

Student Voices transcripts: George

2020 Interview

Academic Support: 0:00

Okay, George. So yeah, if you can start off by introducing yourself and the course you're on.

George: 0:06

So, my name is George Bell, and I'm part of the first year of the products and furniture design course at Chelsea. And I'll be going to second year in October now.

Academic Support: 0:18

Brilliant, and what informed your choice to do you know, the furniture design course? What is your, what's your inspiration?

George: 0:26

So, over the last, say, five years or so, I've been involved in making and selling stuff that I that I made and furniture's one of those things that I have the skills to make and the facilities and I really enjoy the designing process. But the making is really where I find most of the pleasure.

Academic Support: 0:52

Explain a bit more about that I find that really interesting. What is it that you find in your own work that starts to challenge our own perceptions of what furniture should be?

George 1:01

I didn't start out, like thinking about designing a table or a chair. But I looked to the world to inform my practice. So currently, I've been taking walks because of quarantine. And I come across pieces of, say, construction equipment or rubble or really beautiful stones. And I just think about how I could turn that into furniture. Yeah, it's something that I would have never really thought that I would get into. Because I started quite traditional.

Academic Support: 1:33

What does first I'm going to move on to kind of your early experiences at UAL. What were the first few days of being actual see at UAL. But what those first few days like?

George 1:46

Yeah, it's mainly a blur. To be fair, the first term because of how fast paced life is in London and in the creative scene at UAL. But I'd had a combination of being extremely excited and slightly overwhelmed by the campus at Chelsea and also the CSM campus where we did some inductions. It's, it's quite a quite a nice feeling to actually have to start to realise the possibilities and the experiences that you may have in the future. Yeah, it was quite a lot actually. Yeah.

Academic Support: 2:26

That's amazing. So if I can just track back... you don't have to go into too much detail on on where you travelled, what you were doing in your travelling but I'd like to get the sense of what you're able to bring back from your, your travels. Is there anything that you took from your year out and how that's maybe informed your work on your course?

George 2:50

Yes, so I had made a conscious decision to kind of take a step back from designing and furniture and like the whole Art in design world and just experience travelling for what it is. And then after the year, look back and use that to inform my practice. The two main trips that I went to, were Thailand and to Uganda where I was born and raised till I was 10. Those obviously quite different cultures. And in Thailand, I was doing a Muay Thai course, basically to a multi camp. And what I took from that was discipline, mainly six a week and every day, multiple training sessions a day and yeah, it's, it's something that I that I wish to do again, because it was just so rewarding. When I was recovering from all these, all these workouts, I have my books out there with me and since internet was quite limited, the only things you have your books and your thoughts.

So, Thailand was quite interesting. In just helping me become a more disciplined and more well-rounded person, widen my worldview and give me loads of different sources to draw inspiration from. And going to Uganda. So I was 18 when I went, yeah, just turned 19 actually, when I went back and hadn't been back for about four years. And it's the feeling of being back back home really, where I'd spent all of my childhood till I was 10. And seeing family again. It's It was really, yeah, just just lovely. Like, that is the word like, kind of overwhelmed by, by by everything again.

(4:47)

Yeah, so it's very interesting actually, to see a place that you have so many memories attached to. It's a whole other lens, and it's experiences framed completely differently, but also gave me yeah, like a new perspective. So it's a very beautiful country. And I really enjoyed the experience that I had and relished every, every second there.

Academic Support: 5:13

Amazing. I just want to just come back to now your identity as a student. I just want to get your view, George, on your work now in terms of being a student, everything from academic writing, collaboration, failure, you know, your approach to experimentation, or suddenly having to be in a space where you're having to write an essay or a dissertation.

Academic Support

What was that like for you for, having to adapt back into that space?

George: 5:42

Yes, it was quite a dramatic shift from holiday mode into a traditional academic institution. I really enjoyed, actually, working at Chelsea and how my course is structured because there is a combination of essays and reports and presentations and also the actual making of a realised object. And through that, loads of experimentation and trial and error and failing quite a few times. I found kind of a way to game the system and used the quite vague and sometimes nebulous briefs that we'd received in some of our units for first year to explore some things that I'd wanted to explore previously when I'd hadn't had the resources that UAL and Chelsea offered. For example, there was a project that we did on salts, like a salt shaker in one of our units, and were to make out of ceramic. I'd been really interested in how salt crystals grew and found a way to grow them on ceramics. And that was a really interesting process and something that I would never have never tried if I didn't have the framework of my course and the resources that UAL offers and the freedom, basically, to explore and develop my practice in loads of different ways and nontraditional ways.

Academic Support: 7:23

I really love that notion, George, of you bending a brief to make it work around your objectives. How did you do that in a way that your course team or your tutor or even your classmates could understand? How did you get that across that successfully?

George 7:45

Yes, some of the... like the link to the briefs were quite 10 years, but I'd found that I have a way of presenting my ideas and my process that really gives people an insight into my mind and how I'd approached the brief. And I think just giving people in and into your whole process really helps them understand and helps you illustrate what you're doing. But one thing that I did was, I'd started to deconstruct elements of the brief, like a word. And then I would go off there on two different tangents. And I'd found that if I just kept track of where those tangents led me and which ones were dead ends, I could take people on a journey, and show my process and it can be really interesting for them to see that.

Thankfully, my teachers and the rest of my course mates, understood and liked what I was doing and the approach that I took. It's the storytelling of ideas and process that I find that I can I can communicate well to others.

Academic Support: 9:07

That's brilliant. And how do you do that? Do you journal do you have an online learning log to chart your progress or your process?

George 9:14

So, the traditional way is through sketchbooks. I'm not bad at sketching but it isn't my strong suit. I think that every designer and artist needs to keep track where their mind goes during a project and which tendency to go off on and what they research. I did that through communicating my points multiple times to different people, I'd found the main points people really understood and that really stuck with people, used that in my final presentations. It's just by talking to others about what I was doing and trying to convey how I went from, for example, salt to salt growing on ceramics on a ceiling...having to convey that multiple times really distills my ideas and makes it easier to understand.

Academic Support: 10:12

That's so valuable, though to be able to communicate that process and as you've just pointed out with a range of audiences as well, that's, that's so valuable. So I'm going to just move our discussion now just to the present time.

So we're going to think about lockdown in the general sense. What was the first few days of being in lockdown like for you as a creative?

George 10:38

I would classify lockdown for me personally was coming home to Bristol, from London, mid to late March, and coming back into my old room which is quite small compared to the spaces that I had at UAL, my studio at Chelsea, I had to take stock of the situation I was in and what would be possible in this situation.

(11:12)

The way that I like to work and the way that I develop my ideas is through a mature understanding with the objects and through working on my ideas with different mediums and with different processes. Being confined in a very small room with not a lot of machines available, or mediums to work on, that was quite trying, but that just allowed me to basically put a hold on developing those and widen my repertoire of skills and how I'd work. I hadn't invested much into the 3d designing aspect of furniture or products and I hadn't put much effort or time into learning the intricacies of Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, all of those.

Lockdown gave me time to develop these aspects of my practice and my skill set. And now with 3d designing, using fusion 360 that shas completely changed the way that I approach design now. I can illustrate ideas better, not just in the virtual space, I can transfer schematics from the virtual space print those out and then make a scale model is completely changed the way that I work. Yeah.

Academic Support: 12:41

So it gets very quickly then good because two more questions and then we'll round up but um, what was your experience of well, moving your course online? What was that like for you? So in terms of the lectures may be attending workshops. So in this space of the last two, three months. Can you recollect both of the advantages and disadvantage you think you can be? is honest as you want? Yeah.

George 13:08

I think that I'll just put out there like most students...and tutors actually... in the way that we'd hoped our final term in London would have been, and we would have hoped to get some money back due to not having resources and all that but obviously that's quite difficult to implement. My course leaders and teachers dealt with the lockdown quite proactively and from early in the lockdown period, were working on different softwares that we could use to communicate with each other. They ended up changing the whole brief to reflect lockdown conditions. That was quite helpful not just for me but for other people that have more deprived creative situations, for example, they don't have a laptop that works well. I found that the tutors handled it pretty well but it's still lacking in aspects that I was drawn to the degree and to UAL for.

One of the main things is the connections that you make with people just by virtue of the fact of being at a university that spans all across London and meeting different people through different friendship circles and events. And that's something that was quite difficult to deal with because I like to talk to people and find out what they're doing and that has helped me in my design process, but it's the lack of.. lack of connections. That is one of the big advantages of being in London and you have all these different companies and people that you could be connecting with, but being relegated to your laptop and video calls. It's quite a lacking simulacrum of life in London.

Academic Support: 15:15

That's totally understandable. And thanks for being so open about that, George. I'm very kind of impressed and humbled by your approach in terms of the confidence you have in making, or at least realizing, the importance of those physical connections. You've already identified that making connections with people in business is important. What advice would you give to emerging students who are perhaps even new to the UK or new to London?

How can they get an element of the confidence that you have in making connections? What advice could you give to people to make the best use of the physical environment that is London or any other city?

George 15:59

The main thing ...and it was quite a conscious decision on my part... was just to go to as many events and networking, like seminars, for example, or just be out in London as much as you can. Because opportunities can arise from nothing or from just a conversation with someone that can start off a new direction in your life that you've never really thought of. You can be the best artist in the world, the best designer in the world. But if no one knows or understands your work then you're going to have a very difficult time making money from it or having a fulfilling and successful career. I found that by just being out in these spaces, like museums, museum openings, like nights for when friends are showing off their pieces, like that Tate Late had some my friends show their work there. Being in those spaces you're just surrounded by the people that you want to be surrounded by, in your creative career.

This is why I like to get out to just my course and out of just Chelsea and go to like CSM, Camber well, the LCF locations because to have just the widest network of people that you even just know of, that gives you the opportunity to contact those people if you have an idea or if there are specialists.

(17:40) If you put yourself out there with your skill sets and convey to people that you are a competent designer or artist, they will come to you as well and ask you to help out in their projects. I've had that quite a few times. Like just from talking to third years, then ask me, like them being fashion students, they are asking me to help out with a certain aspect of the final degree show, for example, like a sofa that would hold their fabrics. You also get to gather a wider network of people that you can call on. And also, just breadth of ideas that you can have in your mind even subconsciously. They can inform your practice at a later date. It's something that I would urge everyone to do, even if they are classically introverted, because it is something that could change your life relatively easily. Yeah.

Academic Support: 18:44

Brilliant advice, George. Absolutely brilliant. One last question then because you've obviously articulated the importance of that immersive physical space but how about how you might use social media or digital to connect?

George: 19:00

I mean, this is a bug, not a feature in my personality. I don't find myself using social media that much. Again, it ties back to my design process and my communication process. I like to have things curated. For example, with my arts Instagram page where I've shown some of my work. By being out in London and by talking to different people I got the opportunity to get pictures of my work. Some of these pictures would be using the perspectives and other UAL marketing material but I have free range to use them in my website, my Instagram page. Just me talking to someone I got that opportunity. Those pictures were taken and edited by a professional. I posted all of those and I aim to use social media more because it's a platform that we can't go without basically.

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Academic Support: 20:05

But certainly don't rush it. George, you know, take your time because we all know when it comes out it's got to be authentic. And it sounds to me like you know, your work speaks volumes. And I think whatever you put out there on social media has to match, obviously, your, your high craft and your high skill and your knowledge as well. So, yeah, certainly, don't feel you have to do it because you have to do it but do it when it feels right for you. Look, George we've come to the end of our discussion. There's been a real pleasure, real joy speaking to you and I really wish you the best going into the second year and thank you so much for your time, your commitment, your generosity, and most of all your story really appreciate that.

George 20:43

Thank you also Richie for your great interview questions. It's actually given me the chance to work through some things that obviously that I've thought about previously but haven't quite articulated . So, thank you for the opportunity and wish you the best as well.

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