

Student Voices transcripts: Gayi Interview 2020

Gayi interview 2020

Gayi 0:00

Hi, I'm Gayi, I'm on the BA Ceramic Design at CSM or just recently finished. I actually changed career to come to CSM. I was formerly a dentist and I had a hankering to do something in the creative field. But I suppose my family background was very focused on medicine and dentistry. And I, you know, when I was in my teens, I hadn't even really considered doing something creative. But after 10 years in dentistry, I really felt like I had enough in that career and I wanted to try and follow something I really wanted to do. And I started off in just some adult education, short courses and classes and really was drawn to ceramics and heard about the course and was sort of encouraged to apply and took it from there really.

Academic Support 0:56

You you've probably been told this before, but that must have been an incredibly daunting challenge to think of a career change from medicine to the creative sector. What was that like for you? How did you grapple with that?

Gayi 1:11

It was ... it was very daunting. Obviously, having established myself in a particular career, you feel very risk averse. We feel very nervous about what feels like throwing away all of that hard work and education and starting afresh in a totally different arena. I really felt passionately about the creative arts and I reached a point in my career in dentistry where I thought, I need to make a decision if this is gonna be what I do until I retire, or if I really want to go for it and try and do something else. Yeah, it was very scary, but I'm so glad I'm so glad I did it now.

Academic Support 1:53

I admire you for that. It's not an easy decision. Can I just ask you, when you were starting to think then about this creative environment. Did you have any expectations of what an art college might look like or be like or behave like, what the culture would be?

Gayi 2:11

I actually think I had quite an outdated view of it. And I thought... I wasn't sure that there would be the rigor that actually I encountered when I started the course. Because I'm from a scientific background, it was really encouraging and surprising, to me, to see how I'd say rigorous and devoted people are to their field.

Academic Support 2:41

So let's think about more about the creative process. Obviously, coming from a science background, there will have been terminologies that perhaps, might have been new to you. So, words like experimentation or failure or collaboration. Was there anything that surprised you when you encountered this new methodology around the creative process?

Gayi 3:08

Absolutely. And I mean, some of those terms apply to the sciences, obviously experimentation... and you can approach experimentation in different ways. So, you know, some people might think of experimentation as, you know, you're just throwing paints around and see what happens or things like that. But I've found that I was able to bring my scientific background to my working processes. You can find your own ways of making your creative practice work.

One thing that I did find quite daunting initially was the idea of art speak. I felt quite nervous that I wasn't going to understand what people were talking about. And it wasn't the case at all really. I mean, certainly you can find journals and things that are difficult to follow entirely but in terms of being part of the course and the way people engage it wasn't anything to be worried about.

Academic Support 4:08

In terms of that culture... integrating yourself into that culture, how long did it take you in your first year? Was that quite an easy transition?

Gayi 4 :08

I think I found the first year a little bit challenging, I think, for a number of reasons. One, I'd just come from a professional career and it just was quite an adjustment. I'm a mature student that I kind of felt like I was in between ages but I think that passed and our course leaders they use this this term, like a suspension of disbelief, to kind of trust in the process a little bit. And I think also being a mature student and giving up a career. I put a lot of pressure on myself.

I was really focused on I've got to make this career work. That eased for me in the second year and I felt like I gained faith in the process of this BA that it will make sense it will come together in the end.

It may not feel like it at times, but the programme is quite meticulously crafted. And you can't learn everything all in one go. Even if you really want to, like I did, it's introduced incrementally, building on your knowledge, stage by stage. And I think for me, the suspension of disbelief was to trust that that process, there's a rationale behind it. There's a reason why things are introduced in this stepwise manner. And, being able to reflect and look back on the three years, it makes a lot more sense now. And I can feel confident in my process now in my own creative process. I can see the development over those three years.

Academic Support 5:52

How do you identify now do you identify, having completed now your degree, do you identify now as an artist as a creative. Who are you?

Gayi 6:01

I had to... I was just thinking about, you know, doing a website and things like that. And yeah, I consider myself a visual artist working in ceramics, print and digital media.

Academic Support 6:16

Yes. How...how do you think you have changed in the three years so someone who is emerging, coming into this new space to somebody now that is establishing themselves?

Gayi 6:34

I think, going through this course has given me confidence in the idea of my own voice, my own niche interests that I can try and express and communicate to others. I think prior to doing this course I had an idea of what an artist might do and it was all about pick a big subject and make statements about that big subject, and didn't really think so much about who I was in it.

I think I've grown in confidence in the idea that say some of my more niche, geeky interests, I can bring that into my work, I can really engage with the things that interest me and communicate those things to other people. And that's something that really only happened in the third year that I started gaining confidence in that way, in my own voice as an artist.

Academic Support 7:33

When did that emerge? Or was that something that came through from getting feedback around your work? Or was that a kind of a self-identifying moment?

Gayi 7:43

I think it was, in part, because I started selecting subject matter that, say, for example, in my case, relate to science, relate to my background, relate to medicine. So, I touched on some of those themes in my work. But also on our course, they really immersed us in artist practitioners. And that was really inspiring because it showed me that you can, you can just be yourself, you don't have to, I don't know, select things that you think other people are going to be interested in, select what you're interested in, select what you're passionate about, and you can bring people along with you. Yeah, so that's something that just happened in the last ...in the last year, really.

Academic Support 8:34

So, let's move our conversation to the current environment. And I guess we don't need reminding that the last few months have been memorable, challenging, difficult. And my own personal wish is that we can take some good out of this as we start to reflect and come out of this space of lockdown and really think about the impact of what's just happened. But obviously, back in February, March, in the UK COVID-19 was becoming dominant and the rate of infection was going to have an impact on the university in terms of the provision and how we teach. So, I just want to get a sense of what that was like for you the first few days. If you can, perhaps think back to pre-lockdown or during lockdown, what was it like for you to suddenly have this imposed upon us?

Gayi 9:33

Well, I think though, there's so many things going through all of our minds, all at once. I mean, I was really crestfallen, purely selfishly just thinking about what I was feeling like ...we wouldn't finish the degree because ceramics which is my course, is very practical, very workshop based. And I think all of us were looking forward so much to that final push towards the degree show and also that community feeling where you're all like pulling together, you know, especially the final years, you're all pulling together helping each other out, loading kilns. And to see that evaporate away it was, you know, really demoralising. But then simultaneously, my dad's a GP, I was really worried about him and obviously the more serious side, worrying about everyone staying safe. So it was a you're really torn and all these different emotions coming to the surface.

Academic Support 10:37

I certainly think that's a very natural reaction to what would have been going on in your in your space in your in your world Gayi. Coming back to your own emotions then, suddenly, you're in this space where you're, you don't have your studio, the environment. What was that like for you kind of thinking about wanting to finish or needing to finish your BA?

Gayi 11:04

And for myself, there was a necessary maybe two, three week period of needing to mourn the fact that it wasn't going to happen. The way that I'd envisaged it these three years, you know. But once I'd gone through that, venting that frustration and disappointment, personally, I just thought, right, we're in this, I'm just going to see what I can do, and just go for it. I'm very fortunate that our course and our course leaders and staff were really engaged.

And you could tell they were just putting so much effort into making it worthwhile because that was my concern. I didn't want to just tread water just to say that I'd completed this final term. I wanted it to be worthwhile in some way. And when I realised that they were the same, that they didn't want us to just go through the motions just to tick some boxes, they wanted us to get something out of this period, then I felt much happier to engage and managed to turn my living room into a mini makeshift studio and felt like I've produced some of the best work I have.

(12.18)

(Really?) I did because I couldn't do what I normally do. I couldn't get into the studio and fire things. So, I had to think about how can I engage with clay in a different ways. I had a bag of clay at home and I don't have a kiln or anything like that. So I made sculptures and then continue with. So, I know obviously, this has been a really terrible, challenging time and I'm very lucky not to have been directly affected by COVID. But for my creative practice, this reframing has been really valuable. Sometimes your limitations push you in ways you never would have imagined. And that was my experience, you know, you find ways to adapt, we had some really lovely sunny days, and I realised I could use cyanotype this old form of photographic sun prints they were called.

And so I worked with that in my back garden making these cyanotypes which is something I wouldn't have done if I had access to the workshop because I'd be so busy trying to get things in the kiln. So, you know, I learned a new skill, I learned a few new skills in this period.

Academic Support 13:59

See, I mean to capture your process and what you learn from that would be so valuable to your process, the change that you had to make from obviously this physical environment to adapting online...and you've already mentioned that your course teamwork supportive, you've had to make some kind of changes in your own process. But more the practicalities of your course being moved online. What was that like for you in the early days? And of course, where we are now? What's that process like, having to work remotely with your course?

Gayi 14:37

And initially very odd. Yeah, it felt quite an adjustment at first, but I think once we got used to all the different platforms, it felt like it worked quite well. I think some people found it quite tiring initially, having these meetings online is somewhat more difficult to communicate initially, but then some things seemed to work even better online or felt more accessible online. I did some academic support drawing classes and I might not have done them in person because I lacked confidence in my drawing. And it can feel quite exposing to be in that class and around looking at each other's work. So, sometimes I might shy away from that sort of thing. Whereas joining online, it just didn't feel as daunting in some ways.there's a really loud rain noise where I am...

Academic Support 15:30

As long as your speaking close to the mic, I'm thinking it's fine. How were you able to still connect with your peers? Obviously, ceramics isn't always a collaborative discipline. But were you able to still collaborate or connect in this online space?

Gayi 15:53

Well, part of the final year for our course, they put us into small groups where we have kind of related practice. And so, we would have group tutorials together. But also, because we know each other fairly well, we would chat and keep up with each other outside of official University contacts to offer each other a bit of extra support and advice. And you know, we all had dips where our enthusiasm would wane or feel a bit isolated and we were able to pull each other back together again.

Academic Support 16:24

Were you able to still collaborate or connect in this online space?

Gayi 16:30

I'm... I'm not gonna lie. I did miss just walking past each other in the workshop and seeing what people were doing, that kind of casual engagement with your peers, it can be really fantastic. And you can learn a lot from each other in that kind of spontaneous ways. But we still were able to support each other through it and yeah, felt very much like a community even though it was all online.

Academic Support 17:00

So, one final question, how have you stayed motivated and what have you looked to or looked for, that's kept you going.

Gayi 17:10

I think it was in part the community socially. So, the friends I've made on the course and finding kind of like-minded people was really inspiring. The thought of watching everyone develop over the course of three years and seeing people come out the other end as these amazing free-thinking artists....that is quite sustaining. I think that idea of the creative community, that was something that was a welcome surprise to me.

Academic Support 17:46

Amazing.

Gayi 17:45 Yeah.

Academic Support 17:46

Brilliant. Well, look, we've come to the end. Thank you so much for your time, commitment, energy, and I wish you the best in your next part of your creative journey.

Academic Support 18:02

Well brilliant. Look, we'll sign out now. And yeah, I really wish you the best and yeah, good luck.

Gayi 18:09

Thank you so much.