

Neil Kinnock and Glenys Kinnock

Video Interview Transcript

This interview is from a Channel 4 TV series called 'In Your Face' (available on DVD), made by Christopher Swayne and Bruno Wollheim, produced by Coluga Pictures.

What do you think of the portrait?

Neil: He's a great reproducer and if you are actually looking for some kind of document in a painting, whether it's of steel workers in the Black Country or coalminers or a bus conductor or an ageing politician and his much younger wife, then you want someone who will produce the documentary and Andrew does it brilliantly.

Glenys: He tells a story in his paintings and obviously it not just the representation on the canvas, it's the research that he puts in which I suppose all painters do because they try to capture that in their paintings anyway, but he must look for parts in your life that are really important to you and when you're chatting to him you're not really conscious of how he's tweaking out the elements that he will want to put into the picture. I don't think it took him that long with us to discover what might have been the things that make us tick and I think perhaps there will be some things that people might not expect, I don't think all of it is as obvious in the picture as some might think it might have been.

Can you talk about the objects in the portrait?

Glenys: There are two Nelson Mandelas of course which kind of reinforces how much the anti-apartheid movement meant to us both, certainly I was involved from a very early age then as students as well.

Neil: The Suffragette, I bought for Glenys this rather fine piece actually for Christmas some years ago. On the cupboards there's a photograph of my mother and father and myself on the beach when I was ten on holiday.

Glenys: What else is in there?

Neil: Bananas and your phone with the sunflowers because that characterises something else and then behind it there's a jade elephant which is actually given to me by FW de Klerk.

Glenys: When you were forced to meet him...

Neil: ...when I was 'obliged' to meet him and he gave me this lovely jade elephant

Glenys: Which I put into a cupboard until Mandela became President and then bought it out...

Neil: ...that's right, we just thought that was evocative too. And then the teapots I bought for Glenys for Christmas a couple of years ago, because they do two things, first of all they're, what my father would have called, 'dinky' but they're also rather nice reproductions of French Impressionists and so that there's the business twice over. This chair is my mother's chair and we had it recovered but it's the same chair that she used to knit in actually and drive me nuts but she used to sit in this chair because of it's nice straight back and she could sit and knit.

Glenys: ...and mend socks

Neil: and mend socks, and mend socks.

How do you interact in the portrait?

Glenys: We're not really relating to each other in it at all, which again, which isn't really how we are, because we usually are bouncing ideas off or you know...

Neil: or bouncing!

Glenys: So, we're not relating to each other but I think in a way maybe what he's trying to say is that although we are the two of us, we still have a separate existence and that we are capable of being seen as individuals. The fact that we're painted together shouldn't mean that anyone should think we are 'a team' and always 'a team' which is not how we are, so maybe that's a kind of strange reading with him, I've never asked Andrew. But that is how I see it I think, Neil is looking straight ahead and looking quite fierce.

Neil: and old.

Glenys: ... but I am not looking at him but also looking into the distance but looking slightly happier than him which again is much more true isn't it?

Neil: Absolutely, yes, as she said.

Glenys: I'm not a miserable old sod like you!

Neil: I thought you'd say it! But it was good and it was Andrew who decided, not announcing it to us in anyway, that this was going to be two portraits of two people in the same painting.

Glenys: In our home with all our things all around us.

Neil: and I think that's about right. There's enough of us sort of crossing over and enough of us in this cocoon that we've built for ourselves over a third of a century to say, well, these people are plainly together and they're not brother and sister, but at the same time they've got their own identity and their own contribution which I think was an insight on his part. So many people, especially in the more stupid things written about us, try to give the impression that here's this marriage made in heaven, that we're two peas out of the same pod and quite a lot of bloody nonsense of that kind which has never been the case. Thank God.

Glenys: How boring

Neil: It would be awfully boring!

What is the portrait about?

Glenys: It is a story about two people's lives and about, I think the parallel lines that our lives have run in and I hope it will be about the kind of passions and commitments that we've had and passions for our children, maybe for each other now and again and for our politics, I mean that's central as well. Our politics has always been in different ways and we've had different kinds of careers but that's been very central as well and I think what comes through more than anything is family and politics, they're the two elements that seem to creep in to whatever else is there, then one or two of those elements will be very much central to it.

Neil: There's the accompanying theme alongside the partnership, the family, the passions of course which I'm happy to say is particularly marked in the portrait so far as Glenys is concerned because as far as I'm concerned she is one of the greatest campaigners of her generation, of our generation but in addition there's the story of the transition from our backgrounds to becoming, I guess you can say 'a bit famous' and also middle class. It

is a portrait of people in a very comfortable set of circumstances which I'm very happy about, which I much prefer to the alternative, but I think it's also a story of that too, without any meanness, without any envy or acidity in the portrait but there we are. If you tell the story of our lives, our nearly 120 years between us as it were, more of those years in my end of course than hers, absolutely that's part of the story and it's well done, not intrusively but anybody who wants to think in depth about the portrait would see it coming through.