

# TJ·BOULTING

## TRANSCRIPT OF CONVERSATION BETWEEN BOO SAVILLE AND YVONNE JOHN OF GATEWAY WOMEN AT TJ BOULTING 25 MAY 2022



### YVONNE JOHN

I am Yvonne John. At the age of 39, I got married and the first year of marriage was so great that I decided I really wanted to try to have a child. Up until that point, I was quite ambivalent about being a mum. Also, when I met my ex-husband, who was three years younger than me, I was 38. We were at a place where we felt like if it's not going to happen, that's okay. I entered this marriage having the agreement that it would just be the two of us and all will be fine. At 40, I decided I wanted to try. Pretty much, I didn't want to hit menopause without having had tried. And so, we actively tried for three years, to just naturally conceive, and it never happened. At 43 going on 44, after a year of fertility investigations, I got told I had unexplained infertility. I had all the tests, my ex-husband had tests, we were all fine. If they can't explain why you can't get pregnant, they [tell you to] just keep trying. At nearly 44, if I had tried IVF, I would have had to pay for it myself and also would have had a 4% chance of conceiving. In that moment of hearing those two words, I instantly knew I wasn't going to become a mum and I plummeted into this world of grief. I didn't understand this grief at that time, I just was extremely sad. I remember just going home and falling flat out on the bed crying. I didn't even know how to explain it to anyone, because no one knew we were trying, but also, I didn't understand it for myself, because I had no answers. I felt like I couldn't even have any closure on it. I couldn't have any understanding. I was just left feeling very lost. I remember feeling a lot of shame

# TJ·BOULTING

because in my 20s, I had two terminations. I felt like it's got to be my fault and because of that, I felt like I didn't deserve to be a mum, so I shouldn't even be allowed to grieve. I remember when an older friend who had been through it all said to me, you're grieving, I thought that was stupid because I haven't lost anything and it made no sense whatsoever. She knew Jody Day, who's the founder of Gateway Women. She introduced me to Jody and Gateway Women, an organisation that supports women who are childless by circumstance. I did my first workshop in 2014, called Living Without Children. I remember being in that room feeling like I didn't deserve to be amongst these women and that if they knew my story, they would say I didn't deserve to be there either. Because I was telling myself I didn't deserve to even be sad about this because I had given up the opportunity before. It's very silencing and lonely because if you've not even told anyone you've tried to conceive anyway, which understandably, a lot of women wouldn't, or a lot of couples wouldn't, then how do you tell people it's not happening? Then especially when it comes to terminations, you feel like people are going to judge you anyway. That people will say you don't deserve it. So, being on the program, and being with other women who embraced me and allowed me to be sad, we worked through our grief. It was this place of acceptance and allowance because one of the things I realised, as I was working through my grief and hearing other women's stories, is that society doesn't let us grieve. It doesn't even let us say we're sad about it because in everyone's eyes, you can do something about it. You get all the fixes, why didn't you try and adopt? Why didn't you just do this? Why don't you do IVF? You know, the list goes on. I kind of remember feeling like I didn't have a choice. At some point in my journey, I was able to accept my grief and accept my journey, and even question why I wanted to have children. I got to a place where I wanted to reclaim my life, but society wouldn't let me do that. Because I had to stay in hope, I had to stay in denial, I had to keep trying. Because if I didn't do it, I didn't want it enough. It gets really hard for women to grieve because no one will let them grieve, they won't accept it. So, during that time, I thought, I really want to reclaim this story, I really want to have a voice and I want to give the voice back to the women

# TJ·BOULTING

who are in that situation. I decided to write a book, which I did, it came out in 2017, called “Dreaming of a Life Unlived”. It’s my story and a collection of stories of other women, who are finding a fulfilling life without children. I was so surprised that there was this thirst to hear my story and the story of other women who were in this situation. The more I spoke, the more women were coming out and saying this is me, too. It was almost like they suddenly had a voice and they suddenly had permission to just be open about their own journeys. I remember one time I was speaking, a lady in her 50s stood up and said: “You know, I’m childless”, and said that was the first time she’d ever said those words. Once you can own your story, it’s such a freeing experience. Then, at some point, Jody had asked me, why aren’t black women connecting with her and Gateway women, which I thought was a bit crazy, because I’m a black woman and I was connecting with Jody. When I started to look into this, when I started looking at my own journey and my own history, talking to my black friends and Asian people I knew, I started to kind of see what was happening that stopped us from actually talking about our stories and how we were seen in a white society. How we were othered, therefore, were kept silent. My parents are from the Caribbean, so I’m first generation British. I remember my dad telling me that I had to work harder because I’m a woman and because I’m black and we shouldn’t talk about our problems outside of the home. And I realised how much he was trying to protect me, protect his children. We kept ourselves trying to look good in front of our white peers. When we’re not seeing other women that look like us, then we feel like we can’t talk about it. And the more I was starting to see this, and the more research I started to do, the more I was then talking about the women of colour’s experience around infertility. I also started to see my own journey in the system because what I found, what I realised is how much I had to fight just to get listened to. I was constantly tired, I could barely function, and found out I was severely anaemic. That’s when they started to do an investigation. A year after that, I probably was about 46. At the time, they found out I had adenomyosis, which was causing extra heavy and painful periods. I was fortunate to get in front of a consultant that thought, let’s have a look at this. I found that I had ad-

# TJ·BOULTING

enomyosis and fibroids. Along the journey, when they knew I had fibroids, they wanted to do a hysterectomy, to which I was like, no. At that point, they were saying that was my only choice. And then when I found out I had adenomyosis, I really wanted to have a quality of life back. So, in 2019, I did have a hysterectomy. That's another thing I had to fight for, because it was almost like they didn't even want to do that at that point. I think through the whole journey, I had really mixed feelings and a lot of anger towards the medical field because I felt like I was really fighting just to be listened to, and then they were trying to give me treatment that wasn't appropriate.

When I looked back, again, on my research, I found out that actually hysterectomies are offered to black women at higher rates, and at a younger age. I think like 30% more black women have hysterectomies than white women, and between the ages of 18 and 44. There's a real history of forced sterilisation, there's a lot of stats that come out of America, but we do know it's happening here as well. Things like forced sterilisation, forcing women to have a hysterectomy a lot sooner than they would with any of the white counterparts. Not believing that black women have fertility issues because they feel that we're hyper fertile. Not believing that we have pain, as we're supposed to have higher levels of pain. All of these things really impacted on me being seen as someone that really needed treatment and really needed care. Again, they're weren't looking at me thinking "oh my God, look at these stats, we really do need to do something about it." It was really about not wanting to do anything, just kind of leaving me to suffer. So, I have a lot of anger, a lot of hurt. And a lot of joy, because within that, I meet a lot of women, I have a lot of women coming to me saying, you know, you're speaking my story. It's almost like I'm giving them permission to speak as well, even if it's only for themselves. Or to be able to just be in the family setting, where it can be extremely painful to be on a family day out. I've sat there before on a family day out and I thought, why am I here when I'm watching parents, grandparents with all the kids. I'm standing there on my own thinking everyone must be looking at me thinking "what the hell's she doing here?" Because I didn't

# TJ·BOULTING

feel like I belonged. We do lose our place in society, we lose our place at home, we wonder where we belong in the workplace. Because in the workplace now, we're the selfish career women where the mothers are the super women. It gets extremely difficult to survive, exist, and even be fulfilled or feel like you have to find joy anymore. I'm also a trained facilitator for Gateway Women Reignite Weekend workshops, that help women work through the grief of childlessness. And again, that's such an honour to be around women, and especially at the beginning of their journey, to help them face this difficult time and to start working through their grief as well. As much as there's a lot of pain, there is a lot of joy. I feel so privileged every opportunity I get to speak and be around women, helping them. It just helps me know that this was all worth it.

## **BOO SAVILLE**

Amazing. I just think you're very brave to go through that and then just be really honest and open with us about it. I think in lots of ways it frees you up to be that way. One thing I've learned in life is it's ok to show fragility and vulnerability, it is a true way to connect with people. There're a few things about what you said, that I think relates in lots of ways to my practice and my painting, one of which is friendship and connectivity. I think, through these experiences and art, for me, it's a very generous connective experience. And I feel very privileged to have those connections with people, even if I never meet them. I might see someone once who's seen something that I made and that has had some sort of experience with it. I'm lucky enough to get messages from people, because of social media, which is wonderful. I've learned that just being honest, especially with this body of work, allows a discussion about the experiences we all share. Grief has been the place I draw from, sort of my bread and butter for the last few years. Because of my personal experiences which have just been so transformative to me, that I feel something about how important that's been, in terms of understanding what love is, and connection, and friendship, and joy, and being present in the world. I feel like I'm trying to figure out what that is, or explain my journey through infertility. I tried to have a baby for 10 years. And I want to

# TJ·BOULTING

start off by saying I never wanted to have a baby when I was growing up. I decided I'm going to be an artist, I decided at six years old. Then, going through my education, and being a teenager, the general vibe I got from culture at that time about women who became artists was that you had to sacrifice having children. Or it was a very male dominated space and so that wasn't mentioned or depicted in the artists I studied. There was a certain language or perhaps lack of language around female artists that communicated, you can't be a woman artist and have kids. The myth of the lone artist. So I was like, well, I'm not going to do that then. So, I went to art school and it was just never on the cards. And then when I got to about 30, I decided to try to have a baby. Through my journey, I've questioned - and I imagine this is probably quite true of a lot of women who come to your events - whether you actually ever wanted children to begin with, or whether you were coerced in a relationship or felt unfulfilled when you decided to try have them. Or whether you didn't feel valid or, perhaps, my career wasn't going very well, so I have to have a baby or whatever, do something else. Then, I tried for a couple of years nothing happened, I went to the doctor's, and eventually ended up doing IVF. The second of three rounds worked, I became pregnant and then I had a miscarriage at eight weeks. It was a very long process. I was like it's fine, when you're in it, you're just managing things. And then when the third and final round failed, my marriage came to an end. It sounds like a sad story, but actually, it was incredibly transformative. I'm probably the worst nightmare to someone who's trying to have a baby, because that's what everyone fears, that your partner's going to leave you if it doesn't work, but it did happen to me. It was actually just very important, because that wasn't a very good relationship that I was in. It revealed itself through that journey. The support I received was incredible and it's really made me understand the connection between women, the connection of how important art is, and I feel privileged to have this ability to have a platform to show this stuff and to express myself. I think in lots of ways it's the journey of grief which interests me, the journey of growth. That's one thing from coming across Jody's TED talk, which is how I became aware of Gateway Women, that understanding that it's grief that is really important. And

# TJ·BOULTING

language is very important. Then, you can start reframing it and giving yourself a break. Because I think a lot of the time you think, I started too late or I didn't do enough, and you'd beat yourself up.

## YVONNE JOHN

Absolutely. There are so many things that you said that I can resonate with, also through other women that I've been around. It's just so normal and common to hear what you've just said. And patriarchy has a lot to answer for. I certainly was ambivalent about it, I really had to work through why I wanted to be a mum. I realised then that there's a lot of women, mums as well, who actually don't even know why they wanted to have children other than that's what's expected of us. Hearing my parents' voice, "you will know when you have kids". I realised that no one ever said you had a choice not to, or that it might not happen. So, you're not prepared to be in this place. Even though I'm sure everyone in this room is probably thinking "I know somebody who's childless", because pretty much everybody I've come across will say they know someone, whether it's a family member or a friend or a distanced somebody, everybody does know someone, then they think, I don't know why they're childless. A lot of the time, they probably just think it's a choice, they just didn't want it. Because of patriarchy, to be a woman, you've got to be a mum. You've got to be married and then have a child. If you're not that, it's almost like you're a danger to society, they want to push you out and make you an outcast, they don't know what to do with you. And if you're single, then you're going to steal everyone's husband, so you definitely don't want to be single. It's a crazy, crazy place to be in. And grief is so layered, it's an identity transformer. You really get to this place where it shakes you up. I certainly wanted to understand what I was going through, and every time I was getting to a place, there was another question. I was constantly questioning and unpacking what this all meant for me and part of that was also forgiving my younger self. I remember as part of the process, I wrote a letter to my younger self, forgiving her for the terminations. Before that it was the dark, shameful secret that I had hidden away from everybody. Writing a book, writing my story

# TJ·BOULTING

was the worst thing because I wanted to hide that part of it. I didn't want people to know because I felt like no one would grieve with me. But if I didn't tell it, it wasn't true. So, it felt really important to say it, but it was really hard. Vulnerability... I remember, I sang at a friend's party, and had a nice time there for her birthday. Afterwards, people said to me, your strength is in your vulnerability. I had no idea what that meant. Then, through doing the work, I started to understand how powerful it is to be open and raw. But you also have to know how to protect yourself with it, because people want to pull you down.

## **BOO SAVILLE**

I think while developing as an artist, you grow up and female artists that are visible to me seemed incredibly tough, especially during the 90s, when I was first going to art school, it was a very tough presentation of female. I never identified with that at all, I'm quite sort of wobbly. And I make a joke out of everything. I just didn't really understand how I would fit into that sort of toughness. I think that's just another defence mechanism that women often have especially in a male dominated space. But, as I've moved through my life, I've understood the importance of sensitivity through these paintings. For example, when I first started making them, I wanted to literally erase myself completely from them and I didn't really know why that was important. Then that changed into it being a generous gesture of sorts - in taking myself out, I just wanted to give it to everyone else. I'm not making some sort of marks and gestures to go, 'I've made this decision here, this is what I'm doing', I want you to just enjoy the whole of it. That's all I care about. Just take it all in at once. I think that understanding that comes back to caregiving and communities and connecting with one another. In motherhood, in the traditional sense of having a child, there's a lot of connective websites and it's a wonderful community for women who feel isolated, I always thought there's probably a lot of isolation in having a child. But there didn't seem to be anything for women who don't have kids and who need support. You just have to get on with it. There's no connective tissue, even though there is in private pockets and conversations. Which is why the website [Gateway Women] is

# TJ·BOULTING

so important - it gives a forum and a way for you to connect with people who are going through their own journeys, and a safe space to be able to talk about that.

## **YVONNE JOHN**

Absolutely. It really takes down some barriers that you're facing outside all the time. It's interesting, what you're saying about giving [paintings] for people to enjoy, and I think, shouldn't life just be like this? Without all these labels, or expectations or judgments on what it's supposed to be and if you haven't accomplished it, you've failed. There are so many women out there without children who are sitting there with the narrative that they have failed. The sadness is so heavy that sometimes I don't even know how they're getting out of bed. It's something we talked about when we were doing the weekends [sessions]. When we look at the grief, and what they carry, and all these narratives, and all these stereotypes, and all the judgment that is on us, it's a testament that we actually even get out of bed just to leave the house and go out. But then it also shows how much of a mask we have to wear. There are women there without children who won't even say it, because the common question is "do you have children?" It's like that's the one thing that's going to define us. And you will joke about it or people will hide and not necessarily answer straightaway. Because, actually, you can't. As soon as you say 'no' you don't have children, someone judges you for it or pities you like there's something wrong. I've come across women who had carried an extra burden of sadness, because they didn't even meet a partner that they could even try [with], so there's women grieving the loss of motherhood who didn't even know if they could conceive. That's another layer of it added to this complexity they're just carrying around with them.

## **BOO SAVILLE**

Yeah, completely. I was saying to you earlier that being an artist is unique in some ways, as you sort of sit on the edge of everything, you've got this ability to gaze over the edge, and observe everything. And so, I never really feel part of the

# TJ·BOULTING

bigger culture. Perhaps unlike a lot of people who are in 9-5 jobs and they have communities and weekends. I have a job and I have communities, too, but it kind of gives you a lens to look through the world at. I've always had that. Also, artists learn to fail all the time, it's part of your job. I think the failure part, for me, is very familiar anyway, so it doesn't bother me that much. I have gone through that feeling of if I'm not going to have kids I've got to be a really, really good artist. I've got to be, that's my opportunity. That is a huge pressure to put on yourself. I think, perhaps, other women feel that - well, I'm not gonna have kids, I've got to just be amazing at something else.

**YVONNE JOHN**

Yeah, it's like this life of meaning.

**BOO SAVILLE**

Yeah, life of meaning.

**YVONNE JOHN**

We have to become Mother Theresa or climb Everest. Actually I know a childless woman who's just climbed Everest!

**BOO SAVILLE**

Wow, that's amazing.

**YVONNE JOHN**

All of a sudden, you have to do this big, amazing thing for somebody to accept you. Because otherwise, what was the point of you then?

**BOO SAVILLE**

Yeah, absolutely. I remember doing a talk at Newport Street gallery, and I remember thinking, I didn't feel like I identified as a woman. I wasn't even sure if we were really here, if I'm honest. That sounds bananas, but I just thought, how

# TJ·BOULTING

can I define what is a woman's experience as opposed to like an animal or something else? But since going through that infertility and marriage experience, my view on that completely changed because I began to see the way people behaved towards me because I'm female and I guess in a word there's the misogyny. It has taken me a long time to realise that.

## **Audience member 1**

It's fascinating hearing you thinking and reflecting, I'm an actor, and I've had to imagine myself into all sorts of different scenarios, relationships, stories. That's part of my job. But the last job I had to play a matriarch, a mother and grandmother. And I actually thought, for the first time in my acting life, I thought, I don't think I can do this. Because I've invented and I've done all sorts of things that I don't know anything about. I've managed it. But I don't know how to be a mother. So how could I play it? What does it mean to be a matriarch, and to be a head of a family. I felt like the biggest I mean, if we can say that about ourselves as actors, I felt like a fraud. There have been many occasions where I felt like, I don't want to do this, but I can cheat, I can make it work. But that's the first time where I thought I'm an absolute fraud. How can I possibly play this part?

## **BOO SAVILLE**

I don't know if this is also something you've experienced, or not, or people you've worked with, about the idea of you trying to be mother in an acting role. And there's the mother, and for me, as someone who has never had children I feel it's almost like this privileged, holy state that you have nothing to do with. It becomes very fetishised in your head because you can never have it. You don't know anything about it. And I mean, I think bell hooks writes about that there are so many people involved in motherhood - librarians, teachers, neighbours, like there's a whole collection of people, women and men who inhabit mother. And I think that for women, we live in this society where it's almost like a holy state. A really good achievement. Ten points.

# TJ·BOULTING

I think it's interesting because Hannah and I were talking last week about what the ideal state is to be for a woman and I think that in lots of ways, knowing you don't want to have kids and living in that truth, and then just enjoying it is possibly the best one. I didn't want kids until I met my ex-husband, I've never wanted them, I was really happy with it. And then I think in some way, I didn't feel validated until I'd achieved that.

## YVONNE JOHN

No, absolutely and I've come across younger women who have approached me saying they don't want kids and being really, really angry that people around them are going 'but you will change your mind'. And it was quite upsetting because people literally didn't believe, like they didn't know. And I think that, you know, this thing around choice. And society cannot accept that you're allowed to make that choice. And I'm sure there are mums out there that really wish they knew they had a choice over this, because they probably wouldn't choose to be mums. You know it takes a village to raise a child, there was a time when I'm pretty sure that a child would have been in this society and not even known that their mum was theirs, because I feel like motherhood is also apparently about ownership as well. I believe there was a time that that narrative was never there. It was about the collective, it was about the whole thing, the whole unit. So all of the women in the village were mothering. And that child probably didn't identify 'that's my mum', they probably just knew them. They just knew they were being brought up by a collection of women and they all belonged. And it was so nice to just be in this place where it didn't matter who pushed the child out. But actually who's around to say that the person who did, who conceived and gave birth, wasn't the one that was seen as the superwoman.

And part of that impacts on grief, because people lose their friendship circles. Some of them do go off and have kids and don't come back. But some do circle back. And it's because the children are older. I found a place where I was being friends with grandmothers. And that was a very different place. Because actually

# TJ·BOULTING

they weren't wanting to run off and look after the kids or put them to bed, or it wasn't about the kids' birthday parties. These kids are gone. And they wanted to live. So they were enjoying it. And it was almost like I was around women who didn't have kids, because I wasn't hearing about it all the time. So it does change. But I think when you're at the beginning of your grief, you can't factor that in, you're just there going this sucks. And it feels like hell. And you can't see anything past that. And it just becomes such a difficult place to be.

## **BOO SAVILLE**

I think as a woman, from a very early age, you're constantly aware of your body, your body's making a mess, or it's being really inconvenient, or it's in pain or something. And it's these cyclical things, and then that gets really, really intensified when you're going through fertility treatment, because you're injecting yourself and you're going for scans or an internal ultrasound whatever, the whole thing. And painting for me became this place where, it's a bit like when you have sex, where you sort of disappear, you're present, but you don't exist. And I became so aware of my body and its cycles, and its movements, and its failures. And what was happening at any one point. So painting became this kind of place of refuge in a way that I could just do this very intuitive thing. And they started to feel like my children, in a way and I was incredibly lucky to have that. In a way being creative is probably very healing I imagine, for people in your workshops.

## **YVONNE JOHN**

Yes creativeness is such a healing place. I think it's because people can get lost in that, I certainly found that in writing. And I never wrote before. I found it's such a cathartic thing, just to kind of let it out. And you can see it from a different lens, which when it was inside of me, it was just horrible. But when you were talking about your art and what it gave you, I kind of felt this separateness, and you talking about the body this is exactly what happens when you're going through infertility, or even fertility until you get to a place of infertility, is that

# TJ·BOULTING

there's a disconnect with your body because your body's not doing what you wanted it to do, or what it's supposed to do. Because we were told, especially in our youth, don't have sex, because you'll get pregnant. So all of a sudden, there's this chance that you're going to have and it's so easy to get pregnant, and I'm sure people believed they'd just look at a man and they'll get pregnant. Then you get to this place where you have a lot of sex and it's not happening and you're like, this doesn't make any sense? I remember being so aware of my cycles and doing all the ovulation tests and being so regimental in the whole process, so romance goes out the window. And it's just very mechanical. I became 'babyzilla' I guess. And I remember when I was then going to have a hysterectomy, I found it incredibly hard, because the stomach area is the one place that women find really hard to connect back with. Because that is obviously where you carry the child. And when you can't do it, I had a lot of hate towards my stomach. And I didn't want to look at it. Before I had my hysterectomy I was fortunate I was in therapy at the time and it's something I've worked through a lot with my therapist. But before making the decision to be able to have the hysterectomy, I sat in a hotel room, I was abroad at the time. And I sat in a hotel room and wrote a letter to say goodbye to my womb. And I realised how angry I was with her, really, really angry that there was a time when she let me get pregnant when I didn't want to be pregnant, and then wouldn't let me get pregnant when I did. And also that realization that it wasn't just about having a baby, it was about having it in the right way. Because that was part of the narrative as well. So yeah, being able to reconcile my feelings for my womb, and then reconcile how I felt about my body was another incredibly powerful thing. And that's kind of what I feel your artwork is doing and it's like reconciling you with that inner side of yourself that actually you don't want to look at because that is the painful, dark truth that you want to hide away from.

## BOO SAVILLE

It's interesting because I think that everybody comes to these things [the paintings] from and within their own life and in making them so much a void that per-

# TJ·BOULTING

haps people project onto them, they become these spaces where everyone comes with their own idea about what the picture or painting should be. The picture plain becomes this transformative arena. But I think for me that's what these spaces are, where I connect with myself.

I just want to ask you if you wrote a letter to her, did your womb write back?

## **YVONNE JOHN**

No! (laughs) But I suppose in a way I have given her a voice. I never thought about this before. But telling my story has given her a voice because she was silent. She was the part I didn't want to talk about. But not saying that I couldn't have children was the part that was keeping her silent. Yeah, so there was a real ownership. I mean, God, how powerful was it to say, I can't have kids. And I can't say why I couldn't have kids because I don't know. But just to be able to stand there and say, but I still love myself. And I feel like that's such a gift to give her voice back because I like that voice. She's talking to you right now!

## **BOO SAVILLE**

But that's the majority of cases of women who cannot have children. It's unexplained, like 60% or something. You just assume you have something wrong with you. And it really isn't the case and I don't know whether that's because there's not enough research done into things or it's stress or whatever, but really it's unexplained. Talking about being angry with it, I often was angry at my body for not doing what I wanted it to do. And then when I came out of that relationship, I was like, maybe it's a massive favour, like you knew that that was not good. And saved my bacon in a sense? Who knows. But weirdly, we have these attachments to parts of our bodies. And that is again, being very aware of the body is, I don't know if that's purely female. I would like to hear from a man and do they ever think about their body?

# TJ·BOULTING

## HANNAH WATSON

It's not so much the physical thing that is the question, it's to do with its social influences, emotionally. I don't really think of it as a physical manifestation, it's about everything else, that you wouldn't think that your body would let you down unless it was a social construct. I'm really interested in this idea that everyone's got their own different stories: You didn't want children, you couldn't have children, you have children. A few years ago I did a show about 'birth'. And for Boo we didn't have to do the show about her IVF journey. The work came and then evolved through that. At the moment I'm publishing a book about an artist that had kids that found it difficult as well as amazing. So I'm exposed to lots and lots of different stories, and I'm processing how that works in terms of creating, and giving voice through art to personal stories. And it strikes me that we can't let this kind of divide and rule thing happen, where we don't listen to other people's stories. And you learn, because I think that's what is really powerful about having exhibitions like this, publishing books about it, is just having access to other people's stories. And that's why it's more important than thinking 'I'm a failure', it's just understanding everyone else.

## BOO SAVILLE

Yeah, and it's never anything I intended. You know, I never wanted to make an 'issues' show, not that there's anything wrong with that either, but I think it was like a tide that was bigger than myself. That was just the way it was. It's just an honesty that this felt like the right thing to do. But it's opened up this connectivity with people and this dialogue. I've realised that I was going through it very quietly, but not alone. Everyone else is, I'm having lots of private conversations with friends like that. But what's been the most amazing thing about doing this show is actually listening to everyone else, and the whole experience leaves you feeling less alone.

## YVONNE JOHN

Absolutely a winner. Because we are winners, because we're here talking about

# TJ·BOULTING

it. And even women who can't talk about it, are still winners because their life is valuable. Listening to what you said Hannah, I really wish we were in a place where we actually stop these labels and stop this judgment. Just accept. You know, this is my story, this is your story. And wow, these are amazing stories. And the absence of a child doesn't make it any less powerful than if there is one there.

At some point on my journey, it became important for people to see that you can still be a badass warrior queen. And you've gone through all of that. Because everybody's gone through something. And for me, it was just about being able to own it, which I couldn't do before. I mean, a lot of those times, I couldn't even look in the mirror.

## **BOO SAVILLE**

I think that ownership is really important because there's a difference between just being like, 'Yeah, I'm fine' to sort of stop yourself feeling undignified or to stop the shame, but there is genuinely a massive learning transformative power in grief. I think that's the journey - grief in a different form, in a different tempo, coming at different speeds. People always say having a child changes your perspective, but not having a child and going through that changes your perspective. Massively.