During the *Unfixed* residency, I chatted to interdisciplinary artist Jane Gauntlet about her work, specifically her work *in My Shoes*, an experience that uses virtual reality technology to encourage empathy.

Adriana:

I listened to a podcast of the talk you gave at the aspen festival of ideas, about your work *In My Shoes* and you talk a lot about empathy as a focus of that particular work...

Jane:

It’s a focus of all of my work

Adriana:

Ok yeah, well I wanted to know when did you first become aware that a lot of your work was going to be about empathy?

Jane: empathy has always been a big part of my life. My dad was a doctor, and in a small community. So I was taught very quickly that empathy was very different to sympathy. And it was important! Then I started working for a charity and I found that working so closely with people, any people, it was important to express empathy.

And then *In My Shoes*, which started about five years ago, was very much about empathy and disability. And I wanted to raise awareness about disability and I felt it was a good approach.

Adriana:

Yeah!

I only heard the audio of how that piece worked and I found it very interesting it would have been cool to actually experience it myself...

Jane:

Thank you for listening [to the podcast]!

Adriana:

Yeah… nah… it was cool!

I was sad when the podcast was over! "Oh no! I want to hear more," even though it went for over an hour anyway.

So, that is your work right now, what is next? What can you see happening?

Jane:

I want to turn *In My Shoes* into... its a library, its an ever expanding library of experiences. And I want to move outside of my work into brain injuries, epilepsy and mental health problems and I am really interested in exploring other routes. So it’s not just about empathy and disability it’s about being human.

Adriana:

Yeah well, that’s it isn't it? Even with disability, there are things that everyone can relate to whether you have a disability or not.

Jane:

And I am interested in doing a version of *In My Shoes:* *Astronaut*.

Adriana:

Yeah I heard about that, that’s cool. Have you started talking to someone that is an astronaut?

Jane:

Yeah I’ve just been speaking to someone that has been to space 3 times.

Adriana:

Oh wow!

Jane: so we will see!

Adriana:

That’s scary, but exciting obviously!

What do you want to see happen in the arts community that you are a part of?

Like, you are talking about your work, but the environment around you, what would you like people to be doing?

Jane:

I think if we can support each other, I think we can get a lot from each other. I think we could share a lot of assets and ideas. I think it would be nicer to have a closer community of real artists. I think I’m really interest in looking for other funds itself, so I don’t have to do any more arts council applications.

Adriana:

Yes, they are tiring aren’t they?

Jane:

Yeah, I think they are somewhat to be encouraged, I think a lot of artists make work that could be self-supporting, but it helps if you are on some of it.

Adriana:

Tell me about something funny that has happened in your career. Do you have any hilarious stories?

Jane:

Yeah, there are quite a few but I can’t think. You mean in my personal life during my career?

Adriana:

Well, yeah, stuff related to working in the arts that has happened.

Jane:

The first performance for *In My Shoes* I had a seizure just before we did it. And I managed to talk the paramedic into taking me to the theatre to do the performance and him and his friends sat and had a cup of tea as we did it

Adriana:

[Giggles]

That’s beautiful!

Jane:

And that was the first *In My Shoes*.

Adriana:

That’s great!

Jane:

Id had a seizure in my lunch, so he had to wipe all the smoked salmon of my dress, because I wouldn’t sit down. I was determined that I was going to do the show.

Adriana:

So you are very determined no matter what? No matter salmon on clothing! You are like: "No! I am doing this"

Jane:

I had no idea. I was completely aloof. But that was important for me!

Adriana:

Awesome! Thank you so much for chatting to me!

*You can listen to the podcast from the Aspen Festival of Ideas at this link:* http://www.aspenideas.org/session/act-empathy-understanding-injured-brain