

Name: Tom Guilmard
Date of Birth: 1990
Place of Birth: Village in Newport Pagnell
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Interviewed by: Moss Bancroft
Duration: 00:35:03

Can you tell us what year you were born?

I was born in 1990.

When and why did you first move to Milton Keynes? Or were you born here?

I was born in Milton Keynes, so I've been here all my life. I was born in a village outside ... in Newport Pagnell. So, Milton Keynes has always been like a part of my life but now I currently live in Campbell Park, so Central Milton Keynes now.

You went away to university. Could you tell us why you decided to return to Milton Keynes after university?

A few reasons. I was ... the reason I came back to Milton Keynes after university was because of ... money is one thing because London's very expensive but also, in equal measure, it was kind of a ... I see Milton Keynes as a place where there's more opportunity artistically to make a difference. And I've always been passionate about Milton Keynes. I always wanted to do something here and so I saw it as a really good opportunity to involve myself in the art scene and help try and push the art scene and ... yeah, just be involved with that and see what happened.

What is it like being a young artist in Milton Keynes?

Being a young artist in Milton Keynes is very lonely. That's not because there aren't other artists here in the city or people not doing stuff. That's just because the art scene is very separate. It's sporadic. There's people all over the city but there's no ... there's no way to come across them or meet them or ... so, you always feel like you're on your own until you go along to something and then you meet one person, you meet another person. You realise they're doing something really interesting. So it's like a slow kind of ... there isn't yet a hub of artists. I'd say overall it's quite lonely.

Could you give us examples? So, say like two different, disparate groups that you've gone from one to the other say?

In Milton Keynes?

Yes.

So I've ... well, I've been part of Milton Keynes Art Centre and I'm no longer part of Milton Keynes Art Centre. Then I've also been involved with the Gallery, Arts Gateway. There's the Geek Night. There's ... yeah, there's many things going on but they're just so far apart.

Can you tell us a bit more about the Geek Night? I've not heard of that.

Milton Keynes' Geek Night is an event that's put on similar to TED Talks. They're just sort of stories by really, sort of, smart people. So it's an event you can go to and people give talks about projects they're working on, things they've achieved in the past, like ... but they're really kind of ... sort of successful people but it's usually based around tech so there's, sometimes, some arty talks in terms of ... just talking about Geek Night.

You said it was quite tech-based?

Can you finish your description of Geek Night?

So, yeah, Geek Night's quite ... like the talks are always tech-based but that also includes, you know, talk about design, typography, things like that so, yeah, that's basically what Geek Night is.

0:05:13

You told us you'd like to help push the Milton Keynes arts scene so what are the things that you, sort of, need to have done to try and make a difference in the arts community here?

I'm constantly working on stuff to do with it. When I first moved here I moved into a studio in Galley Hill, which was part of the Arts Centre. We started a Risograph Printing Press called PRESS. The logo that we made from that was based on the ... one of the features inside the original Galley Hill studio which, when it was built in the seventies, was the first community workshop in Milton Keynes. So it was all tied in to the ethos of Galley Hill. We put on shows for that and the way that was ... that works is it is a community-based printing press so if people have projects we don't charge. We just facilitate the production of the prints or the projects that they want to do.

That's one thing. I've been heavily involved with the Capital of Culture bid, as that had progressed. Obviously, that doesn't exist anymore because of Brexit but I was on the board ... on the panel ... for representing young, professional creatives. So I've been helping there. Any sort of events, really, that have happened around Milton Keynes and just, basically, spreading the word and being passionate about the opportunities that I see in Milton Keynes and I want to, sort of, help facilitate for other artists that don't have anywhere to base themselves here.

That sounds brilliant. Can you think of any examples of things you've done through your printing press? That sounds really interesting.

Our first event was at Milton Keynes Gallery and that was called 'Intro' and we got over a

hundred contributing artists from all over the world to submit art and then we printed it. We printed five ... an edition of five. Four copies went to the artists, one copy went to a show and then we invited people to the show to come and, basically, buy art and all the prints were £5 and the money just went straight back into the press, buying more inks, more drums, etcetera so ... and it was really good. There was probably about fifty/sixty people who turned up for that. So it was really exciting, yeah.

I've actually had a look at some of these, sort of, tongue in cheek illustrations that you've done about Milton Keynes. So how did they come about? Were they part of a specific project?

Yeah. Yeah, well, they were just frustration. Me and the person I work with ... we got kicked out of Galley Hill studios by the Arts Centre, which was unjust and unfair. And so, yeah, we were left studio-less and so it ... but then still not lost any passion for trying to be part of the Milton Keynes scene and, essentially, it felt like I needed someone to listen and no one was listening because you know, for whatever reason ... well, I mean, why would they listen to me really? So I needed like a reason, I guess, and I just text my friend ... I was just drawing them. I was, like, started sketching about Milton Keynes because the aesthetic of Milton Keynes is really interesting. So I started drawing stuff and then I was, like, 'Ok, these could be funny.'

And then I text my friend. I said, 'I'm gonna do a set of ten of these drawings and I'm gonna get them somewhere.' And so I just completed them for fun. I posted them on my social medias and then a big, sort of, blog picked them up without me emailing them. Sort of messaged me. It said, 'We'd like to feature these.' Featured them on their site and they got shared on Facebook, like, over 3,000 times and it seemed like the whole of the young community in Milton Keynes was really, sort of, buzzing off of them. And it was good because my name wasn't attached to it so it felt really special because ... yeah, it felt like it was for the city.

Since then that's when the council got back in touch ... like, got in touch with me and said, 'We'd like to have your opinions on a few things.' And then it was like it kind of worked but it was weird because I'd said I was going to do this and I said that was how it was going to go and then it did, which was very strange to ... yeah, like, understand if that makes sense.

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What kind of things do ... that the council asked you about then? What kind of things have you got involved in through that?

Well, at first they just sort of ... at the time a designer called Daniel Chehade was putting together the Bid Book for the Capital of Culture and I know him quite closely and he told me that ... he'd obviously had to work with the council for that and he told me that the council had seen them ... seen the drawings ... and I started laughing and being a bit nervous and then he said that this person wanted to meet me and then, from that, they wanted me to do some drawings for the Bid Book. So I worked with Dan a little bit on that.

That never happened but then that opened the conversation. From that I was actually able to speak to someone like, you know, above just friends and people and I guess they saw my passion for that. Then they invited me along to certain events and certain things and then they

asked me to be part of the process and that's just how it happened really. There was nothing specific but it just meant that they wanted to talk to me and then I could talk and try and be passionate.

Would you like to establish yourself as a key artist in Milton Keynes?

Not as a key artist. No, I'd like to establish myself as someone who cares about art in Milton Keynes and cares that there aren't any studios that cater to professional artists. There aren't independent bars and galleries and things that help grow culture. I just ... it's not about my art. I don't really care about whether people connect or don't connect, you know. That's completely up to them but, in terms of ... I just want to ... yeah, I think I'd like to establish myself as someone who cares about Milton Keynes.

We've heard some similar things in other interviews about there being a lack of small venues, things like that ... independently run things ... so, you more so as a studio so do you think there's others in Milton Keynes that would like to do the same as you?

100%, yeah.

Would you be able to sort of phrase your opinion on the lack of small studio spaces and other people being involved?

Milton Keynes has a reputation of organised fun. So everything has rules from the get-go. Everything is like, 'Ok, here is a space but it operates like this.' And there's no parameter to go outside those boundaries. What small independent spaces do is they make mistakes but they also grow naturally and they cultivate culture. I don't know if that makes sense but they build a network of people, a network of like-minded people. It feels free, it feels relaxed and things can happen naturally.

I understand that that's scary from someone who's in charge and their point of view because, you know, things might go wrong but, if you want true culture, you need to embrace freedom and without spaces that aren't organised ... say, 'Here's an art space for you that you can use at seven o'clock till four o'clock and you have to sign in and you can't use turps and you have to ...' You know, and all this stuff. You're stifled already. You're, like, against it. If you give a space and you do whatever you want with it people will put on their own shows and then something ... it grows from that and that's where conversation happens and that's where collaboration happens and that's what's lacking, I think.

So at the moment you say it's lacking. Do you think it's possible to establish a thriving art community?

A 100%, yeah. Every ... most of the buildings in the city centre are empty. It's not for lack of space. There's a problem that we do have in that most cities have, you know, rundown areas which councils are willing to take risks with. So, you know, when you get gentrification or renovation of areas because they're cheap and rundown and so rent's low or rent's subsidised and it's risk-free for councils because it doesn't look nice anyway. The problem of Milton Keynes is that because it's only fifty years old it ... I don't know how to word it any better ... but there's no shitholes, you know. Everything's nice. Like everything is really nice so ... say for instance the Genesis building in the centre of Milton Keynes. Actually, no. Sainsbury's ... you know that old Sainsbury's ... old Waitrose. That has been empty since I left Milton

Keynes. Going on ten years, I think, that's been empty. Why? How can that be empty? How can that be left there when people are, like, begging for space for things to happen? That could be a multitude of things but, yeah ... so I think definitely but I think it requires someone taking a risk and that's what I think.

Yes, I would have thought that would be a great skate park.

Yeah, that could be amazing.

A terrible waste because Sainsbury can afford to keep it.

Exactly, yeah.

0:15:24

So is there anything else you would like to say about your involvement in the arts in Milton Keynes? Is there anything that ... anything else like that could be done to help with improving it?

I mean, that's kind of a hard one to answer.

Yes. I suppose you were saying about someone who's willing to take risks like ... you didn't mean is there a way you think, maybe, you could bring ... would it be possible to attract investors or people like that?

Yeah, well, any rich people who want to launder some money. 'Let's do it through the art scene.' I'm joking but I don't know what the answer is. I literally don't know what the answer is. I don't know what can be done. All I can do is keep trying, keep ... yeah, I mean, money is ... it's everything really but also I don't think something like this takes a lot of money.

I think if the council is serious about cultural growth and ... the conversation hasn't actually started because of the Capital of Culture bid ... I think what they need to do is get a space for a year and do an experiment, just as a trial. And I think they need to subsidise the rent completely and I think they need to select artists, put them in there and sort of explain a process and say, 'Ok. You have this for a year. Do what you want with it. There's an events license ...' Like drinks can be sold there. I don't know how that works but something like that and do it as a year-long experiment and if it fails massively then, you know, it fails. But I'm almost certain that it wouldn't fail. I think it would be a really exciting process.

That's fantastic. (Unclear) so much. I've just a few more questions that are more general about Milton Keynes because we're trying to get people's perspective of Milton Keynes. You've given us some really great pictures of the arts side of it. There's some more general questions about it too. So, do you have any early memories of growing up in Milton Keynes?

Yeah. Yeah, I have lots of memories of skateboarding in Milton Keynes. Obviously, because I didn't grow up here, like in the centre, I would get dropped off or I'd get the bus into the centre with my friends or meet my friends here and we'd walk up and down the boulevards, skating all the spots. Just spending the whole day moving around the city, skating about. That's sort of my main memories of the actual city.

I obviously remember the first time I went to the Point. That was, like, exciting. And then ... yeah, I guess, Christmastime at Middleton Hall. They're kind of like my memories. I always used to think that looked really cool. That's sort of it though, really in terms of city life. When I was really young, obviously ... well, I spent a lot of time at the Snowdome, as I was, like, a teenager. So I have memories of that, yeah.

Did you ever have a particularly favourite skate spot?

A particularly favourite skate spot? Well, the thing is I skate transition so the city isn't made for transition, you know, and so ... there's so many good spots. It was more ... skating for me has always been about hanging out, you know, but for me it was probably the theatre because there was just lots that you could skate there. When I was young I would skate stairs and stuff so that was fun then.

The theatre is actually being developed on right now and they're changing where the stairs are. What do you think of that?

That's fine. I mean, like, obviously, I'm all for a new gallery and the gallery plans look amazing. But, yeah, I mean it's sad. I think people went there and they got their tricks that they wanted to get before it was knocked down and people, like, paid homage to it. It'll never be forgotten, that's for sure. I mean, it's a massive spot but ... yeah, I'm fine with it.

Sort of trashing culture to put more culture there so ...

Yeah, so long as it's a direct swap. Yeah.

It's not just a Sainsbury's?

Yeah, yeah. If you were putting that car park in John Lewis there ... yeah, I'd be fuming.

I'm glad we've got you saying that and not me. Is there anything in particular you associate with Milton Keynes or what does it mean to you?

0:20:05

Milton Keynes to me has meant something for so long so today, I can't remember who it was I spoke to before I came here ... I can't remember their name, I'm really sorry but they asked me to bring some stuff so I was digging out some bits and I went through just a bunch of old stuff and I found a piece of work that I'd done when I was fifteen and at the end of the piece of work there was a bit that was like 'Tom's Life Goals', yeah? And one of the ... there was only about five points on it. One of the points was leave Milton Keynes. And I think I lot of my friends have had that attitude and I spent probably my whole teenage life trying to get out of here but as I've moved back ... I mean, it is still Milton Keynes. It still has the things that I didn't like about it but, as I've learnt more and seen the original plans and have read the original documents, read the intentions for Milton Keynes and just been to certain talks and just learnt about its history ... its short history ... but about ... and then the architecture and the art design side of it originally, to me it has changed so much in my mind.

I walk round the city and I think it's beautiful. I really do. It sounds like funny but I really do

think it's amazing. I think some of the buildings are so cool. I think the potential ... when I think of Milton Keynes, I think of potential and when I think of Milton Keynes I think of people who have become satisfied with the way of living without realising that we live in a new city and, by living in a new city, that's an extreme privilege. And that means whatever people think the city is now doesn't define it. With it only being fifty years old the city can become anything that we want it to be and we're in charge of that and that is crazy.

If you tried to do the same things in London you couldn't do it because it's so established. Milton Keynes is still malleable. You could still do whatever you want with it. If people could see and were interested and ... I don't know... yeah, that's what I think of Milton Keynes.

You segue way perfectly into the next question which is Milton Keynes is fifty years old, what do you see in the next fifty years of Milton Keynes?

Oh, I can't predict that. I can't predict what's gonna happen in the next fifty years but, hopefully, the culture conversation has begun. Hopefully, for the first time, with it being the fifty years of Milton Keynes, I think people have reflected and what I see in Milton Keynes ... and I think this is great but also part of the problem ... is very proud people, because we've had so much stick ... people say, 'Oh, it's roundabouts.' Blah-blah-blah. That boring stuff. People are like, 'No, it's great!' And so they feel like they have to defend it and when you defend something you can't actually analyse it properly because you're being defensive.

So, for instance, if I'm working and I'm working with a client and they say, 'Oh, this drawing isn't what we wanted.' And I go, 'No! It isn't what you ...' I can't make it better because I'm not listening to them and I'm not reflecting on my drawing and not reflecting on the task. So I think for the first time people have started to reflect and soften up on it and think ... and understand that Milton Keynes is an experiment really and there's nothing wrong with an experiment that might be failing in some areas but that's all part of the process.

So, hopefully, in the next fifty years, we sort of start to rectify the things that are missing, bring in new things. I don't know. Hopefully, culture will grow. I think we've got the business side and the money side and the ... I think we've got that down. I think that now we need to embrace the other side and let them both co-exist.

And also, I hope, in the next fifty years we have a style council that comes in and is just basically in charge of deciding what comes in and out of the city. That's what I'd love ... stylistically, aesthetically.

One more question from me. So if you go back in time to when the developers were making their plans, is there anything you would change like, obviously, transport's a problem sometimes but infrastructure and community ...

Yeah. I would not have let City Club fall at the wayside. I think ... talking to someone about this today, said ... do you know City Club?

Could you explain?

0:24:36

Yeah, I can. City Club was part of the original plans of Milton Keynes and it was essentially

like a leisure park, in a way of like ... it wasn't shops. It was bars and sort of playgrounds but very cool and artistic and strange. It was just basically like an adult's playground ... is the best way to put it. This was scrapped, I think, late on in the process and I think that was a really bad idea because I think that was the one thing that could have cultivated the growth of culture. Because that would have been a meeting place.

I mean, people compare City Club to the Xscape but, again, this goes back to what I was saying about style council. Milton Keynes Development Corporation would not have made City Club look like Xscape or host the shops and restaurants that are in Xscape. So, I don't know ... but, yeah, that's one of the things I would have done at the beginning.

And also I think the city is begging ... I don't know if there was plans to do this or, I think ... I heard somewhere there was maybe going to be a monorail or something but I think the city is begging for a form of transport that is like a tram. People sometimes feel embarrassed to get buses I think but the way the city's set out, it's like if there were trams and bars and stuff all up and down the city I think people would just hop on and that would just breed like. I think that would be really cool but I don't know if there was ever intentions to do that so that might be void.

I think there was actually a monorail planned. I've heard that before.

Yeah, being a (unclear) is completely down to the Xscape being built, obviously because you can't snowboard in England anywhere so that happened directly as a result of that in Milton Keynes. But what is funny about that ... when Louise asked me to bring some stuff for this ... I had a look back and I was, like, I didn't want to just bring anything of me snowboarding and then I realised the type of snowboarding I did was urban city snowboarding. So we would go to ... in the way of similar to skateboarding ... so we'd go to cities that had snow and we would snowboard down stairs and handrails and that was what we did. We filmed for video parts and did photo-shoots for magazines and things like that.

So naturally I'd walk around Milton Keynes in the summertime, when I was back from wherever I'd been, just seeing all the spots and being like, 'Oh, if only it snowed in Milton Keynes.' And there was two times, during the time that I did snowboard, where it did snow enough to do what I did in Milton Keynes and that was the most exciting time ever and it made me realise, when I thought about this and I found the photographs, that I've always ... whatever I've been doing, I've always tried to do it in Milton Keynes. And it was really exciting to realise that that had happened. I'd never thought about that but I remember just waiting for the ... I flew back once from Austria because it snowed in England and, actually, I was in Canada once and I heard about the snow and I flew back as well then.

So it was, like, I needed to do it. I needed to do something in Milton Keynes outside of the Snowdome and every time I did interviews for magazines and stuff there'd always be this question, 'Where's your favourite place in the world to ride,' and people would answer, 'Oh ...' I don't know ... 'The Alps,' or whatever they would say but I would always be like, 'Milton Keynes Snowdome,' in every single one because that was my favourite place in the world.

And all through the summer when I was back from wherever that was it, like every other night I was there but it was cool to realise ... so I've brought some photos of me snowboarding in Milton Keynes. In Campbell Park, in Greenleys, in ... and there's videos

and stuff so yeah ... that was ... if it wasn't for that I would have left Milton Keynes a lot earlier, you know. Or I would have hated it a lot. Or been frustrated and bored but the Snowdome was huge for me in that period.

You said the Snowdome was great for when you were here in the summers, (unclear) every other night. How much of that ... to what extent did skateboarding and the skateboarding community in Milton Keynes support your snowboarding? Did you go out skateboarding a lot during that time?

Yeah. I mean, they go hand-in-hand really. So, skateboarding in Milton Keynes is what happened first. I was always skateboarding first and then ... I can't even remember how it happened. I think I got a lesson for my birthday and just naturally I was like ... wanted to do it because skateboarding and, you know ... I thought they were similar. And I guess in some ways they are but it was really difficult.

So yeah, that ... I don't know if they supported it. I mean, they are two different things but a lot of the snowboarders skateboarded in Milton Keynes so it just felt like two things really. You know, we'd skate all day and then go home and get our snowboard stuff, go to the Snowdome and snowboard. So, I don't know about supporting but they were co-existing for sure.

0:30:26

If you could just tell us a little bit about the sketchbook.

These are sort of where the original drawings started for Milton Keynes. I'd draw some of the original buildings and the Point and just ... but pick shapes out of them and then that's when I was, 'Ah, there might be something in here.' Because a lot of the stuff I do is about, you know, stacking objects and shape and composition. So then I thought these could tell a story and I was really intrigued.

These are obviously initial sketches but the way ... in the Shopping Centre, you know, the reflections and how those trees by John Lewis, they go above the windows and then you see these bottom reflections and I was just messing about. And this is where you can start to see them again and, I think, I drew this and this is like the Snowdome here. Then I wrote, 'Nando's' again and then I thought, 'Ok, that's quite funny.' You know, like thinking about how many Nando's there were. Then, I guess, this is a bit more blunt but, you know, then I thought, 'Ok, you need to be clever about this.'

This is kind of ... yeah, this is not dissimilar from the final thing apart from it doesn't say 'Milton Keynes is shit' up there. But then, I just sort of worked through that and then this all just developed. Here this is like ... you know, this is to do with the reflections in Milton Keynes and sort of this idea of like walking round just being sad ... and this stuff.

This is ... here I have. This theme ... one of the original development materials of Milton Keynes. It was 'No building should be taller than a tree.' So I drew all these trees and then the Xscape, you know. It was just like ... I don't know that's just what it was. It was just funny. This is the original sketch of the one you were talking about ... about Slug. I mean, there's nowhere in the city where you can wear a hat. You know, these absolutely rubbish bars and venues have dress codes for whatever reason and they are the weirdest dress codes

in the world because they're not even, like, people dressed smart. I mean, Slug & Lettuce having a dress code just blows my mind personally. I don't ... and it comes into play after nine o'clock. And that's their most hilarious thing ... is at nine all the bouncers come round and they go, "Take your hat off." Or you've got to leave because of your trainers and you just think, 'I'm in here, paying money. This is the least classiest establishment. Why would you make me do that?' And I think this is actually the one that people responded to the most. It was just sort of Slug and then it's like, again, 'Yeah. Fine.' It was like, 'Fine.' No hats and I think people just ... people don't go there that I know and stuff because you can't wear a hat. Or they try and find ... I don't know ... yes, people seem to laugh at that one. I'm not really sure but that's kind of ... they're just all the sketches and stuff.

Back to filming again. You were talking about the logo.

Yeah. So this is the poster from the first event that we did with PRESS that I was talking about which is the Risograph printing press. This is the logo here. In the studio space that we had there is a big neon sign that's been there from the seventies when it was a community workshop, which is of the Vitruvian Man. So we wanted to pay homage to that because we were operating out of Galley Hill and out of that studio so we made our logo, the square and the circle from the Vitruvian Man. Then this is like a thank you that we went to the hundred contributing artists. I hadn't seen this since we've done it and then I'd just forgotten that, you know, it's all documented ... held at Milton Keynes Gallery ... January 5th, 2017 ... it marks the launch of PRESS ... 'an intent to build a printing press around new ideas and approach. PRESS believes in open collaboration and invites artists, designers and illustrators et al, to shape the future of accessible printing options in Milton Keynes. If you can offer advice, educational motivation please get in touch'. So I thought I'd bring those in and that was a sticker that we gave out and yeah ... that's that.

0:35:03

End of Interview

Transcribed by Stephen Flinn (May, 2018)