends at university and just before Christmas last year I treated them to a big Danish Christmas lunch. My son is a professional chef so the two of us cooked for two days and they came along and they had all this Danish food and they were absolutely gobsmacked you know. It's this, they thought Danish food would just be boiled potatoes and um *[laughing]* for me it's become much more important to try and retain those cultural elements of my Danish identity and also to pass them on to my children. Encouraging them to embrace the Danish part of them. They are very Scottish in many ways but it's nice to say they're very good at swearing in Danish which is not a good testament of my abilities as a mother but hey ho. So yeah but underlining is always that feeling but I'm not like people around me. I'm a foreigner really, essentially, an immigrant.

LR: When you go back to Denmark how do you feel there? Do you feel at home?

E: No. This is something I've been thinking about in the last year or two. When the pandemic started I had gone over to visit my mum, she's quite elderly and then of course the whole lockdown came about a week after I had arrived and so I was stuck in Denmark for three months with my mother who's a bit of a battle-ax at times but it was really really interesting to discover how much I've actually gone a different direction from my other siblings who all live in Denmark. My sister lives in Germany but my four brothers live in Denmark so we kind of think it's quite funny that it's only the girls that managed to get away. I could tell how big a difference, my Danishness is quite dated now, because I've not lived in Denmark properly since the early 80s so a lot of the ways I think and define myself and think of the Danish society is stuck back then and I don't like the way that Danish society is moving at the moment. There's an increasing widening of the gulf between wealthy and poor. They've gone down this route of punishing people for being out of work or being somehow deficient. They maybe can't work due to illness and that kind of stuff, the way that foreigners in Denmark are treated and when I say foreigners I don't mean white foreigners I mean people of colour and especially Muslims, how they are treated. I think it's disgusting. I'll never forget those photos from Denmark of lots of refugees walking down the motorway on Denmark and people standing on the flyover spitting on them. It...

LR: I didn't know about that... That's horrible.

E: Yeah that was, I felt just disgusted and I thought I don't want to be even part of that kind of thing you know. So I don't feel part of Denmark as it is in modern times. My Danishness is really increasingly about nostalgia and memories and people I knew from back then and especially some older family members that stayed with us as a child. My godmother died a couple of years ago and I felt like there was a tear there. There was a further rip in my kind of, how connected I feel to Denmark and I feel once my mother passes away which is probably not that far off, probably the next few years, that'll be another tear in my connection to Denmark and I'll be going over there even less than I do now. So no, the home sickness is weird because I know it's not Denmark as such that I miss, it's something completely on a different level. It's the things I knew, the things I was attached to as a child I think. I couldn't think oh I could just go back to Denmark. What would I do? I did it and I hated it, I felt so lost and I was working down in the very south west in Denmark and people keep to themselves. I was there on my own and even though I worked in a big state department I never saw anybody at work so day in day out I would just kick about completely alone. I think once one of my colleagues invited me along to the cinema with her and her mother, and that was the only time I actually socialised with any of my colleagues in the ten months I was there. It cost me my relationship as well because I had been in a relationship with someone for about eleven years at that time and he was very keen on this move to Denmark and start afresh and yeah let's this and let's that and within three or four weeks of going over there he decided it was really for him so I saw him a few times over the next few months and then it just all fell apart.

LR: Was the guy Danish?

E: No he was Scottish.

LR: Okay but he wanted to...

E: Yeah I got divorced from my Scottish husband back in, oh it was many years ago, we got divorced in 2003 I think but we've remained really really close friends and he's a really important part of my life. Father of all my children but my partner who I got together with, I think it was 2006, he thought he couldn't tolerate I was so close to my ex husband and he didn't really like my children so we had a really fraught relationship and the move to Denmark was sort of the last ditch attempt at maybe bringing us closer and maybe redressing the power imbalance in the relationship but he clearly didn't like it and so I finally terminated the whole thing when I came back to Scotland in 2018 and I've not really seen him since. So it comes with a high price really, straddling two countries in this way. You never really quite find peace if you know what I mean. You'll probably know from yourself there's always that little bit of you that's thinking what would my life had been if I hadn't come here if I had gone somewhere else or stayed in your own country and all that kind of stuff.

CH: To ask you another question if that's ok. I'm interested to know how you see the EU? Like, as an entity that you can cross borders you know and you can go and live in any country and in terms of nationality. Well perhaps nationality is still important but perhaps being able to cross different countries, how do you feel? Do you feel European in any way or any respect?

E: Oh definitely. One of the great things I think about EU has been that opportunity to criss-cross borders and you know there's not been all this sort of formality. For example I went on holidays to USA some years ago and you had to get a visitor visa and all sorts of stuff and have a chat with them in immigration why you even here and that kind of stuff where in Europe, I mean my sister lives in Berlin and she goes, she just bought a summer house in Denmark and she can come and go as she absolutely pleases and I can as well and this is what really strikes me about British people is that they don't understand that it's not really us as EU citizens that they have restricted in that way. If we are

residents here, it's themselves because we can still go to EU and criss-cross around or go and live where the hell we want and my children can do because they've got dual nationalities so for us there's not those borders in the same way as there now is for British people. It's themselves that they've hurt and I feel very much part of Europe and EU and Germany is my kind of go to place because my sister lives in Berlin so I know Berlin so well and Germany and I still feel very much part of the EU. I don't feel I'm out of the EU, I feel everybody that's a British citizen are out but I'm not. I'm still a member, I'm still a part of it.

CH: Does that make you feel better?

E: Yep. Definitely. Well we are sticking together and it's actually the Brits that are now being excluded and while I feel a bit sorry for many because a lot of people didn't vote for this, there's also that kind of well you made this mess, you fix it and we're not going to come and fix it because we weren't even asked in the first place you know. If the chips really go down and I decide this is just too rubbish now, then I can leave without any kind of problem and go and settle somewhere else and so can my children. My sons are the most important thing to me, they can all do this if they chose. My oldest son actually lived in Denmark for some years and studied over there and he's completely bilingual which is really interesting because my other four children, their Danish language skills are much more limited because life just got too busy. I had three children under the age of four so life was too busy to try and [laughing] put it on now, it's in English ok fine. So yes, but they have all expressed an interest in improving their Danish language skills and over when we were in lockdown, I've got two of my sons staying with me because they're at university, we would have Danish class every Thursday and just sit down and try to get some Danish language on board and so we still very much part of the EU but it also impacts on things like relationships. I've now been single since 2018. Then I start thinking, well maybe I should start thinking about meeting someone and then I think that will just complicate everything so I get together with a Brit and then I want to go somewhere else and live I can't take him with me and oh god!

LR: I know! You're right, I've been trying to persuade my husband to get an Italian citizenship and he never puts his mind to it because I'm always thinking what if I want to go back to Italy or somewhere in Europe in a wee while. You can't come with me because you're a Brit and your stuck here.

E: Exactly. So I went and got myself two kittens instead and thought that's easier. [laughing]

CH: I'm also interested Erika why Scottish independence was important to you because at that point in the Scottish independence referendum Scotland was still in the UK obviously but we were part of the EU at that time so why was that important to you?

E: When I first came to Scotland in 1984 it really struck me very quickly, the imbalance between Scotland and England effectively and how Scotland I felt was getting a little bit of a raw deal and I thought well, if Scotland is actually a country full of resources, I come from a very small country myself. Same population roughly but Scotland is in a geographically nearly two and a half, three times bigger than Denmark. With a lot of a resources obviously that Denmark never had. Denmark's had to and has become quite a wealthy country, very little national debt and all that kind of stuff and they've had to kind of use things like technology and design and then obviously (bacon?) which is a big (???) as well. I just couldn't understand weren't more ambitious. I thought you've got everything going for you, all you need to do is just to say we want to have a go of it ourselves and before I came to Scotland I didn't even realise that Scotland was so separate in it's identity as it was. I can remember when I first met my husband to be, it was actually out on the razzle and I walked up

to him and a group of his friends and at this point they weren't wearing kilts. I could just hear them speaking English and I was quite gregarious, outgoing, extroverted so I wandered up to them and said Ah so you're English and you should see the looks they gave me. English?! English!? I had no idea how strongly they felt, all I knew about Scotland is, is that not the place where the Queen would go on holidays and pick heather and drink whiskey or something like that? I had a vague idea about kilts as well, bagpipes you know, the usual. The enlightenment that took place in me over the first few years I was in Scotland was really really profound and I think the Scots are tremendous people. I really do. I was also aware this, I wouldn't say anti-English sentiment because it wasn't really that but it was just a kind of Scots being really really fed up with this English arrogance you know like Ach we're better than everybody else. Especially because of the sports. I began to realise that for Scots whenever they were watching a game of some kind where England was taking place they would always support the other team which, why is this and as I began to unravel this whole thing and even quite oddly people would sort of go urgh England and it was because of the gloating and the we gonna' win this and when they didn't you know it's not our fault it's because someone else was cheating and stuff. You think, oh come on!

LR: You did not have the utmost satisfaction last year when Italy beat England at Wembley at the European football cup?

E: Absolutely. My sofa is battered from jumping up and down on it. Absolutely but you're torn because you don't want England to go out of a tournament too soon. You want them to get really far so they start kind of hoping, maybe we can do it and then they get payback.

LR: I have never felt prouder to be Italian than when we beat the English that was great.

E: Yeah absolutely, it's also when you go out and being in Europe on holidays and that kind of stuff I always tend to avoid English people because they're honestly insufferable sometimes. I also avoid Danes when I'm away on holiday as well so I suppose it's not just the English but I just became convinced that Scotland could do it better on their own because Scots are really quite different from the English politically and also in many social kinds of contexts and stuff like that. Yeah I think it was 1986 when I wandered into SNP's really rather run down headquarters and said I'd like to become a member and so I was probably the first foreign member they had back in 1986. I remained a member and actively campaigned and went on marches and handing out leaflets and that kind of stuff. I really felt that Scotland could do better on it's own but as part of EU. I never wanted out of EU. I was one of these foreigners that supported independence and supported EU. I know quite a few foreign citizens supported independence but also wanted out of the EU. I've just kind of lost faith in the whole independence movement because they keep saying yeah yeah next year we'll have a referendum and then the whole pandemic and then this and then that and I think the SNP Scottish government have become a bit too keen on staying in power rather than focusing on how they came about which was let's get independence and then our political map will reset itself.

CH: I'm interested in your picture as well, going back to your artwork which is amazing. Is that you doubled up? Is that two of you or?

LR: It's split.

E: I mean the actual artwork if I can hold it up as you can see is actually 3D.

CH: OK, whow! So your split in half ok.

E: Yeah it's that kind of split and trying to remain one person but I'm not. I'm split many ways. Sometimes I think maybe it would be quite good to go back to Denmark to do something completely

different and then there's my children and I'm very very close to my kids and one of my children has some issues with mental health problems and I support him quite a lot as well and I'm thinking [sigh]. When I'm over there I want to be here and when I'm here I often think I'd like to be over there so there is that split. There's also that sometimes the doubt you know, well... Where's it going to go and are we going to become even poorer in this country, our opportunities for being a successful country are they going to be so damaged that we just going to be sent back to the stoneage again. Where's the focus, I don't know. Again this lack of ambition in Scotland that splits me and yeah... There's still the big ball of stuff in the picture there where I still can't quite work out...

LR: Right yeah. What really strikes me is the entanglement of this feelings, thoughts, doubts, nostalgia. It's interesting in the picture and I wanted to ask you about. I feel like I can understand your heart is pierced by the pin, is it stabbed by the pin?

E: Yeah it's kind of the, the hearts sort of being held together by a string and a safety pin and so...

LR: Yes ok held together.

E: So despite the infliction of some pretty big knocks yeah it's still there, still held together and still beating. I'm probably in many ways happier now than I've ever been in the past. The first few years after I came to Scotland I struggled a little bit with depression because I was very isolated. This was before the internet and email and all that kind of stuff and I had very young children stuck at home quite a lot and my ex husband he was a lawyer and working all hours and he wasn't very good at giving up his own personal interests. He would be away at rugby at a Saturday and out playing golf on a Sunday and so I spend an awful lot of time completely on my own and got quite depressed for a while. Over the years I've kind of managed to process a lot of it and deal with it and I've never been worried about going and finding the support. I did two and a half years of psychoanalysis, really after my relationship broke down and I came back to Scotland and that's really helped me a lot to put things into a kind of context and learn how to properly process rather than just pushing it down into myself. So I'm a lot better now, actually leveller now and also of course it was compounded by going through the menopause which was quite a strange place because I found that I didn't really perceive things in the same way that I had before and then last year, not even a year ago they then found I had very early stage ovarian cell changes so I had to undergo a full hysterectomy with the whole lot. You kind of feel wow, there's a part of me now gone really you know. So there's been all these different things and I think they are actually all in the picture somewhere. All those things you go through but also ...

LR: What is the string? Is the string holding the heart as well? The piece of string all around the heart?

E: Yeah and I think that's actually, probably, a lot of the string is really my efforts you know just to repair and heal and all that kind of stuff but using everything I've got to hold it all together. That's represented by the string. Those are my conscious efforts and I try and live my life in such a way that I have an awareness. I don't want to hurt people by not being aware or just by trampling around like a bull in a glass shop. I'm very conscious about how people feel and always try and be gentle and I did this post graduate diploma last year in career guidance at Napier in Edinburgh and really I kind of learnt a lot of advanced counselling techniques and it's so useful in my job. I'm a paralegal and it's so useful in my job now because I deal with bereaved people every day and I find it's really helpful to my clients and it's also really helpful to me because they open up quite easily and as some people said to me, I don't know why I'm telling you my secrets I just can't resist. So people tell me stuff you know and that's really helping me to help others. I find that in itself is an incredible healing process.

CH: Can you tell us as well, interested in the colours, the way you put colours together. The red and blue, does that signify anything?

E: Yeah the Danish colours are red and white of course and the Scottish colours are blue and white and the UK the British colours are red blue and white so that's very much a conscious choice those colours and no other colours. Yeah.

CH: So very flag focused thing.

E: So it's pretty symbolic because those are the three colours that represent my life really.

LR: Yeah, very much so. We spoke about Brexit a lot and you know our project is about what we call this sort of double whammy between Brexit and Covid. So did Covid have a part in all of this feelings your talking about or was it more of a marginal thing, just happening but not affecting you that much?

E: No it has affected me. More than Brexit the pandemic gave me a sense of being stuck. Suddenly that was the true freedom of movement restriction for me because all of a sudden when I first went over to Denmark just before the lockdown happened I knew I could get into the country because I'm a Danish citizen and they couldn't keep me out but I saw people in the Airport being turned away. They wouldn't let them fly because you could transit, but if you couldn't prove that you were transiting to Sweden or something like that they wouldn't let you on the plane. I actually helped a couple...

LR: So was that after March 2022 when they actually declared the lockdown here or was it just before then?

E: It was just before that yeah. After the lockdown I couldn't have travelled but yeah I got over to Denmark and all of a sudden I found myself stuck there. My flights getting cancelled and eventually I found a way home three months later by going down to Germany because it was ok to fly from Germany to England. I could only transit Germany but it was ok to stay overnight so I went down on the Sunday to my sisters and the next morning I had to fly on to England so I wasn't allowed to stay at my sisters for a few days or anything like that and then I arrived to London and I then had to get a train up to Edinburgh and it was incredibly complicated. Even though I actually went to Denmark in August last year and I was over there for about five or six weeks, it was still a real stress to travel and wondering oh am I going to get stuck again or whatever but my godmother had died just about a year ago and they weren't allowed to have a funeral at the time and I couldn't have gotten across to the funeral anyway so we had a kind of late wake in the beginning of September last year and I was absolutely determined I was going to go to that and I did. Yeah you're kind of worried what if my mum had died and I wouldn't have been able to get over there, any of that kind of stuff so yeah I felt that was a real stress factor. I like to just take off to Berlin for a long weekend for example fly over there on a Thursday and come back on a Sunday and all of a sudden just not having the opportunity, the possibly of doing that. It's dreadful yeah.

LR: And were you worried about your relatives in Denmark? When we couldn't travel how were you feeling about being here while they were there you know just in case they got ill or something like that.

E: Yeah that was awful and my godmother who was also my aunt. I knew she was ill and I couldn't get over there and see her for the last time. I had seen her six months earlier and we had a date that we would get together. She liked her schnapps and stuff and we would get together and have a nice lunch and some Schnpps and stuff like that and all of a sudden she was dead and I was furious with

her. I thought how could you! You promised! I was really angry and I spent loads of time with her when I was very young because my parents marriage was on the rocks and then I got shipped off to her often so at least they didn't have to worry about me. I was very very close with her and all of a sudden she had kind of left the building without saying cheerio kind of thing and I was very upset about that. I was worried of course that my mum would do the same or one of the two of my brothers have kidney disease and one had a transplant and I was worried what if he dies before I have a chance to see him and stuff so... Yeah that was a very big worry there that they're there and you're here and I have to say Zoom is just not the same. My step-mother died last summer and we had a little zoom get together while she's lying there dead and they kind of hold a camera onto and well there she is and it just felt completely you know... unreal and yeah very difficult.

CH: Did you feel that the restrictions in travel because of covid made you think about the effects of Brexit in any way? Or did it kind of exasperate it or did it make you not think about you know Brexit or anything? I'm just interested.

E: Oh yeah I've thought a lot about Brexit. I think Brexit is ultimately a lot more profound than the pandemic. Now I'll probably get shot down for this but I feel in the continuing restrictions of the pandemic in Scotland are beginning to get to the unreasonable now and a lot of countries, Denmark is completely opened up now. They've even taken Covid off the sort of critical illness list. Sweden are opening up completely next week, Germany are lifting a lot of their restrictions as well and saying well you know at the end of the day Omnicron variant is yeah, you still need to be careful if you've got underlying conditions but it's really much more that responsibility needs to be pushed onto people that have these conditions that they look after themselves according to their needs. The rest of society are really kind of moving back to normality and I suppose because some of us have those interests, family relationships in other countries I feel that we're affected more by their own sort of restriction thing and lockdown and all that kind of stuff and it should really be more up to the individual, how much risk do they really want to take. I'm concerned about what is the underlying driver here. Is it, has it been a sort of handy way for some governments to clamp down more on freedom of the individual and that kind of stuff you know just being able to restrict us more in what we can do and what have you. Maybe also to kind of, yeah take the gaze away from Brexit. You know people don't think about Brexit so much. I do because I'm a foreigner *[laughing]*, an immigrant. I can see how it's affecting me, I've had to stop sending anything over to Denmark, anything like that because half the time it doesn't even get there and you have to pay a huge fee and all that kind of stuff. So if I want to send something I'll just ask my sister to organise something in Germany and write with love from Erika you know. So that's one wee thing but also we don't have access to the same you know... for example if you wanted to buy Danish sweets or anything like that I just don't buy them anymore because it's just far too expensive with postage and second there's all these restrictions on what you can buy now and Denmark half the time doesn't even ship to UK anymore because we're not in the EU. So you know, I think the pandemic has made a lot of people focus on that rather than the damage Brexit will increasingly cause and we're only going to begin to see it now because it's only from January that the full effects are going to kick in.

LR: Yes, I think we're just at the very very start and I keep on reading articles I mean about this price crisis and stuff. I think they have some of that in Europe but here it's much more extreme because of Brexit. It's ridiculous you know they're saying because we're out of Europe we will save money and it will go to the NHS and now they're increasing the taxes and blaming it all on Covid but is it only really because of Covid or is it because the economy's going downhill because of Brexit as well. I think to a certain extent Covid was a god send for the government because it really muddles the waters a lot from an economic point of view about the instrumental effects of Brexit. I

keep trying to read articles from other newspapers, non UK newspapers because they tell it as it is and they tell how it is in Europe instead of being fed with the news that's circulating here which are always a bit rigged to be honest.

E: No I absolutely agree and I try to read different sources as well because that's where you hear it and my sister is really really good at telling me what they're saying in Germany and so on you know and you just see a completely different picture than what the media's saying here and I just feel that we're not getting the true story about Brexit and not about the pandemic as well and for me there's just this kind of hopelessness that nobody's ever been held properly to account for anything. There's this big oh Boris Johnsons' going to be forced to resign, is he bugger. I mean they're just going to keep shouting about it and they just carry on as usual you know. They lie and they steal and they rip us off and they just get away with it. I'm fed up, I really am fed up with it.

LR: Yeah I totally share your feelings. I get very involved because yeah I feel so strongly about many of these issues as well. So strongly I can't stop myself from saying it.

E: Yeah I know, I know.

CH: Yeah I'm interested in the way that you're nostalgic and reading lots of Danish history. I'm interested in that from the perspective of you're kind of thinking of this as something to do with fantasy or wanting another kind of direction of what it is to be a citizen of a country or what is it? I'm not putting it very clearly sorry, I'm just wondering what it is about the kind of nostalgia that you spoke about that's important to you.

E: I think underlying is I've always been really really interested in history. It's always something I've immersed myself in and for many years it was actually the two wars. The first world war and the second world war and the period in between and especially what went down, not just in Germany but in terms of the fascism that it sort of spread throughout Europe and that's always been a deep interest to me and obviously everybody knows a little bit about the Vikings. You know there were these brutal guys with helmets with horns on that just raped and pillaged and it's interesting to note that's not really what went on with the Vikings. First of all they never wore horns on their helmets. We've never found a helmet with horns on but I've felt that there's lots of elements missing because if I was going to be able to understand myself completely and all these different parts of me I needed to go back and find out a lot more. I think the whole sort of trip down memory lane it's not just the Viking age but also what happened afterwards. It's probably somewhere an attempt to understand my own nature in a way. Sometimes you can't really explain why you get interested in something it just happens and you're just fascinated and you get drawn into it but I was interested in how did we get from a society like the Viking age where women were a lot more equal, where it was an era for the Scandinavians of great discovery and wealth in fact because the Vikings didn't invent the slave trade but it was a golden age for the slave trade for the Vikings. Is it something to be proud of? Probably not but it was the way it was. It happened. Then it just kind of took hold from there, how did they go to that age of Norse mythology then all of a sudden, well not all of a sudden it took a while but Denmark became a Christian country which in turn led to women loosing more and more rights and loosing their voice where before Danish queens had been quite powerful and had a strong say to suddenly just being these items who were containers of male heirs with very little direct impact. To dip in and come back up again and get the right to vote to where we are now you know and I think for me it's really just about getting the continuity and understanding the past in order to understand the present if that makes sense.

CH: OK yeah.

LR: It does, of course, very much so. Well this is all fascinating.

E: To understand what took place in Germany in the 1930s people tend to think of the Nazis as something that just happened for five years from 1940 to 1945 and it wasn't. It was a much much longer period and I sometimes feel really quite uncomfortable when I see some of the parallels that are going on in the world at the moment and you don't need to go very far you can just see it in British, English politics, Scottish politics. These attempts to almost seduce people into certain types of beliefs.

LR: Do you think the Scottish are at it as well?

E: I think women's rights are under attack in Scotland at the moment. Attempts to kind of weaken our rights and our... and this whole idea that we have freedom of speech I think is nonsense. We don't, we just deal with it in a different way. Now you have this cancel culture, if you say the wrong thing, you just get cancelled. I mean how can you cancel?! So the whole freedom of speech is urm... and freedom of opinion. That's not to say you should go around and insult people and upset people and hurt people, that's not what it is at all but it's about if you begin to do this... what really boils down to the equivalent of book burning in the 1930's Germany. You're going to end up in the same place. There's just no argument about it. You end up in the same place if you do this and it's happened a few times throughout history now. Keep narrowing and narrowing people's liberties and what they can say and eventually the lid will just blow off it and off we go again and have another conflict, another war, another you know genocide or whatever you have you know.

LR: Yeah there's a lot of anger in the debate. So you think this limitation of liberty affects women in particular in Scotland? Women in particular limited?

E: Yeah I think so. I mean I only became aware of what was really going on a couple of years ago and it started with this whole argument about whether men who identify as women should have access to womens spaces.

LR: I thought you were hinting at it because yeah, that's what I'm thinking in these days as well. I'm following, I wouldn't call it a debate, I'm following the fights on twitter and they're so bitter and oh my god, especially on that side of the so called Trans movement, against women who just say that biology has a space in defining who somebody is.

E: I find it absolutely and that's a strong part of why I actually ultimately deleted my Twitter account. I really could not... No it was... you were supposed to sit as a woman and refer to yourself as a person with a womb or something like that. I don't have one anymore so does that make me less woman?

LR: Yes.

E: It's that whole kind of bizarre you know want culture. I want this and I want this so therefore so you should all allow me to have that you know and I've got...

LR: I think I would define it as, I don't know if there's an expression in English but I translated it literally from the Italian expression as a delirium of omnipotence. Like I want therefore it is.

E: Yeah that's a good way to describe it and it is an argument that's very much talked about in my family because my five sons are completely bamboozled by the whole thing and they feel that they're not really allowed to say... I'm a white western man, they're not allowed to say that without a big display of guilt and...

LR: Oh yeah.

E: They're not allowed to be proud of being white men anymore. White men together with white women, we've been consigned to carry the guilt of the entire world for everything that's ever happened and I mean if you saw that comment by Whoopie Goldberg to say that the holocaust was white people doing stuff to white people and they can just fight it out amongst themselves. I thought you fucking ignorant woman. I mean...[*laughing*] so as black people they don't really need to have any part in the holocaust because it didn't affect them but it did affect them. I mean there were black people in Europe that just got sent off to be...

LR: Another thing I'm worried about, there's all this fight about you know women who cannot be called women because that's discriminatory. So why is it not secular debate for trans men. So women who are transition to men, why can you still use the term man without many problems where as on the other side you cannot use the term woman without any problems. So why do you have to say people with wombs and you don't have to say like people with a penis instead of saying man? So why is it not specular if that's got to be all on the debate, all into discussion. Why's it only on one side and not on the other which is discriminatory to women.

E: I think the whole thing is a bit of a trojan horse to be honest. Men have tried various methods over the centuries, like with Christianity, that was a direct attack on women and womens power. Women were up until that point often the link between God and human. The mother nature you know, the all embracing female and all that kind of stuff and men managed to wrestle power from women there with their male god and consigning the woman in the story to be this virgin who had a baby you know and then Eve who was the bad temptress, who was the bad apple in the basket you know.

LR/E overtalking.

E: They've tried different ways and now they've kind of run out of options so tell you what we will become women and then we'll get them from within and that's my theory. That is a direct attempt by men to once again put us back in our box by attempting to become us. Sorry Charlie no offence here.

CH: I was going to get back to the actual subject matter of what we were meant to be discussing.

LR: Yeah I know I'm so sorry. I'm just so passionate about all this and you know, you just uncovered the pandora box in my head.

CH: Erika for the end of this interview can you kind of sum up a word, maybe it's a Danish word that you can kind of translate into English that expresses that mood, that feeling from that picture that you've created.

E: Erm... Just one word?

CH: Or a sentence or a few words. It's fine.

E: Just bursting with uncertainty really.

LR: Very great.

CH: Yeah.

LR: I feel for me was a fascinating interview. Thank you very much.

CH: Thank you so much Erika, we love your artwork so much, it's amazing.

E: Thankyou very much, it's been quite a good experience for me, having to kind of put words on. It's actually been really really good because when I did this artwork I didn't have words in my head. I just had feelings and thoughts and stuff but no actual words and it's been really interesting for me as well to eventually put words on it so yeah thanks for that.

LR: You think this idea that we had with this project, does it give voice to something that we Europeans that we have inside and gives a channel to express and reflect? Because for me it's like a mixture of different feelings and like muddled in my head and I thought yes it would be nice to be able to think about it and express it somehow. To find ways to express it which doesn't have to be only through words and that's the idea of the artwork that we had because sometimes it's probably better to just do something with your hands to express whatever it is that you want to express.

E: I used to do a lot of art when I was young and it's just been frozen for a long time and this has kind of got me thinking about getting active with art again and actually to start creating some stuff and I showed this to my sons and they were like wow this is so intense they said and of course I'm never a huge fan of what I create myself to be honest. I always think urgh... but I think this is going to spur me into being more active and doing more again so.

CH: Oh great, thankyou so much.

LR: Thank you!

End of Interview

End of Transcript