

## 'Another Country' Artist talk, 25th January 2014

K: Karen Le Roy Harris (Gallery Manager)

M: Matthew Krishanu (Artist)

C: Cara Nahaul (Artist)

A: Audience (when the floor was opened for questions)



**K:** I'd just like to say we're going to start really by the show itself and how it came together. Can you both tell me a little about the title 'Another Country'?

**M:** Well, the title 'Another Country' is an abbreviation of a phrase that stuck with me right through my BA which is an LP Hartley quote which was, '*The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.*' And, actually, both Cara's and my work relate to memory, so we're always looking back in a way for our subject matter... and I really like this idea of the past being a place that still exists, that you can revisit in your memory and then make public through painting it. So in a way, each of the paintings is a portal or an entry point into another country, another world. A parallel world where the past exists. Well, at least it is for me.

**C:** I was fascinated by this quote, the idea of a past. Personally, what past do I look at, and also the idea of 'they' and who is the 'they' in this quote. So for me, I thought I should actually go much more personal than I had with my previous work and look at family photographs of my own family and go from there. I think from there, then, ... that's where the work started to take place and that's where I started to really look through my

own personal archive and seeing what I could start sifting through in order to make work for the show.

**M:** I think that's interesting for me, I mean, a little bit more about the genesis of the show is that having seen Cara's work at the Jerwood Visual Arts — the Jerwood painting fellowship prize, and earlier than that the John Moores painting prize, and Cara was painting people like Benazir Bhutto, from Pakistan, an ex-prime minister of Pakistan, and painting her when she was a child, for instance, and painting these family portraits of people that you don't necessarily know — but then you look at the titles, you get an entry point to them. But they weren't really autobiographical so it's really interesting that you made that switch with this show as well to look at your own personal photos.

**K:** I suppose that's something I wanted to touch on as well - Cara's work has gone through this quite big transformation from being more figurative to something, the works in this show, slightly more abstract forms, in a sense they're more autobiographical than they were before because before you were referencing other figures that you were interested in whereas this is your own personal archive, so what has made that kind of transformation for you?

**C:** I think one of the things I noticed when we were hanging up the show [was that] while both of us were working from family photographs, the photographs I was working with, I'm not in them and they're also from when my mother was a young child, and they were of my grandparents, so they were actually photographs from before I was born.

So I think that's a big, significant difference in our work and in the photographs that we chose. For me, I've been reading *Camera Lucida* again, and in this one chapter Roland Barthes talks about this photograph he finds of his mother and this photograph was taken before he was born. So in this photograph, he sees his mother as, you know, before like he ever really knew her, so this entire life before he existed. And for him, this photograph has this really piercing quality, and it's also the reason, he talks about this piercing quality why he won't reproduce these photographs in his books, and the photographs he writes about he won't reproduce in his book because he's very aware that what he feels when he looks at these photographs, the readers won't necessarily have the same emotional impact.

So that's the reason why when I was looking at my photographs, I chose to focus on not the people, but rather the photograph, the feeling of looking, working with these photographs instead.

**K:** I think that in both of your works, you've actually got a lot of themes and motives that are recurrent through this whole show. For example, Cara, you've got these chairs with floor patterns which are repeating throughout the works, and Matthew, you've got the two boys, which I'll let you tell and explain who the two boys are as well, they are recurrent throughout the show. So it's got this concrete narrative throughout the whole show. So maybe I'll start with you, Matthew, can you tell me a bit more about how you selected these pieces and to ask more about these two boys and your experiences...

**M:** I'll guess there are two points: one is that it's a two-person show and while me and Cara both do quite a lot in our practice, I think it becomes a bit of a hotchpotch to try and get too much in, in a way that in a solo-show, you might show like a retrospective, almost of different areas of your work.

But to make it balance, which I think this show has quite successfully done, to make it balance, we both had to be quite clear on what we wanted to bring to the show, and when I invited Cara to show with me and then approached this gallery with a proposal, Cara was still painting figures and I was interested in painting figures for my autobiography if you like, which tended to be these children or occasionally other family members.

But I think it would have become almost overcrowded if the whole gallery was full of people all sort of looking at us, all clamouring for attention, so I was heartened to see Cara's work develop and become more abstracted, to have interiors up against landscapes. But then with the accents of things like the palm tree, which suggests this almost a painted — like you get in portrait photos basically — you might have a painted backdrop or a film back drop. Which relates quite nicely to me painting landscapes and hanging them all indoors...So it's one thing in the way the show balances between us.

The other thing is really, painting myself and my brother started about two years ago, in a painting called 'Two Boys.' Prior to that, I had almost always painted solo figures... in interior spaces. And I was getting a bit bothered that often people would talk about them as being quite melancholic or lonely. And I found that as soon as you have two people looking straight back at you from within the frame, this, it amplifies their presence in a way, they have more power for being together, and I think it kind of interested me first small, that it was doing that, but then the next step was to paint bigger, to paint them almost life sized.

I mean the fact is that they're children, but if you imagine that where you're sitting from they'd already start to recede in size anyway, but um...I wanted to give children — and brown children — children from India and Bangladesh, give them this weight and presence in a gallery space, a white cube.

And really once I started it, it became almost a project, I wanted to work more, I started on that one at the end ['Limbs'] and it was smaller, it was about half the size, and I was like, no, no, it needs to be bigger still. And I think having two people, and having them big became...partly a...almost a political angle to it, as well as an autobiographical one.

**K:** Yeah, but they definitely have. I mean, I think about 'Golly', the painting, that's slightly...these are, the paintings in this particular room, they are slightly more confrontational, like you said the actual boys in the picture are kind of looking back at you, so there is, with the viewer, there is that kind of interaction and relationship with them, whereas 'Golly' is maybe slightly different isn't it?

**M:** Yeah, I mean 'Golly' relates more to interiors, even though there's a sea background and you have a sense of space, there's something in the way the child is seated, and a general sense of perhaps melancholy, which I don't think there is in these.

**K:** Yeah, definitely, there's quite a change. And with, you sort of mentioned the scale, these kind of very large paintings, that's sort of something quite new for Matthew, so is there, I mean you sort of explained a little bit, but maybe just tell us a little bit about the experience of working on this big scale, and how has that transformed your painting.

**M:** Yeah and that relates to Cara as well in that Jerwood painting fellowship, lovely big paintings, and it's always something I've wanted to do — to work bigger — but when I had the right subject matter to do so. I think when you're choosing subject matter, a lot of it's to do with what scale is the image that you're about to paint, you know what should it be? And to be honest a lot of the images I was painting small were just right that size, they would've looked oversized — kind of inflated, grandiose or something — big. So I guess it's finding the right images, and the image is really saying no paint me bigger, and at first I got great big rolls of paper, put them out, painted with Indian ink, and that gave me a sense of just how big they should get. I think in terms of technique, painting vertically as well is a really important thing, because having them up against the wall rather than...you know if you're working small you can almost paint it on your lap or sort of sit with it. But actually having something that you need to stand right back from to even see it and let the drips run as they do in 'Skeleton' all round the background, all those things become part of the making process, the actual physicality of what the paint does, or with 'Kashmir', the way the drips run, which is quite different from you Cara...

**K:** Yeah they're slightly more geometric forms...

**C:** Yeah, I mean the photographs that I worked with for this show, they were probably about this size [gestures with hands] and in black and white, and they were scanned and sent over from some relatives in Singapore.

And I think a personal reason why I choose to work on this scale, it actually is from working with these small photographs because I think there's something quite wonderful about trying to work out the space of this photo or a detail and then really just magnifying it and it becoming quite a liberating process for me then to have this feeling actually manifest itself onto the canvas.

And really, I mean thinking about these photographs, I was thinking of myself as a voyeur of these photos, and entering into these interiors and looking around and seeing what I could paint and then presenting the kind of the mise en scène of these photos on the canvas, and so that's why they're this scale.

And in terms of the choices of paint, I actually wanted to feel the kind of sense of...of a rewarding feeling of having this engagement with the tactility of paint and deliberately...because the photos are black and white and then so choosing to go the complete opposite direction and choosing colours which are not related to the photograph at all and are completely from my imagination and then having the freedom to then choose the different textures I wanted, and kind of what I would imagine this object to look like in real life if it had been there.

**K:** So in a way, and that's what's nice about the show, although its been looking at the past it's actually a reinvention isn't it as well and like you say the colours being your particular take on it even though you weren't present in them.

And I suppose for you it's maybe slightly different Matthew because you're in the photographs so this is kind of your personal [history] — but how do you feel, like how has it been going from the photograph to the painting, how does that reinterpret that memory I suppose? Do you feel like it's a new memory, a new journey for them or do you feel like it's looking to the past, or both?

**M:** Sure. It's nice hearing what you're saying about the size of the photos cause it's the same for me as well, I tend to keep them pretty much their original size, I mean back in the day photos generally were smaller as well. And I don't scan it and print it big and then paint from it, so I think there is something really nice to have something which is just an entry point, you know you've got your canvas there and you've got this little bit of information, it's just like a route map really in terms of where you're gonna go.

And it gives you a lot of freedom then I think to take liberties with the photo and change things round and amplify the colour. I mean in 'Kashmir' it's intentionally like a dream-like state and the hills become purple, the boat starts to run like liquid in a memory rather than as you'd see it in a photograph. I think also there's that thing in family photographs both being start-off points to us but I don't think we're necessarily painting autobiography. For me although that's my brother and that's me, I don't think of it as portraits of us so much as trying to get a mood or an atmosphere of boyhood and boyhood abroad...you know boyhood which isn't over-sanitized and fearful of health and safety, or being kidnapped...you know we're in flip flops and we're surrounded really by [animal] corpses because this is after a cyclone or floods in Mymensingh, a part of Bangladesh where the river would flood over and cattle would be caught up and their bones would be left and they'd be picked by vultures, and my brother and I would go out and play — it was play, it wasn't horror, there was nothing horrific about it, we'd bring back dry bones and have them in our house afterwards.

And it's that which I wanted to capture in the painting — and the fact that we had some photographs of them were the way into that — and then I guess it's about letting the paint do its thing so it's not you know like Richter's photographic paintings, they're not quoting photographs, it's not trying to be a photograph, it's using the photograph more as a drawing really, a drawing for repainting, and then letting the atmosphere and the mood of the painting dictate.

**K:** And how do you feel, it's quite interesting you thinking sort of a comparison of like you know childhood growing up in Bangladesh or obviously you've both grown up in London as well, so how do you feel your paintings maybe translate looking at Western culture and Eastern culture, there's a kind of slight clash of the two potentially within the painting style, but also subject matter obviously looking back at childhood in Asia as well?

**C:** I think for me I would say the way that I paint or what I chose to paint is a way of trying to piece together a cohesive narrative about my cultural background, whether it's — with my previous work it was about watching documentaries and learning about this

second hand through a very formal way of learning about where my parents are from — and then it's also listening to my own parents' story of when they moved to England, then it's looking through photographs.

So in a way you know it's this constant journey of piecing together various ways into learning about one's own culture through these various mediums.

**M:** I mean for me I think it's the experience of painting for ten years and exhibiting during that time and really thinking what is it that I want to paint? What is it that I don't see in galleries? What is it perhaps that only I could paint? And in a way there was a long period where I resisted painting stuff directly from this very rich family archive, because you also don't want to pigeon-hole yourself as somebody that you know is stuck in their childhood, or stuck in just wanting to paint their cultural background if you like.

And yet as a painter really fascinated by the Western painting tradition, I can also see huge gaps in terms of what you actually see in galleries, and to be honest it's not just about skin colour it's also about childhood, I mean children in paintings are often... it's either fairly saccharine portraits or perhaps somewhat grotesque portraits of childhood, and I haven't really seen many paintings of children just in that sort of rawness, where it's not through a mediated vision of an adult's perspective of childhood, but something that kind of captures what it's like to be up a tree, your limbs become one with the tree when you're up there, or when you're on a boat, and it's like you're the first people to ever go out on a boat under hills, that sense of magic, if you like..

So for me it was just those two things really, painting India or Bangladesh as well, my brother and I are from India and we lived in Bangladesh through our childhood but painting Indian children but not in a *National Geographic* way where they're looking back, sort of with plaintive eyes at the white cameraman... so giving them a sense of... basically they're 'normal'; to me, you know, they're not 'other'. What you said earlier about an 'other country' — that's quite an interesting idea. Painting two boys in their element is what I was looking to do.

**C:** I think we [what] talked about in the beginning when we were starting our work for the show [was] this question of representation, and I remember telling Matthew about the work that I made for the Jerwood show, and then the feeling of then being asked to speak about this work and then sort of feeling a little bit uncomfortable then, knowing that I was suddenly this spokesperson for these images which I actually had no real authorship over, and being very honest about that but also thinking actually, that's quite interesting, what does it mean to be looked at in a certain way and then also what does it mean then to play up to an expectation of what your audience thinks you should be making your work about. Is it because, am I always going to make work about this because my parents come from another place, even when I look at my own past I'm looking at it through a certain lens, because I've always grown up here.

So then that's where this you know, the chair has come in because it becomes a place from which we then represent ourselves. And that's how I started making the work for the show.

**K:** Yeah, that was something that really interested me about your work was that there, because it's your work in a way those archive, those photographs of your parents and your grandparents – you're maybe you're slightly more removed from the history and the heritage, so you kind of get that sense of distance from that world maybe from the outside looking in, I suppose, with these, especially with these chairs here — I'm looking at it and they're kind of isolated in the space. So, I'll go back to the chair and maybe we can expand on that, but with the chair, I suppose for me the chair, I kind of look at it and chairs have this sort of thing as a presence in a way, it's related to the body and the seating of the body and the chair is... is there a particular reason why you selected this particular chair?

**C:** Yeah, this was a photograph ... so in this photograph it's my grandfather, he's sitting on this wooden chair, and I couldn't really see most of the chair so I drew what I imagined it may look like. And then the decision to not really place it in a room...I mean I allude to that this may be a room, but there's nothing that actually connects the corner, there's no line that reaches the top of the canvas, which would actually indicate the corner of a space. So there's a deliberate feeling of trying to have this placelessness in the painting.

And also, a lot of people talk about the absence of the figure, but for me the chair just becomes a stand in for the figure, and it becomes much more about knowing that someone else is going to look at this and not having it fixed in this one place, and not having a fixed meaning attached to it.

And the same with the palm tree, like I'm very aware that the palm tree has this value of this sign that means many things. For a lot of people it means vacation but for me it means home, you know...it reminds me of going back to where my parents grew up, so it has this double meaning.

**M:** It actually reminds me of when I first got the print back for this [the exhibition booklet], it was laid out on one sheet of A1, I was actually at the barber's waiting for my haircut, and one of the guys, a Turkish guy, came over and said "oh you're planning to go on holiday". So he thought it was a holiday brochure, and I think there were enough signifiers in there to suggest it...

**K:** I think there is that...especially with the boat, I suppose there's that sense of journey...

**M:** Yeah, the boat, palm tree...

**K:** So it has got that sense of kind of vacation, yeah definitely. One of the other things, you touched on it before Matthew, I just wanted to raise back again, was for example some of the titles as well, I mean some of them are quite descriptive as in 'Skeleton'. I suppose 'Limbs' particularly interested me as a title because even though it's quite a figurative representation of boys, it is that kind of abstract word, and I suppose with your titles they do tend to be abstractions in the same way with you Cara as well, so I don't know if you can talk a little bit about your choices of those titles a bit more.

**M:** Yeah it's funny actually. Looking at the titles sheet, it seems to change as the scale changes. All my small works tend to be a little more descriptive (in the past they were things like 'Girl on a Bed', 'Boy on a Bed' — here we've got 'Boy and Bull', 'Two Boys'. But when I was working bigger, to describe didn't seem the way in really, and I think there's something more elemental perhaps about these pieces, so for me 'Skeleton', the fact that their feet are pretty much in it, it's almost like they are growing out of this skeleton and the skeleton of course has sunk into the marshy ground around it as the body has decomposed and the fact that they have nearly bare feet or just flip flops; for me it wasn't 'two boys and a skeleton' like you might have on a photograph — it was about the skeleton-ness. Similarly 'Limbs', (of course *skeleton* and *limbs* are both bodily terms) but the fact that this is something living, still living (a tree). And for me the light that comes through, that very particular dappled light, that you get when you're abroad, or when you're in a hot country, the way it comes through the leaves, with heat as well, all of it was equally important; and the boys' legs and their arms are completely part of the focus, as are the limbs of the tree.

**K:** They become quite organic with the tree, don't they?

**M:** Yeah it's funny actually, when we were lighting this, the lighting guy said 'With that one, I think of that as the showpiece — what we really want is a spotlight on the two boys' faces.' When we tried it, it looked a bit naff, but most of all, it became a portrait of two boys up a tree, [which] it's not. It's about them being equal to their environment. Maybe *equal* is too strong, but subsumed by their environment, like in 'Kashmir'. The environment is pulsing, it's something greater than the boys, it's just because they're staring out at us that they have that intensity, and the spotlight basically misread the painting.

**K:** And it has got (especially in that position) that sense of growth of the tree, that it could just start to spread out and grow across the wall, and I think the landscapes do have that expansive feel to it. You were talking earlier about portals, and it's almost as though you can enter these expansive spaces.

**M:** Yeah, and I think they are so much taller than you, that they kind of look down on you, like they would up a tree, which is important.

**K:** Yeah definitely, and I think I am going to ask you a little bit more about the positioning. Obviously we have curated the hang of the paintings and I wanted to ask you more about the selection and the curation of the show — how you feel it works together really? Does anybody want to touch on that?

**C:** I really enjoyed curating the show together, because I'd only really seen Matthew's work [in reproduction] until close to when we started installing and I remember when we had all the works in the room, all at the same time and it actually became a very natural and quite easy way of working out which works would sit well together. And also I started

noticing our colour choices. It's quite clear that I use a lot of yellow and Matthew uses a lot of blue and it's funny, we said that we meet each other at green. For me, I saw our works relating to each other, actually largely through colour — working out which ones would sit together.

**M:** Yeah, colour, and I think scale is the other determiner. The fact that we had this lovely big room, with a nice high ceiling as well which I think really helps. And the curator we were working with, Matt Price, quite early on decided that we would have just the big paintings in here, and we occasionally tried a small work from the corridor, but it was sort of lost in this space. So I think having this particular space was very useful for the hanging. It just sort of slotted in very nicely.

**K:** And can you tell me more about the smaller pieces, also the monoprints and watercolours in the cafe space as well. I wanted to know a bit more about the process of the monoprints and the watercolours. Are they again working from photographs, are they preparatory works for your larger works, or are they always just works in their own right?

**C:** The monoprints I started, I think I was wanting to experiment with different surfaces in the paint that I was using and then also a way to look at different colours and using very little pigment, really bringing it out, or working with geometric shapes as well and learning to discipline myself because it's very easy to make mistakes in printing and so having that discipline then to make sure that I would learn to create a certain colour or shape.

And then it was really about just focussing on parts of the painting that I would then think of in a detail as a monoprint. That's how they would come out; or doing an early sketch of a painting which would then actually just become a work in its own right. So I never think that the monoprints are less than the paintings. They come very much in dialogue with each other.

**K:** For you I think they are almost more of a pure abstraction, down to the essence. They are very interesting, there are clearly shapes in this room that are just down to their simplest form. And again, Matthew I don't know if you want to expand a bit more on your watercolours.

**M:** Yeah, the watercolours for me are I guess are partly a testing ground. I also work with Indian ink quite a bit on paper, to work out issues of composition. I mean, there's a painting called 'Boy in Water' round the corner for instance, which is a boy in a lake, or in a river, and in the original photograph he's not in the lake, he's standing on the bank, and so often, having something like Indian ink in a sketchbook allows you to try out different things and I think I tried out all of these in there.

Watercolour is sort of a middle ground really, where I start to bring in colour and start to think of the balance and the composition. They're not necessarily preparatory. In a way sometimes it's really what the image says, it will either say *make me into a big painting* or it will say *oh I'll make a nice watercolour*; because I use the paints so differently and

with the watercolour it's about the light showing through from the page, and it's about placing, almost like toys, like little toys in a doll's house: I'll put something there, something there something there, with this lovely haze of white around it.

Whereas with canvas, you've got the edges, you've got all the drips, you've got all these other elements to them. Watercolour is quite a free, satisfying, quite a quick process and you can be quite zingy with your colours — or on the other end of the spectrum, quite muted. There are, I think there is the one with the boy and the golly, the golly doll, as a watercolour which I'd done about a year before I did the painting, but they're quite different as well. Compositionally and what I put in them.

**K:** And do they work alongside, were you working on them at the same time as the big paintings? Does it tend to run alongside?

**M:** No, actually when I'm working on the big work... what I did was I had done some watercolours before I did the big paintings, and then did some more watercolours once I'd finished... sort of revisited them.

**K:** So it's sort of separating it out?

**M:** Yeah.

**K:** It's also quite interesting again, it does curate really well actually in the gallery space and the cafe, the colours, again, pulling out from both of your works, in a very different way as they are in here (the gallery space), which are much more subtle colours. Which is quite interesting.

**M:** Yeah

**K:** We're going to open out to you guys (the audience) so you can ask some questions about the work.

**Audience's Question:** Hello... One thing that really intrigues me about the pictures is the knowledge of this extra unseen presence which is the photographer, who is obviously present but unseen in the image. And the idea that as a viewer, what I'm seeing has been filtered by the painter, the photographer, and also with the influence of memory on top. Is there anything you have to say about the unseen presence of the photographer?

**C:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I find that quite fascinating when you look at a photograph, you know, you acknowledge that this event happened at a certain time and someone wanted to record it. And it also alerts you to that very fact that there is someone left out of the frame and that happens, in every single photograph there is always something that is left out outside and also the photographer itself.

And then I think for me I thought about, because these photographs I was working with were actually taken in a photography studio, and so then it was about becoming the photographer, what does it mean to have to document these people who are wanting to represent themselves and document themselves for people later on to look at them. So, I am very much interested in what it means to be that person who is looking at another. And capturing them.

**M:** For me I think the key word is 'intimacy' because I think that the photos are intimate, they'd usually be taken by my dad, probably, of me and my brother. As somebody that looks at a lot of images like *National Geographic*, [I find that] just the way that the subject is framed, positioned, when it's somebody who knows you very well, who is your own blood, will also capture and represent you in a much freer way, I think. And so for me, the fact that I'm going back to — because I've looked at also photos of mission for instance, archival ones online and so on, and obviously seen all sorts of photos of Asian boys in India, but they don't give me what I'm looking for, which is something which represents them unselfconsciously. I think the fact that it's a family member, means that at most you'll get a pose of, "I'm a boy up a tree," or "I'm a boy look at my skeleton," but [you don't get] the power relationships that are often there when photographers go abroad from the West to document there... and these are family photos... yeah that's one thing.

The other thing is a couple of the paintings don't have photo references, like 'Boy and Bull,' that's actually built up just from paintings from my imagination, but I still think there's something of the way that a photo would be framed in there — so there's something also just in terms of centring in the middle of the picture. Which is both common to paintings and to a lot of photography.

**K:** It kind of reminds me we used to have something called 'the people of the land', and it's people almost representing the place where they're from and actually you often get two figures stood in a painting in front of their home. They kind of have that reminiscence for me actually. Does anyone have any questions?

**Audience question** 'The past is somewhere you can never return to' — that kind of came up in this work — is that something that you can relate to?

**M:** I'd say definitely, that goes right back to the beginning, "the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there". The fact that the past becomes 'they' — something removed from 'now'. It is true that not returning or not fully belonging is definitely there, because I also lived between England and India. I was born in England and lived in Bangladesh, and went to India to see family and so on. And that sense of when we'd come back to England I'd see it as a foreign country and when I would go back to Bangladesh I would see it as a foreign country; you know that of sense of never fully returning or never fully belonging to a place. And it's interesting actually, one of the watercolours is set in Cornwall and it's my brother and a dog on a hill looking out to the sea and for me that's still a foreign country in that picture. And I think 'Golly' actually is originally a photo in England, but I've changed it through memory. So I think not having an 'authentic' homeland or belonging place is part of the enquiry of the work.

**C:** Yeah, I think it's similar for me as well. The photographs I was working with were taken long before I was born. And I guess the idea of not being able to return to like a place, where you can really be yourself or know where you belong, I guess could lead to potentially a sad place, but actually it's quite liberating to know that instead of thinking of it in a very sad way, to say well no I can actually take control of my own past and re-invigorate it and re-tell what I would imagine my past would be, through a painting. And that's where painting becomes quite empowering for me because I get the chance to do that.

**M:** And I think sharing — for me as well it's a question of placing paintings in the canon of contemporary painting and ideally they're the type of paintings that haven't been seen before, and are a new word in that canon, that lineage. So yeah — there's one thing, it's down to the individual artist, but I think also the story and narrative of painting is really important and to keep adding links to it.

**K:** Anyone else? Any questions?

**Audience's Question:** I would just like to say — I look at these paintings and I'm looking at this one predominantly now [Cara Nahaul's 'You Are Here'], so I'll say what it gives for me. I think that everybody has a space back to their childhood, and their origins that is a foreign land. It's amplified obviously if you are immediately one generation from another part of the world — but actually I have an Irish parent — but I was completely brought up in England, but not here. But if I go back to my old town, it's completely different to how it was 50 odd years ago — so they've put a car park where the car park used to be — but it's different. So for me, everyone has that sense of 'the past is a foreign place' with or without the added dimension, so do you feel that these paintings (you mentioned the politics of that) are — it's almost like I can look at that and say 'my grandfather was in that chair'. Is that the intention behind this? That it speaks to everybody's past and everybody's sense of a space that was inhabited? That we may have been there, or we may have not, but somebody else was. Is that's really what's behind the whole show?

**C:** Especially with this painting that you picked up on — that's why I titled this one 'You are here', because I think it addresses you in the painting, and obviously in the title — in this chair there is obviously someone, it could be you, it could be anyone. And also I think having, as I mentioned earlier, this feeling of not having a fixed place, not fixing my paintings in a particular location gives a way for then any viewer to actually relate to the painting, and you know that it's meant to be read by many different people and be aware of the multiple meanings that it can embody.

**M:** I really like what you said, it's very true of the show, and I think that's what Skye [Sherwin] pulls out as well as in a way it is about childhood and family as being a cornerstone of one's memories and identity but also I just think the emotional amplification of childhood memories is completely different. Even from puberty onwards I think there's something — you lose a sense of atmosphere — you're more in your head I think but when you're a child you are really soaking up so much elementally and the range of feeling is so great I think that it really does stay with you the rest of your life and it is the lifeblood then of so much art and general experience and emotions — and if you

get very depressed later or whatever, often there's so much rooted in those early childhood experiences.

And I guess for me the fact that 'Another Country' becomes such a useful metaphor as well is: I was twelve years old when I came to England, to start secondary school — Year 8, Southampton, that was the next six years of my life, so I went from Dhaka and India and Sylhet and Mymensingh and Kashmir — that was my childhood with trips to England for three months at a time — to actually living in Southampton and going to a secondary state school there. The break was massive in terms of childhood, but the fact that any memory I have from Bangladesh and India — other than visits subsequent to it — are of me as a child — they're filtered through childhood, so it's very easy for me to access what age I was at that time and therefore the emotions that correspond to it.

**K:** Yeah, definitely. Does anyone else have any other questions?

**Audience's Question:** I was just thinking, as you were discussing childhood in the last question, that it seems like a very 'sunny' exhibition (and I'm not just talking about the climate). Would you say it's an idealized childhood that you are dealing with here because there could also be very dark memories associated with childhood as well?

**M:** Yeah. I think 'idealized' would be the wrong word, but certainly filtered because it's sort of extracting one element of our childhood, which was the elemental thing — the contact where you really feel part your environment, you know, 'outdoors' and experiencing things. So it is like I'm putting a lens on that.

I find that when I paint indoor scenes, they tend to be more about an internal world of the person, in a way that's like a separate experience for me, and perhaps those are 'darker' (potentially) or more melancholic if you like.

So I wouldn't say that it was idealized, because I don't think there's any way that a whole childhood can be like this, but what I wanted to spotlight in these paintings is that elemental contact. It's almost like the metaphor of being 'barefoot' on the earth and as a child being really, really free for at least that period; and then of course you've got to go to school or go back home when things might be crap there — whatever it is, but the fact that for a little while you feel rooted and comfortable and free and alive and that's what I was looking to explore.

**Question by audience:** So do you think that the implication then of that elemental contact is something which is lost with the loss of childhood?

**M:** I think that's an implication, yeah. And also I think sanitization — you know our environment — supermarkets all the rest of it, where it becomes very removed from just lived experience with the natural world. So yeah, I think there is that implication.

**C:** My paintings don't necessarily deal with this 'looking back' at childhood, but in terms, of what I think you mentioned, of thinking about the climate of the paintings, which I quite

like... For me, I wanted to, when I was looking at these photographs, because I was imagining what these might look like in colour, and then having the freedom to play then with what I wanted that colour to be... And so for example the palm tree started off with me looking at this photograph of my grandparents, and they're sitting in front of this fake tropical landscape, which I thought was kind of absurd because this photograph has been taken in Malaysia, and then they've got this facade of this paradise behind them, and I just thought 'why is it always that, why is it always the palm tree, and some weird - you know - white building or something?'

And so then, this painting is called 'Proposition for a Backdrop', so it's then me, creating my own backdrop - what would I sit in front of, if I were to remove this palm tree and put it in something else, to make the palm tree black and orange rather than a real palm tree. And then also, this harlequin pattern, having these layers to sort of hint at the idea of this illusory nature of this backdrop, you know, 'why is that there, in this photograph?'

**K:** There is this sort of sense [in] your work Cara, that there is that kind of layering and almost staging and placing — and I feel with yours Matthew they are in the environment in its rawest forms and there's quite a good contract between the work. Is that something you kind of picked up on when you were looking at each other's work at the beginning or is it something that has just developed naturally?

**C:** It was just a coincidence

**M:** Yes, just coincidence.

**K:** Thank you very much for all coming, and thank you to Cara and Matthew.