

# Summary of oral history interview with Dimitri Launder and Anila Ladwa

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**INTERVIEW WITH: Dimitri Launder and Anila Ladwa**

**INTERVIEWER: Sarah Gudgin**

**LOCATION: South London Gallery, Peckham**

**File number: DIMITRI\_LAUNDER\_AND\_ANILA\_LADWA\_WAV\_FILE**

**DURATION: [01:29:20]**

[00:00:00]

Dimitri Launder: Born 1974 in England.

Anila Ladwa: Born London 24/4 1971. She grew up in Zimbabwe.

Dimitri: Grew up across Europe and all over the UK. Both parents were artists and travelled for work. Mother is Greek and comes from the Island of Symi. Came to the UK in her early 20's to study art and met his father. He was born when his parents were in their second year and so they graduated with a one year old. Greek grandmother came over to look after him for three years, she didn't speak any English. Dad is from the Midlands.

Anila: Great grandparents were from India travelled to South Africa with friends and walked to Zimbabwe where they settled. Her mother one of nine siblings. Mother and her sister came to the UK. Her father was an Indian from Kenya. When her parents' marriage didn't work out, which was controversial, her mother travelled back to Zimbabwe with Anila who was four at the time, which is how she ended up growing up there. She returned to UK when she was 19 where she has settled. She still has family in Zimbabwe and a foot in both places.

Originally, her family came from a village in Gujarat. Thinks it is extraordinary that they did this journey. Many Indians in Africa went there to build the railways, but her family went on an adventure. Their motives are not known and it feels like a lost history.

Dimitri: There are similarities in their histories. It is a story that travels through a lot of families, of someone taking a big step or a risk and the children having mythologies or respect for that. He felt he was able to take risks too. The family moved a lot, he went to 15 schools and it gave him the ability to create relationships and build micro communities, which helped in the work of Area 10.

[00:06:23]

Anila: Her mother and her six sisters were quite liberal thinking, in an Indian family where people were having arranged marriages, they were offered their own choices and freedoms and Anila went with that and was never forced in her choices in any situation. Her uncles had arranged marriages and they tried to push her to do the same, but her mum and aunties defended her right to choose which was quite unusual.

She has no relationship with her father, though his brother married her mum's sister. Didn't know dad's family, he was a mechanic. Mum was a shop keeper and later they brought an American diner in Zimbabwe called the Dutch Oven which makes famous donuts.

Dimitri: He remembers that Anila used to always carry chilli with her everywhere, to put on her food.

[00:06:23]

Anila: Is a freelance creative producer and project manager working in social arts, for 10 years. Before that, she worked for Southwark Council as an arts and events officer for 7 years. Masters, Interactive Media and Critical Practice at Goldsmiths.

[00:11:03]

Dimitri: Since graduating he has designed and built gardens and has an arts practice called Artist Gardener. He has a site-based performance company with his wife called Arbonauts. Recent commission in a tidal swimming pool in the Thames Estuary for Estuary Festival 2021.

Discusses experience of Art College and being part of a small group of people who were interested in making a bridge into professional practice and taking it into the public realm, which was around the time they were graduating.

[00:12:31]

Anila: Remembers the group formed strong bonds and relationships, common interest in engaging outside of Camberwell College. They didn't feel supported and tutors were disinterested at the time in engaging with people beyond the college, so they started looking for spaces to put up shows.

Dimitri: They weren't on the same courses. Dimitri started off doing Graphic Design, but graduated in joint honours. 1995-1998.

Anila: Took joint honours in Fine Art and Applied Art. She chose painting and graphics which was how they met.

Dimitri: There was no head of graphics for a while and this allowed them some freedom. Remembers the group fighting with the college to get some advice around professional practice, so that they could get some help and plan ahead. As they worked toward their degree shows, they recognised individuals who had the energy to look beyond that too.

[00:15:25]

Anila: Recognised opportunities were out there and they were eager to try this. No professional experience, but it paved the way for the people they are today. Their first public show was at Camberwell Leisure Centre, which was in dereliction. Anila describes what she made.

Dimitri: Used lost property items and made them into pinhole cameras which he used to photograph the disused building.

Anila: Talks about publicising the show.

[00:18:18]

Dimitri: They then negotiated the use of Winnie Mandela House, which is now Pelican House a residential property, connected to Kennedys Sausages and the Fire Station which is SLG. Supported by Anya Whitehead who was head of culture at Southwark.

Anila: Winnie Mandela House had stood empty for 10 years, derelict, flooded and pigeon infested.

Dimitri: They had a ten day licence and opened for the duration, so that people could see the process and there was a live event at the end.

Anila: They programmed with Camberwell Arts Week, which offered them support.

Dimitri: They had no idea how to write a risk assessment of health and safety report.

Anila: Describes the installation which she made for the show, using carpet underlay to convey thoughts of Zimbabwe.

Dimitri: Describes the installation which he made using through-away materials to make inflatable tunnels.

[00:22:38]

Anila: The show called Take Action, was really important because it was a political statement on derelict sites.

Dimitri: It showed they could be transient, work fast and focus on their network.

Anila: They asked people to wear face masks and sign a disclaimer

Dimitri: Talks about how the public engaged with the work.

[00:24:17]

Anila: Explains how the success of that show offered them a line of communication with Southwark Council and Camberwell Arts Week, which led them to their next building which was former timber yard at Eagle Warf called Whitten Timber.

Dimitri: Saw the building first. It was vast and he became excited by the potential and the materials which the timber yard were leaving behind and could be reused. They negotiated with Southwark Council to take on the building. Wanted to do everything above board.

Anila: Describes another exhibition in Hoxton Square. From this they had started to develop a language from doing installations which were very process based. Understood they could make art and engage with people through conversations.

Dimitri: In Area 10 they shared practice, tools, materials and audiences. Replied on micro networks and it evolved organically. During the negotiation with Southwark, they had to demonstrate their previous work and ability to deliver projects in a short amount of time. Once they had the licence they started to promote Area 10 and the first show involved around 40 people.

[00:24:17]

Anila: They were able to negotiate a peppercorn licence to be in the building legally for a month. For a long time they operated this way. Great opportunity, but it made it hard to plan ahead.

Dimitri: Their negotiations were cultural exchanges; they provided activities in the space at a time when between Camberwell Art College, Goldsmiths and LCP, there was nothing else happening. They created an island of activity.

They were caretaking the building and the Council didn't have to secure it against squatters. They also created a cultural platform in Peckham.

Anila: At the time Peckham had a very negative stigmatisation as a result of the death of Damilola Taylor. The Regeneration Department had a large amount of funding, which resulted in Peckham

Programme. They took an interest in Area 10 using arts and culture to change some of the negative perceptions of the area. They became very popular, as the site was really exciting and was the size of an air craft hanger. Also there wasn't much else around for people to go to.

[00:33:15]

Dimitri: Describes how they created a permeable and open structure. The set up events around the solstices and equinoxes and these were times when they opened for bigger shows.

Anila: Recalls that Camberwell Arts Week was always around the time of the summer solstice and Glastonbury, which meant that they could never go to Glastonbury.

Dimitri: Although he and Anila were directors and founders of the project, they remained open to how artists came in, taking in proposals in a wide open way.

Anila: They tried to be very democratic and open in the way they operated. They were very aware of a hierarchy, which caused lots of issues.

Dimitri: They put a lot of energy into Area 10. They took paper based proposals and hosted Sunday specials, where they made cooked breakfast for artists, so that they could talk about their ideas for the space. In this way, they would choose a group of people to work with for the next few months. They valued sharing their lives and their practice with people, but they couldn't just take on anybody.

Anila: There was one criteria, which was that people had to make work on site and couldn't bring in pre-made art. In that way, people responded to the building as site specific work.

Dimitri: Everyone had their own space and work, but after a while the work started to relate to each other in unexpected ways because of the duration of time people were together.

Anila: There were collaborations and amazing things happened. Visual artists and performers, formed companies and the work was very exciting. Psychological Arts Circus, Aerial, digital work, light came together for the shows. The things that came out of Area 10 were really important and became major works.

Dimitri and Anila discuss some of the artists who they worked with.

Anila: They hosted Hannah Barry Gallery's second Bold Tendency, which was their first huge sculpture show. They supported her to get the carpark space where they are now based.

[00:39:43]

Anila: Many shows had audio visual work in them and there was a media lab, which was very cutting edge at the time.

[00:41:23]

Dimitri: After three years, they were hit with a business rates bill which mounted up to £100,000. As a result of this they had to form into a limited company.

Anila: Explains that the first people who were involved in the first exhibition remained with them and there was a small committee of around 6 people, with different skills and opinions working democratically to decide things. They took a more formalised position when the big bill arrived and they had to take on more responsibility.

Dimitri: The unexpected bill from Southwark's property department, took a toll on people's health and well-being. They couldn't resolve it.

Anila: They had been told that they had to pay water and electricity bill, but no one had mentioned business rates. Thinks the property owner should have told them. They were shocked and unprepared.

Dimitri: They solved the issue by becoming incorporated and then used that to become a charity. They negotiated their status to act with the same freedoms.

Anila: The aim of the charity was to run an arts education programme. Remembers that the children on the estates around the building used to throw things at them, but after a couple of years, the same kids were able to have conversations about live art. They invited them in and hosted them for previews of the main shows. Talks about the impact that they were able to make.

[00:45:51]

Dimitri: Speaks about how Area 10 impacted the local area around Peckham Square. At the time, it was a dangerous area with drug dealing and prostitution, a place that they didn't feel safe in, but it did change whilst they were there.

He feels that they put extra time in, if someone knocked on the door, they would talk to them and invite them in to see. They were part of the community, generosity of their approach.

Anila: They didn't see what they were doing as 'outreach' and they didn't have a formal plan.

Dimitri: They worked with organisations and school kids.

Anila: Area 10 was an important part of the I Love Peckham Festival which took place in Peckham Square.

[00:49:24]

Dimitri: Talks about the hours and commitment of running Area 10. Initially, they saw themselves artists leading a cultural platform, but as time went on, they had less and less time for their own art work, due to facilitation of the space and other artists. Regularly had a programme of 140 under graduates from colleges like Goldsmiths showcasing their work.

Anila: She was working full time outside of Area 10 and had given up her arts practice. They were looking at the space and trying to allocate responsibility to different people.

Dimitri: The Saw Mill, Powder Rooms and Media Lab were run by artists. Initially, the building was full of materials which were part of new proposals that they were taking. However, the materials were recycled so much, that they started to recycle the artworks. The Council also gave them a skip full of municipal materials which they were able to use. After three years, the building was clear because the materials had been used up.

Anila: Their first show was about wood.

[00:53:00]

Dimitri: They were a 'brown box, not a white cube', 'create, collaborate, and communicate'.

Anila: The shows were mixed media with live music. There was nowhere to go in Peckham to see live music, theatre or dance. However, due to the nature of the shows, people thought they were a squat, which was a stigmatisation which they hated and they wanted to prove they were there legitimately.

Dimitri: People worked together on three month projects, creating a micro community with energy which needed to be released. At the end of a project they would have live events and they would have musicians, theatre and hybrid art forms weaving together and a lot live art.

Anila: You might have your mother visiting for the opening of a show, then there would be a naked woman clowning in clay. Unexpected happenings.

Dimitri: Remembers some the bands who played.

Anila: Remembers an event in the middle of winter with over 2000 people.

Dimitri: It was a lot to deal with, because it was his and Anila's names were on the paper. Personal liabilities, risk and fire assessments. It was like running a festival with generators and portaloos.

Anila: They learnt a lot. As a result she went on to produce festivals in her career.

Dimitri: Instead of taking money they accepted donations at their events, some people gave less or more.

Anila: The bar was run by donation as well. Covered their costs. They also offered food and brought in people and food vans to cater.

She talks about how the amount of time that people put in became an issue. It was always difficult and they had to look at how they did things. When Madonna when was making a film in Peckham, her people asked them to park 10 huge trucks in their yard.

Dimitri: They had a small pot of money, which meant they could hire generators or pay the expenses of bands.

Anila: Also repairs and electrical bills.

Dimitri: Everybody said 'wow' when they came into the space.

Anila: Describes the different spaces in the building.

Dimitri: They had a domestic door as an entrance into the huge space. Sense of awe as you came in.

[01:02:21]

Anila: They were accessible without knowing it: remembers carrying wheelchairs into the building. They were welcoming and important to a lot of people.

Dimitri: Talks about carrying on with his art practice, making a piece for all the shows and developing work which had another life. Speaks about the grind of maintaining the space and how in the last 12 months, they knew the 'writing was on the wall'. They realised that if they wanted to stay there, they had to secure a business plan and a long term licence.

They spoke to the Arts Council who were supportive, but chose not to apply. In 2009, they started to create plans and worked with an arts agency called Arts and Business, who helped them to identify heads of businesses based in Peckham, who were interested in supporting them as cultural organisation. However they needed a 25 year lease and they were unable to obtain this from Southwark Council.

[01:06:25]

Anila: Shares her insights from within Southwark Council where she worked. The political tide had changed, Peckham Programme Regeneration Department was rapidly done away with, which had vouched for Area 10. She knows that the Property Department disliked them. The site was deemed suitable for mixed cultural activities in the area plans and it needed to be financially viable. They had lost their support within the Council and she then became aware of the Eviction Notice.

Dimitri: They had put themselves under so much pressure to develop their business plan, bringing Deutsche Bank on board, in order to create all the structure they needed to go to the Council with ideas to create a cultural economy. It exhausted them.

Anila: Realised she was in a difficult situation because of a conflict of interest and she had to be really careful. Dimitri took on a lot of the burden. Soured her position in the Council and she didn't want to be part of it anymore. Changed her career path.

Dimitri: Speaks about the personal impact that the situation had on him. Tried to stay confident publically, but it was complicated and hard to maintain the private and public domains. It was also an unexpected relief when it was done, there was no way back or forward with it and he drew a line under it.

[01:11:32]

Anila: Speaks about how it had become a burden by then. On one hand sorry, but on the other thankful it was over.

Dimitri: Talks about the lies that were being talked about them in the press. Undermining what they had done.

Anila: Although they had been fully compliant, the building was condemned, but the Council refused to let them see the paperwork. They did everything they could to prevent this happening.

Dimitri: The Council had more robust communication lines with the press. Local MP had heard what was written in the press and wouldn't help them.

Anila: Explains what she meant by 'the building became us'. They didn't go on to find another building to carry on as collective. However towards the end they realised that Area 10 was about the building, not the people and relationships. They knew they wouldn't continue.

Dimitri: They could visualise themselves with the 25 year lease and their plans, but if it wasn't this, then they it would be something else.

Within two years of leaving Area 10, he was doing theatre and performance based work, all his experiences gained through Area 10 were useful to achieving his vision in other sites as an artist, performer and co-director of Arbonauts. He gained a great skill set and a network of creatives who he could approach to collaborate with.

He also realised that the fine art world is 'selfish and grabby,' that what they tried to do as a collective was a more generous way of working which leant itself to his future work.

[01:16:14]

Anila: As a producer post Area 10, her learning came from there and her interest in collaborations and process led work as an art form. She went into festival work, where different kinds of practice could come together. Working for the Council at the same time, she gained an understanding of bureaucracy. She was able to use that in her creative work as a producer, being liable, mitigating risk etc.

She thinks there is a poor understanding of artists from commissioners, who want great things but don't understand artist's practice or process, they just want the end result. Has to deal with these notions, trying to adhere to what people are paying for, whilst supporting artists.

[01:19:14]

Dimitri: Thinks the legacy of Area 10 is invisible. What they did was to create a network of artists who have developed in many directions and they were also part of establishing a cultural quarter in Peckham which they couldn't have visualised at first. Their legacy is there, but invisible.

Anila: They were pre- digital not able to use social media.

Dimitri: Mentions the early use of social media and Friends Reunited, to create artist networks.

Anila: They still have some videos of Area 10, and one day they hope that they can create an archive of their material that will show the 8 years of Area 10. It was a catalyst, alongside I Love Peckham which exists today. Also Peckham Platform which she worked on for 5 years with the Regeneration team to get the space built which is success, as well as the Hannah Berry Gallery and Bold Tendencies. Their time and input was a catalyst for Peckham and she is pleased to make claim to that. Lots of organisations exist today because of that time.

Dimitri: Thinks their energies at the time were recognised in other groups who were also doing what they were doing.

Anila: Mentions an article about Area 10 in *Wired* where it is claimed that George Bush's daughter visited Area 10. In fact, she wasn't at their venue, she was at a squatted venue on a different night, lots of helicopters and police.

Dimitri: They had over 1500 artists who worked with them and regular events, with over 1000 people in the audiences.

Anila: Talks about a particular show called Destination Area 10.

Recording Paused:

Destination Area 10, explored Peckham as a destination and a refugee gateway in a multimedia show. At that time, Camberwell college students never came to Peckham, although they extracted bits of local culture in their work.

Dimitri: At certain times of night Peckham was an unsafe place, he remembers that he was mugged moving into Peckham and another time with broken bottles on his bike. In general it wasn't a no-go

area. It was a place where there was a changing cycle of cultural influences which they witnessed and this changed in the profile of the shops, culture and people.

Anila: Says that there was no economy for them to consume in Peckham at the time, no coffee shops or catering, no cultural spaces beyond SLG. There had been no steps at that point into that area, which was new territory for them.

[01:27:53]

Describes Destination Area 10, [there is a video on line]. It was very multicultural, especially though the music, from table players to opera singer, very diverse, 60 artists, mixed audience.

They discuss managing noise and relationships with their neighbours.

Anila: Continues to describe the show, which really show-cased diversity. In the art world people sometimes forget about the importance of engaging with other cultures.

They discuss the event together.

Anila: Describes how the flyer for the event was a mocked-up as a Peckham Airlines, plane ticket.

[01:29:20] End



Dimitri: