

Hilary Carty interviewed by Samenua Seshar

Respect Due, Museum of Colour

00.01

Introduction Music

'Intro' by Soweto Kinch from his album *Conversations with the Unseen*.

00:08

Samenua Seshar

You're listening to Respect Due.

00:16

Introduction music

'Elision' by Soweto Kinch from his album *Conversations with the Unseen*.

00:22

Samenua Seshar

For this project we've invited UK creatives, journalists and heritage organisations to nominate an individual who's had a big impact on their creative journeys. The individuals nominated for Respect Due are people who have inspired and innovated in their field, people who have demanded change and paved the way for generations to come. Their achievements will be showcased in the Museum of Colour along with portraits by the artists Grace Lee, Erin Tse and Naki Narh. The Museum of Colour is a digital museum celebrating 250 years of creative achievement by people of colour. In this audio series, you will hear from the nominees themselves.

01:10

Hilary Carty

My name is Hilary Carty, and I'm the executive director of Clore Leadership. Clore Leadership is one of the UK's longest-established training and development organisations for leaders working in the cultural and creative industries.

01:28

Samenua Seshar

I'm Samenua Seshar, director of the Museum of Colour, and this is the voice of the one and only Hilary Carty. Hilary has been at the forefront of cultural leadership for decades, but her passion for performing arts began very early on.

01:45

Hilary Carty

It was very clearly a love of dance that drew me to the arts. I remember well, being at school and being introduced to contemporary dance, and just really falling in love with the art form. I loved the mixture of expression and vitality, I loved the physicality of it because I was very sporty and active, and I just loved the range of ways that you could move when you did different types of dance. So that was what drew me in and then, over time, I became interested in the arts more widely.

So, I did a degree in performing arts, and it was very interesting, because I majored in dance but we had to do theatre and they encouraged us to do music and this thing called arts administration, as well. It was, you know, a relatively new thing, 'arts administration', and I think it was on a Friday morning, and I could just about be arsed to turn up to these lectures, which were kinda, you know, telling me about how to manage things. And I wasn't at all interested, which makes me scream with laughter now, because of course it's how I earned my daily bread, as it were, and have been doing so for years.

03:06

Samenua Seshar

Hilary was managing a small dance company when she was appointed as Director of Dance for Arts Council England in 1994. She held several senior roles, before she took on the big job: director of the Cultural

Leadership Programme, in charge of a £22 million fund for leadership within the cultural sectors.

You started out in a small dance company, and then you became a leader in the dance world. Now you are a leader in the cultural leadership world. How has your perspective shifted, as you've moved through these various roles?

03:44

Hilary Carty

It's interesting, I think what my perspective has done is to see the possibility to have impact and try to influence on a wider scale. Seeing - almost like the layers of an onion - but starting from the inside, and then realising that there's a wider layer. Because what happens when you start within the kernel of an art form, is you understand how that works, but then you begin to understand that actually, the decisions... for me the decisions weren't just about dance, the decisions were about cultural policy. So, if I really wanted to be able to make a difference for dance, then I needed to be working in cultural policy. I needed to be working in that next layer of the onion. And then you get there, and you think, 'Okay, great. Yes, here it is. I've reached this wider layer of the onion.' And then you see, actually, I need to have a bigger slice in order to impact cultural policy, and that's very much how I've done it.

I have to say, it makes me laugh, because I look back on my career and it seems so straightforward and linear. It wasn't! (laughing) It was like, 'Oh, my heavens, what do I do? How do I do this? Is that the

right thing? Oh my gosh, am I going backwards? Is a diagonal move okay? I'm plateauing. Is there nothing else I can do?' So, all of those decisions were in the mix.

05:11

Samenua Seshar

Yeah, it is interesting when you do that, because one of the things that our sector is known for is that there is no direct route... it is an interesting circumlocution, shall we say, of fitting in various places.

But I'm going to ask you now a little bit about the leadership. And over the years, millions of pounds have been invested in leadership. Now, for many who are on the coalface of delivery, that might sound a bit strange. But why do you think it's important to invest in leadership and what drives you to make a difference in this particular field?

05:50

Hilary Carty

Well, it's interesting because investment in leadership has actually always been there. The difference is that now we invest in leaders at different stages in their career, and we don't hold the view that leaders are only those ones with 'director', 'chief executive' or some version of God in their job titles. And so that investment in leaders was something that was happening before. What we have now really encouraged is a wider understanding that leadership happens at different places in an organisation; and if you're to do that, then you need that investment to be accessible also at different places in an organisation. And it's a natural evolution, as many things have evolved

over time. So, we are looking at: what does it take to really create the best art, to create the best culture, to create the best collections? What does it take to create them? And what does it take to maintain them? And what does it take, then, to innovate and create the ones for the next generation or be part of that? So, if you look at leadership in those terms, then of course you would invest in leadership.

The thing that motivates me is people; I get energised from working with individuals and seeing the difference that they can make if and when they find their stream. And I have a fair bit of experience now of supporting individuals to look for that stream and locate the stream and then swim. And I've just never tired of that process. It's... I find it really energising. So it's people based. But I think people are what make the difference. It's that leader in that space, at that time, that will make the difference. So, if I can work to support that leader, then whoa, what else do you want to be doing?

08:01

Samenua Seshar

Interestingly, thinking about that leadership, I do remember a time where there was this tension between leaders who created the work that went on the stage or that went on the walls, and those who ensured there was enough money for things to go on the stage and go on the walls, and that there was a natural tension between these two areas. And I do think that that has, to an extent, stopped. But what do you think? Do you think that tension remains or do you think the house is now in order in that area?

08:39

Hilary Carty

To a certain extent, I think the house was in order before, because that tension between creativity, finance, governance, audience development, reach, relevance... those tensions are ones which we conjure with all the time. The key issue is that it's less polarised. So previously, you might have had the polarisation of the creativity - and here we're using stereotypes, so you have to bear with me a moment just to make the point - but we have the stereotype of the artists who didn't know and care about money, just wanted to make art, and then you have the sort of chief executive or finance person who was all rules and regulations and trying to prevent and constrain this artist. Well, it isn't as easy as that! Because actually both have to have an understanding of all of the different parameters. And one of the things that the investment in leadership development has done is to broaden out that understanding.

So, certainly at Clore Leadership, we work with creatives, we work with artists, and we are encouraging them to use their creativity as their leadership tool. You're not changing that, but you are broadening out to have an understanding of the perspective of the person who is primarily dealing with the money, the perspective of the person who's primarily dealing with the stakeholders, the funders, etc, etc. So, it is to maintain your creative edge, but understand where those tensions with others in the mix lie.

And similarly, we are working with executives and managers to say, 'It really isn't enough to just say no all the time. I mean, this is a creative

space that we're in, and actually, the real judgment is understanding when that creative risk - which does put you at the edge of a financial commitment, or the edge of a commitment with a stakeholder and you might have to go and ask more, or ask again, etc. - when is it worth it? And how can you judge that it's worth it?' And so, what we're trying to really understand is: working in cultural leadership means working with creativity, and creativity must be given its rein, you can't just constrain it and say, 'No, no, no, no, no.' What you have to develop is an intelligence that allows you to assess, 'This is a creative risk, but it's why we're here.' And that's what culture does.

11:18

Samenua Seshar

But I'm going to ask you now a little bit about people talking the talk when it comes to change, yeah? So often institutions talk the talk when it comes to change around class, gender, race, and disability, but the distribution of power remains the same. What do you feel needs to happen, at a boardroom level, to make sure that people with different perspectives and experiences are in positions of leadership? And what impact do you think that can then have? I know, there's two questions in there...

11:57

Hilary Carty

At least! And there are very many answers as well, because this is a complex one, as you can well imagine. There's a lovely phrase, and I think I first heard it from Joanna Moriarty at Green Park Consultancy,

and it's the phrase about budging up, just moving over a bit, creating space. And the budge can mean, you know, when you budge up, you know, when you want to share a chair, so you just kind of make yourself a little bit smaller, and you push yourself to the side a little bit; you don't necessarily have to get up at that time, although you might decide to do so later, but you certainly create enough space for someone else to come in. So you're now sharing that space, and that's where the budge kind of theory comes in. And I think we need to have this happen. It's really difficult for people in power to relinquish power. But that's what's got to happen, if we're going to see change. I mean, it's really quite straightforward when you look at it, it's just complex when you try to do it.

But the other thing that's necessary is, once you've budged up, you have to then no longer hold the floor - you have to actually allow the new voices to have some airtime. And you have to listen differently, because we're used to listening in a kind of a choral way. So, we've got the sopranos over there, we've got the bass over there. And so, there's a kind of harmony that we're used to hearing. And when these new voices come in, it can seem quite discordant. Because they haven't been singing in chorus like the rest of us, and sometimes they don't want to, and they don't need to because they're brought in because they're different. But what does that mean to the sound that we're trying to create? And that's where I think we are, in a lot of the cultural creative industries, is understanding that actually, if we are to give genuine space to those new voices, that diversity which we say we welcome, then we can't just hold the meetings in the same way, we can't just have the same discussions. Actually, if we are to allow things to permeate, then they genuinely have to have space. And

that's the next stage I think some people are grappling with and others need to grapple with, which is not just mechanisms for recruitment, and sort of saying, 'Hey, you know, here we go, I've got my diverse person, look how wonderful,' - but actually then allowing that diversity to be part of the common narrative. And that means adjusting.

And that's another area where it's difficult, because we go onto boards because of our passion for the art form, because we want to see those institutions thrive, because they mean something to us, etc, etc. And then as a trustee, you're asked to take on board all of these other considerations, because you have to fight with yourself to sort of say, 'Gosh, no, this really is important, because it's important for the longevity of that same organisation. But it means that some of the reasons why I joined the board might not be as pertinent or as valid as they were five years ago.' So you then have to have a question with yourself, which is, 'Am I the right person to be on this board? Or should I move my budging a little bit further and actually get off the chair?'

15:14

Samenua Seshar

Interesting. I love that metaphor of a budge. I was imagining the backseat of a car, and you know, somebody else is coming along for the ride, and you're like, 'Oh, okay, I'm gonna have to sort of sit on top of the door. But that's okay, they've got to come in'.

15:30

Hilary Carty

But you see, if you think about it, in many of the countries that we're from, you know, places like Jamaica, different parts of West Africa, etc, the budging... we're so used to budging. Because you see this vehicle which is full, and you think to yourself, 'Nah, nah, nah, nobody else can possibly get it here,' and then the door opens and one more person gets in (laughing and talking over each other) Squeeze up! 'Small up yourself' is what they say in Jamaica, 'small up yourself'. We're quite used to budging. But here, where, you know, transport is more regulated and, you know, one person one seat, etc... there are all kinds of reasons, if you take it, why that budging isn't quite so easy for everyone, it's not quite so comfortable.

16:16

Samenua Sesher

Absolutely. And you use the metaphor of the sound. And that idea that if you bring other voices in, the sound is going to change - that maybe what sometimes happens is you bring the other voice in and you expect them to sing the same tune as you. And that person then feels uncomfortable because, you know, you're a whole load of sopranos and they are an alto and they're singing in a different way, and it doesn't... they don't feel comfortable, and they don't necessarily feel welcome, even though that might not have been the intention. But they're expected to fit in, they're not expected to change.

16:52

Hilary Carty

Absolutely. And this is where it really is behoven on the part of existing board members to consider what they are really doing when they bring in that diversity. Because if you are bringing in someone who, say, looks different but you want them to just fit in with everything that's gone before, what's the diversity? That's a superficial diversity. And so, when you really look at diversity of intellect, diversity of opinion, diversity of perspectives, then you can see that diversity comes in many different forms. And yes, you might want cultural or ethnic diversity, but only if it brings that into the space.

17:41

Samenua Seshar

Absolutely.

Hilary Carty

Otherwise, otherwise, all you've got is melanin.

Samenua Seshar

There you go. So, we're recording this in 2021, and it is a very particular time to be a leader. So how do you think cultural leadership has dealt with both the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd in the USA and the global reckoning they've produced? Do you think that this could be a moment for real change? Or do you think things will revert back to the status quo?

18:10

Hilary Carty

I think the verdict is out. I think it is too fresh, for us to make - for me to make - any clear statements about 'we've moved' or 'we've not moved'. I've been in the sector for a long time and I've seen rather too many new dawns that were going to bring about days of sunshine, and they haven't always materialised. So, you'll need to forgive me holding my verdict on that, it's partly just to protect myself so that I don't go giddy, expecting all kinds of shifts that aren't realistically going to happen. And that self-protection is really important for all of us. You can call it realism, others might call it pessimism - I don't. I just say, 'Wait, give it time.'

Having said that, I think there are tangible signs of difference. I think that the murder of George Floyd happening in the midst of the pandemic made us all sit up in a way that others didn't. He was not the first black man to be murdered on the streets, in the States, even in the UK. So that, certainly in terms of black communities, is something that we... that's a bit of a trauma that we hold. The difference with George Floyd was that we were all at home. We weren't busy running to and from the office, on trains and all of those things - we were all at home. And we saw it on the twelve o'clock news, the one o'clock news, the two o'clock news, the three o'clock news, the seven, the eight, the ten, and then the next day. And more of us had an opportunity to see what would previously have possibly just been shared between a smaller group of people who would have been appalled, and who would have said, 'Oh, why isn't this wider?' But the pandemic meant that more people saw the reality of the experience, of the lives that many people live and haven't previously been able to share and talk about. But you couldn't, you couldn't say you hadn't seen it. You couldn't say you didn't know about it. And

because more people were engaged, you then had to look to say, 'Oh, my heavens, this is real, this is happening. How can this be happening in 2020? When we have X law, Y rule and Z diversity?' And so, people had to conjure with that, and look to their institutions and say, 'How are we responding to this?' And I think the Black Lives Matter movement really assisted in that amplification by saying, you know, 'Enough is enough. And really, is it my job to keep telling you? Because that's what I've been doing for the last X decades. Go learn now, go learn, go educate yourself as an individual, as an organisation.' So it was all of those things together.

So, to a certain extent, the pandemic really forced an engagement with one of the key blocks on diversity, which is not walking the walk, only talking the talk. It forced everyone to engage in a different way. So, for me, that was a moment when I saw genuine shift. Some of the shift was somewhat plastic and superficial in that it was just about statements on websites, etc, etc, and it didn't go deeper, but not all of them. Some of them genuinely did go deeper. And even the ones who didn't go deeper were called out and had to reckon with 'actually, this is not enough'. And I think we are still seeing that the tail end of that, we're still seeing that evolve. We're still seeing signs of organisations that are really taking this seriously and are making long-term shifts to review and to assess and to make a difference. And that then gives you case studies and exemplars that you can then use if you haven't necessarily taken the passion, but you can look across and say, 'Wow, this institution is going that far. What should we be doing?'

I'm sorry, it's an ever so long answer. But I think it's playing out, I don't think it's played out.

23:07

Samenua Seshar

No, it's a big question. So I'm going to move on to the qualities of leadership. Now there's leaders, and then there's great leaders. What qualities do you think great leaders need to have?

23:24

Hilary Carty

(laughs) That's a tough one when you're running a leadership programme, because you can't just... you can't just give a two-word answer and kind of go, 'I like this one. I like that one.' My answer to the question is that it is about finding the balance of authenticity, relevance, and context, and fitting yourself into a space where you know you can make a difference through your leadership. You need to understand what makes your leadership different. Where are you strong? Where are your weaker areas? So that's about understanding your authenticity. What do you care about? What do you really want to make a difference in? Be relevant to the time that you're in and the sector that you're in and use the context of contemporary society to really make your move. That's where you see great leadership. It's when those things really fit.

24:28

Credit Music

'Outro' by Soweto Kinch from his album *Conversations with the Unseen*.

24:34

Samenua Seshar

Hilary was nominated by me for her contribution to the cultural sector, for increasing opportunities for leaders to grow, and for always making time to share her wisdom with others.

Respect Due is presented by me, Samenua Seshar, and is produced by Stella Sabin for the Museum of Colour. You can find out more at <https://museumofcolour.org.uk/>. The music you have heard in this series is from Soweto Kinch's prize-winning album *Conversations with the Unseen*. Further episodes of this series are available across all podcast platforms. Respect Due is supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Paul Hamlyn foundation. Thank you for listening.