

Uzo 0:00

My name is Uzo and I am a study abroad student at Central Saint Martins from Virginia, which is close to Washington DC, the capital of America. I am in my last semester of undergraduate school and so I felt that I needed a change of scene. And London is the most diverse city in the world. And UAL is number five in the world for arts. So it seemed like a hand-in-hand opportunity to take. Because I've decided to study abroad overseas in my last semester, I had to do my senior thesis show early on, so I did it in December. So, I was just busy and ran around and I had two other art exhibits in December. So, I had three shows going on. I published a book in July, so I've just been running book sales. Yeah.

Academic Support 0:50

So what preparation did you make for coming here?

Academic Support 0:54

The preparation I made coming here was trying to pack as much sneakers because I knew I was gonna be walking a lot. I don't wear sneakers usually but I went about sneaker shopping. I think it's called like trainers here? UM...going trainer shopping. Buy winter clothes because people kept saying bring an umbrella, so I was preparing more for the weather. What did I bring? I bought Tum's which is like for stomach pain, if you eat food that's bad and I didn't really need that. What else did I bring? I should have bought some art supplies from home if I could fit it in because it is expensive over here, like things you would take for granted ...the American art supplies are actually more expensive here because it's American products, you know. So, I will like urge someone like if you have some art supplies, bring it with you. Yeah, everything I brought, I ended up using.

Academic Support 2:02

What did you think the difference in education, the difference in higher education?

Uzo 2:06

So, the education system for arts is very different. The American system is a little bit more constructed. And they want you to build up on technicality first before conceptually thinking, bringing your works together. And versus here it's kind of like they want you to think conceptually. It is not as structured as much. But it allows you to explore different things that you want to explore. You know, there's a printmaking shop here, wood shop, welding, casting ..there's so many things here that we don't have in my school. So I always say that, like they pushed you to try different things.

Uzo 2:08

Have you changed since you've been here?

Uzo 2:48

And when I first came, I kind of put myself in a box because I was so stuck. Because ....a few months ago, before I came, I just finally had a eureka moment on the kind of art I'm approaching... like what my art is. And I kind of strive to keeping it to that. And doing the same method of paint on the canvas when I'm in a new environment when I should have just explored all the options that I had. So it wasn't until last minute that I started doing like a carpet-making and painting on textile and trying

different things out, that I've never done before. So, I would say when you come here come with an open mind.

Academic Support 3:30

And what does an open mind mean to you?

Uzo 3:33

Be open to doing things that you usually don't do... like ...kind of expressing yourself in different mediums, whether it's video, whether it's a different sort of hand making.

Academic Support 3:50

And what is the advantage of doing that?

Uzo 3:54

It gives you ... it allows you to think of your art in different processes. You know, some processes might be faster, some might be slower. Some require you to build up your artwork a different sort of way. Like in painting, I do the background first and then the body, but here I'm doing carbon making, I have to build up the body first before I can go and start slowly approaching the print and the patterns.

Academic Support 4:20

And has that then open your mind to processes and to....

Uzo 4:26

Yes, you don't just have to be a painter, you can ... so many ways to just approach something. And it was nice seeing other people from the US who are on my programme, they were already doing like different things. And it was just interesting and like really nice to see like how they approach things.

Academic Support 4:48

And what about living in London what's it been like?

Academic Support 4:50

It's so small.. spacing is small. It's different not being able ...this is very different, not being able to drive around, but kinda like depend on the train. But I do find that, even if I was driving here, I think I would prefer taking the train, because it's faster it's a faster means. I'd also say the city is more environmentally friendly, you know, charging for plastic bags... because of the smaller space... more people are.. people hang dry their clothes. You guys are very big on like recycling over here too. So, I would say definitely more environmentally friendly.

Academic Support 5:29

Food wise, you know, sometimes in America you see Asian food, like you see Thai food, Korean BBQ, things like that. But here you will also see European foods like you see Polish restaurants, you can think about Turkish ... Lebanese, like more, more Middle Eastern, more European restaurants, which is really amazing to see. Like, if you go to Peckham and Lewisham you see like African restaurants, you'd see a lot of things here. So, I think it's really cool and I feel like it's ... it's good to have diversity, you can have an exchange of ideas and cultures.

Academic Support 6:07

Do you have any tips? Imagine if you were speaking to a student, and it might be someone in Saigon or it might be somebody in Belgium, coming over here...?

Uzo 6:17

The facilities here are not 24 hours. So, it's better for you to work in the morning and day, not early in the morning, I think it opens at 8.30. So, kind of getting in the habit of knowing that you don't have 24 hours to just be in a studio and create art. I would say here, the teacher is not going to be telling you what to do do this, do that do that. So, you have to come here with a little bit of structure for yourself and knowing how to plan what you want to do and how you want to execute it. And everyone else is just here to give you tips along the way. So, you just have to be your own .... you have to be a self starter, you know.

Uzo 6:57

I mean, I had two opportunities to make friends. And it was through my group ...like my study abroad group, and through my tutorial group. But another thing is they have groups here. They do have a lot of clubs and groups here, which are great opportunities, even though you feel like ... I really want to join that club, it's really one of the best ways to find people who are like minded, like you, who share similar interests to you. And it's a good way to make friends.

Academic Support 7:26

And do feel you've made some good friends here?

Uzo 7:28

Yes, I've made some good friends. Not all of them from this school, but a lot of them are just people who have always followed me on social media. They knew that I was here and so it was like, 'oh, let's all meet up', so I've had friends from Manchester drive down to see me. I've been to Brixton, I've been to Enfield. It's also like ... when you're being introduced to a new area from someone who is from that area, it is a more homely experience. They are showing you what they know and what they grew up with. So, I find it's more personal. It was a more personal experience like being... like it was like you were visiting relatives

Academic Support 8:12

And tell us how people know you on social media?

Uzo 8:15

I don't know, I think it was just friends of friends. People, I guess, the persona I portray is very friendly, so they want to know me and want to see me. So ... and then I put ...with my book sales, to a lot of people wanting to buy books, the people I met wanted to see books, so I would just bring it to them in person.

Academic Support 8:35

So what's your book?

Uzo 8:36

Oh, I've created a feminism colouring book. Basically it explores femininity, from different cultures. And it touches upon inspirational women like Oprah Winfrey,

Dolores Huerta, Malala Yousafzai, like different girls and women that have done things, you know,

Academic Support 8:57

What about skills and knowledge? Lets talk a bit about what you felt you came with, what you brought?

Uzo 9:03

I would say painting wise, I'm very theory-based and conceptually-based and technicality-based. So, it's kind of like what I know. So, when everyone else is critiquing, to talk about it conceptually, I like how you had the girl bent over and things like that while I talk about, I like how your colour scheme is, I like the brushstrokes you use. I talk about what's your method, methodology, like your method in getting to your work.

Academic Support 9:36

You come across to me as somebody who's very confident.

Uzo 9:39

I used to study statistics, when I first came into university, and I didn't love it. There are people who loved it. You could tell, they were very ecstatic about what they did, but I didn't. And I knew that even if I did continue with it, I would eventually quit ... I would eventually quit a job. So I took a year off. And just started painting on the walls... just decorate the wall. And I posted it on Facebook. and people were like 'this is so nice', if I look at it now, I don't think it was so nice but people really liked it. So, I just started practising and practising. It's amazing I had to work hard for someone to take my art seriously. And for my parents, because I come from a very traditional home. So they was very ... not supportive, at all, when I became an artist. So, it's kind of just working hard and, at this point, I just felt like I was doing something I loved.

Academic Support 10:35

How did you make that decision to move?

Uzo 10:38

There was actually so much support around me, you know. And then I would always just go online and research different artists like me. Find people who had the same interests. So I would see people like Njideka Crosby, who came into college pre-med and switched. And I would look at her CV and see what she has accomplished so far. And I was like, I want to be like her. You know, she comes from the same culture as me, went through the same ordeal in college, I want to be like her. There's people like Kehinde Wiley, who has been at art school since he was younger, you know, and it's just cool seeing where he is now, you know, seeing how his way of picking out models is the way I now like to pick up models. So, this is ...it was helpful, when I was able to look at other artists, who were like me, or similar to me, that I could look up to and kind of push me, because I was like, I want to be like that. And that was kind of my motivation also in a way.

Academic Support 11:37

And presumably people might be getting to see that in you?

Uzo 11:40

Me? It was interesting because I went to a middle school ..I went to a primary school in Croydon ... and I gave a speech there. And they were just so fascinated. It was the cutest ....and I had never received, so many hugs. They said "I want to be like you." Some of them didn't want to be artists, but they want like do anything. So, I just told them 'practice, practice practice'. You know, they'll talk about 'I want to be a dancer'. I was like, 'well just keep practising'.

Academic Support 12:06

This is Croyden in England?

Uzo 12:08

Yes. My school in America, they did a mini documentary on me, as an artist. And so I went to the alumni network. So, there was a governor here, who went to my school for undergrads. So, she saw the video and she invited me down to the school to give a speech to all the students. It was fun.

Academic Support 12:26

So what's next? Any thoughts?

Uzo 12:28

So, what's next? So, I've applied for a fellowship in my school. But it's kind of hard, because I find now that I'm in London, I can't imagine going back to such a small town. So I applied for another fellowship in Washington DC, which is more city-like. I don't think I'm ready for New York yet. New York is a whole different jungle. And then I'm applying for grad school, I'm applying to the Yale grad school programme. And those are my next steps.

Academic Support 12:56

Well done.

Uzo 12:57

Thank you.

Academic Support 12:57

And I wish you every success.

Uzo 12:59

Thank you so much.