



## **Cultural Value Project Launch Event, March 21st 2013**

### **Audio Transcript**

#### **Jude Kelly**

I'm Jude Kelly. I'm the Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre and it's delightful to welcome you all here, especially those I *don't* know actually, if you see what I mean, because I can take the opportunity to get to know you.

I want to start by saying that I completely agree with David that the intriguing possibility of saying that to find the real value that society can put on something in a contemporary moment, at the same time as recognising that in some ways it is always going to be hard to measure the profound. I think this is a very important thing that we should strive to do all the time so I'm going to begin by that statement because otherwise I wouldn't be here, championing the idea.

This weekend I was at something called 'Names Not Numbers' in Aldeburgh and there was a debate, a jury debate, and the title was 'What Connects Us Most?' and the themes were scientific endeavour, economics, entrepreneurialism, sustainability of the planet, law and human rights. Anyway, one of them was culture and I was arguing it and I won.

[laughter]

That's all I wanted to tell you actually.

[laughter]

I was talking about the idea that if you go back 32,000 years and you opened those caves that they opened 400 miles outside Paris, and you see the drawings on those caves: the recently discovered ones that Werner Herzog made the film 'Cave of Forgotten Dreams' about, and you realise that 32,000 years ago, people wanted to paint the antelope, they wanted to paint the rhinoceros, they wanted to paint the lion, and they wanted to tell jokes about the human body cavorting. In other words, they were us.

An ability to reach back through time, to connect, is absolutely extraordinary and we know that culture is the method by which we can sense another human, because they want to sing and they want to dance and they want to carve and and they want to make patterns and designs etc. We know all of these things. So when we talk about the importance of culture, I think sometimes in the sector we can get confused between wishing people, longing for people to understand the fundamental requirements that all humans have to express themselves and to throw a window open to other people to look at us.. There's a difference between getting people to understand and believe that, and then getting them to decide how much they want to spend on having it. And although I believe that all civilisations, from the ground up, begin, from somewhere expressing human divinity through the idea of celebration and form and shape, nevertheless, the requirement a society has to then decide to commit to it in a very fundamental way, at

taxation level - this is a sign of remarkable sophistication and commitment, which we must never take for granted. And we must never squander it.

I have the incredible honour to be the Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre and it's an honour because in 1951, after the horrendous Second World War, the level of barbarity that the world confronted made it have to come back with, 'Well, what are the solutions for keeping peace?' And of course, United Nations, UNESCO - there were many institutions set up to think about this, but here in Britain, the Festival of Britain on *this* site, the 27 acres, was about art, design, music, colour, expressiveness, saying that if this is for everyone, if this is for all tribes and all-comers, and if it's something which has incredible aspiration and ambition but believes that the collective imagination can make change happen and make peace sustain, then we'll put our money into it.

Now the Festival of Britain manifesto, if you like, took that idea that everybody's imagination counts and I really believe that. And I think in the next hundred years, just as we now take it for granted that people, of course they learn to read and write, of course everyone can do that. That wasn't thought of a hundred years ago. That wasn't a belief system. We're on the tipping point of believing that every individual's expressiveness is something which is not only a right, but something which *can* take shape and form. And I think in a hundred years' time we'll be amazed by what society is doing.

But in the meantime, it has to be invested in. The relationship between health, the relationship between crime, the relationship between well-being, the relationship between education and commitment and confidence, all of the things... It isn't an either/or. It isn't about the application of art being somehow baser than the idea of higher aesthetics and feelings. This is about the complete use that art and culture has to the meaning of us, as humans, but how do you measure it enough for society to say, 'This is how much we want to spend on it'?

Now I believe that we should be creating the next phase of *Every Town Should Have One*. I don't know whether you remember that famous John Pick book about art centres. I don't believe that we have sufficient arts education in our schools, I don't believe that in our National Health Service we're using art to anything like the degree that we should, I don't believe in the criminal justice system, that we're looking at restorative justice as containing arts as a given. There are so many ways that the arts could and should be being used but until we measure its power in some way, that as David says, the economist can rest easy in their bed...

Until we attend to this idea of cultural value, I think that we are always going to be looking as if irritatingly, you should just know this. But we don't know this about anything else and why should we know it about culture?

So we're on the verge here, at Southbank Centre, of starting to do a very, very big, new endeavour. We're looking at the whole of this side of the site: the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the Hayward Gallery, the Purcell Room, and what is a bigger footprint than the Royal Festival Hall and we are going to engage with that side of the site: not just refurbish but transform. It's a very, very major project. It costs a lot of money and how do we argue its case unless we understand, not just the fact that it would be nice to tidy it up, wouldn't it, but actually this will have great value to society in 50 years' time. And so for that reason, even if it was just selfishly to measure our own cultural value, I applaud the project happening.

But I finally want to say this: that when I went to Iran to look at arts projects there and education projects there, one of the most devastating pieces of information I got was that, in order to justify children who have mental disability being allowed to stay alive, they show people that they can do art and the projects are called 'The Right to Live'.

When I went to do a session a couple of years ago with Interpol about smuggling artefacts, to watch museum curators from Baghdad weeping about the fact that their temples had been literally dug up in the middle of the night with men with guns and transported who-knows-where... They were saying, 'How will anybody know who we were, once upon a time, in this cradle of civilisation?' And I think that if this country can measure cultural value and come out as a result of it and say, 'It's powerful, it's meaningful, and we commit further', what a fantastic signal that will give to other countries who are struggling to say that life's meaning is still there to be found, because they have no structure for supporting the arts and culture.

Thank you.