

Ayaba 0:00

My name is Ayaba, I am studying MA CCC (Culture, Criticism and Curation) course at Central Saint Martins.

Academic Support 0:09

What were you doing before?

Ayaba 0:10

I was doing an undergraduate degree at Goldsmiths University in Anthropology. Before I came to UAL, I guess my hopes were actually a lot of collaboration with artists, especially outside of UAL. Eh, also to have a secure, I guess, foundation for the career path I wanted to go into and also to be a bit more free with my artistic direction and also learn how to facilitate artists as well. Another hope I had was to understand the business side of the artist industry and also to be a bit more hands on with the financial side as well.

Ayaba 0:53

My fears were that I wouldn't be able to connect with people, to actually collaborate. I was just a bit worried I would find it difficult to be... I guess... open to ideas as well and not just restricted to what I would like to do. The course does push for a lot of group work and teamwork. So I guess from that point, I did do a lot of collaborations. I haven't done a lot of collaborations outside of UAL, so that's like, a hope that didn't really, I guess, happen. But I have done a couple of things. But it is difficult if you're just a beginner in this industry and also fears of being exploited, working or collaborating, and you know there's no profit. I need to start thinking about these things seriously. And I guess it was... especially at Central Saint Martins... because I think a lot of the students are already established. They've done their BA at UAL or another art school, so they are already kind of are aware of how the art industry kind of works. The subject I did wasn't really an artsy subject, more of a social science subject. Just coming from that background has been difficult to penetrate into the art student world I guess. But I was happy to find out that there is opportunity to use things that would be way too expensive outside of UAL. So like the printing, wood work, metal work, even though that's not directly related to my course, I do have the opportunity to have access to those studios, to those workspaces. If you know what you're doing, you really can maximise your time at UAL for your benefit. Another thing I'd say... like how can I say it... an entrepreneurial spirit that you know, you really do want to work for yourself and, you know, collaborate with people and push your brand or create a collective, so I like that...yeah.. at UAL...I guess I'm still still learning, still navigating my way at Central Saint Martins. So that's my experience so far.

Academic Support 3:00

How do you deal with frustrations? In any organisation, things don't happen, sometimes they go wrong or cancellations or changes. How do you deal with that? And how would you recommend other people dealt with that?

Ayaba 3:16

Well, I'm pretty lucky that I live quite close. But when I have kind of set aside my whole day to be at Central Saint Martins because the programme is going on, I think the best thing to do is always have your own personal project. I think that's one thing I do like about UAL ...going back to the entrepreneurial spirit... that you are pushed, to set up things for yourself and do things for yourself, so always yeah have a plan B that if this doesn't go on today, at least I have something I'm working on. So it can be frustrating and it can be annoying, but then I always find that I can't have just one thing going on. I always have to kind of have different things going on. So if something does not happen, you can always get back to something else and work on that. So, that's how I deal with it.

Academic Support 4:05

What sort of things do you think would be interesting for somebody thinking of coming here to hear about? What do you think it'd be good for them to know?

Ayaba 4:17

If you are thinking of coming to UAL, I would suggest to come with a plan. Know precisely what you want out of UAL....Make sure that you are aware of the opportunities that come with being... of going to UAL. So perhaps if it's like internships, or just working with partner galleries or museums, or even just partnerships, like in terms of printing... or... not just printing, there's so many other like partnerships that UAL have, that you can go to them first before you start researching other places to get your work done stuff like that. I think printing is the only thing coming to mind, but there are other opportunities that definitely you should look at UAL first before you go out into society or the world.

Ayaba 5:11

Another thing I would suggest is just be open minded. I know that's quite cliché in the sense that everyone says don't be narrow minded, but really just look at what other people are doing and learn from it. Be ready to absorb anything and everything when you're at UAL. Don't just stick to your particular genre of whatever is, if it's music, if it's fashion, or whatever. Just always, always be ready to know more, learn more. Yeah.

Academic Support 5:45

One of the things you said was have a plan, know what you want. What happens if you don't know what you want?

Ayaba 5:54

That's okay as well. Don't feel pressured. And you can feel pressure to have everything together. Say when you're around people, artists who already have, like their work been doing shown in galleries or like designers whose fashion shows have been mentioned in the Guardian or Vogue. You're like, 'damn, I'm not doing anything or I'm not working hard enough or I'm being lazy'. But no, that's okay. I think going back to what I said about being open, to just absorb knowledge, I think that's part of the process as well. When you have no plans just... just don't feel pressured to have everything all together. It may feel like you're ... like you don't have a particular craft you're working on but just do as many things as you can to find what you're comfortable in. Go to as many workshops, go to as many academic meetings. I mean, even then you can go to all of those things and still not feel that you know

what you want to do but again just continue, don't give up, I guess, continue to try new things. But also work in them and don't just give up because you feel that this is not for you. I'd say for a good three to six months, work on something and you find that you'll circle around, if that makes sense, that every new thing you try you kind of go back to one theme, one topic. And once you've realised what that is, just work towards that. But yeah, just don't feel pressured because I know I definitely felt when I was reading things and I realised that so many great people have gone to Central Saint Martins. And it's like, 'I have absolutely no idea, I don't have any, I guess, fan base or any exposure yet. And I'm getting older. What am I going to do? Like Time is running out'. But again, yes, it's good to find inspiration from other people around you and know more about what other people are doing. But don't compare yourself and know your time may be when you're 30. And that's annoying to hear....but that's your time and just work towards that. Yeah, just make sure that you're concentrating on actually knowing things and not just being surface level. So when your time has come, you have the knowledge to actually produce something or inspire people. And it's solid. It's not just like very watery, or you know, you know a little about something, but you can't go in depth about it. So just take this time to know, to really, really study and craft yourself to wherever you want to do. Yeah.

Academic Support 8:37

I think it's also really honest of you to say that feeling of I'm not good enough because of all these people around. That I'm sure it's something that people think a lot before coming. So it's really good to hear that.Risk taking, or experimenting, because one of the tendencies of this sort of competitive environment is that you sort play to your strengths. But actually that means that you're not so likely to take risks and do something that actually really works or doesn't work but pushes you in another direction. So could you talk a bit about how you're beginning to push yourself within your own creative practice?

Ayaba 9:19

I'd say by putting myself out there more, and that sounds, again, so cliché, put yourself out there. Umm, by submitting my photographs, or any piece of writing, and creative writing, I do. Just pushing it out to open calls at UAL, websites that are not part of UAL, but also perhaps before I would have just done an academic piece of writing and now I actually want to set up an exhibition and then have people see it, perhaps do a survey and then include that in my academic piece of writing as well.

Ayaba 9:57

So I guess with risk taking it's is all about putting your ideas out there as well and not just being scared that firstly, it will be rejected, and secondly, it will be used without you being credited. I've had a fair amount of putting my things out there and because I'm not too well versed in how to navigate with regards to the business side of the art industry, that my ideas will be used without me being credited or you know, paid. But again, just honestly, any work you have, it could be the simplest sketch like just put it out there. Look at what people are saying about it. Go back and revise what you're doing. So just know that everything that you create now it has a time to shine, I guess. So, I think the biggest risk-take I've had so far is going out of my box, not sticking to what I know. And it's is scary, I'm not pretending that it's something that's an easy, because I always like to feel secure in the knowledge I have. So like learning about something new, and then having to discuss it with other people who

are well versed in the subject you just don't want to sound stupid. So perhaps you like you may withdraw yourself, but you're learning, like just stay focused on the plan you have and just stick to that. And every single time before, I know you're not good enough, just be focused. And you know what, I'm learning something new, every week, every day. Yeah, that's all I can say about that.

Academic Support 11:30

And can you talk a little bit about different interactions that you have with other students and the members of staff?

Ayaba 11:39

With other students, when you have an idea, just speak about it because, especially with your peers, the more you talk about it, the more articulate you become about the subject, and the more concise it becomes. And you can narrow it down to a very small niche where you can begin to unpack it. So, with your peers especially, just talk, talk, talk about what you want to do. Again, with your tutors, I would say, is the same thing but have questions for them, I guess. Instead of just speaking, have questions that you can ask them, and then when you ask them, go back and do your own research, like just looking at journals, academic journals, even music. I mean, again, that's one thing that UAL has taught me. Don't just stick to academic journals, go to literature, go to music, don't just think it has to be some sort of official professional sort of research. It can be a children's film that you're watching that can link concepts for the project you want to embark on.

Ayaba 12:46

And even not just actual tutors, but with staff around, just listening to them. Like the security guard has worked at UAL for three or four years. He's had different conversations with different people. So speaking to him could be some sort of research. Because I remember the guy... I said him... I'm not gendering it, but just this particular security guard I'm talking about, yeah, he's been there for ages and hearing his experiences and what he has learned can also help you as well and can be part of your research. And also for my course, they've pushed the library workshops. So actually knowing how to research, the sort of language you should use when you're researching, actually has been really, really helpful with my present projects that I'm going to start on now. I always say go back to the workshops, because going to them, just always links you to different things. If you didn't go to that workshop you would miss out on. So, yes.

Academic Support 13:46

Maybe you could explain different interactions with the staff? So I'm thinking of like the one to one tutorials and how you see those as opposed to a group tutorial and seminars as opposed to lectures.

Ayaba 13:57

With the tutorials, and especially one to one, is more a mentorship. So what you get out of that experience is just connections, I guess. And then going back and speaking to them and seeing how, these connexions have helped you, because it's just one to one and it's more personal. And they will know more of what you're interested in. This continuous feeding of knowledge of, well go to this conference, or read this book or do that to help you gain the skills and knowledge you need for the

whatever you want to do. And more so, in a group tutorial setting, I wouldn't say it's general. Well, so far what I've experienced, it's more so on specific topics. What was the last one we did? Presenting your work, that's less personal, but you still gain skills that are improving how you operate in the art world.

Ayaba 14:56

In a seminar, again, is down to your engagement and how and you interact with a tutor because now you have like 24 students in one room, listening. So, what's important is that if there are readings, you read that, even if it's just one, or if you can only watch one YouTube link being sent. But just make sure you know what's being discussed. So when you get there, it's not like you're just getting knowledge for the first time and hearing about the topic for the first time, but you can actually engage with the tutor and engage with your peers as well. Thinking about the topic that can help you to rearrange your own thoughts and organise the way you think about it.

Ayaba 15:36

The lectures, to be fair I don't have a lot of lectures, most of it has been seminars or just presentations, like group presentations, student-led presentations.

Academic Support 15:50

If somebody is really shy?

Ayaba 15:52

If someone's shy, quite honestly on my course, you don't have any room to be shy, you might feel a bit awkward. But since my course is focused on group work and collaborations, you are constantly push to present with your group and by yourself. I remember in the first or second week, we had to present the proposal to get into the course. I had to do it. I'm not too sure I'm giving great advice with regards to the other courses, but I know in my course, there's the constant need to present, so after a while, I mean if you are a shy person, you can feel a bit anxious and afraid, but you just get used to doing it.

Ayaba 16:34

And I won't lie when I first stepped into Central Saint Martins I did feel it was a very violent space. So that can make you withdraw into yourself. But just gradually, I mean, you're around artistic people who yeah can be a bit snobbish and elitist, but also are interested in collaborating and knowing more about different people's ideas and their own creative background. So then you do carve out your safe space. So um, yeah. So, for any shy person looking to come to UAL, in the beginning, you might feel like you're just coming to university and then you're going home without interacting with anyone or you know, collaborating with anyone. But then gradually, I will say that you do get used to being around people, you do get used to speaking about things and voicing your opinion, and learning and then disagreeing and agreeing and saying why and bringing up things that have helped you.

Academic Support 17:31

You say violent, can you explain?.

Ayaba 17:35

When I say violent, I mean, just really, really, just isolated when you walk in and you feel that you're just by yourself. And even though you're in a room like The Street in Central Saint Martins, it's filled with people, but you just feel isolated. You feel that you're in this reknown arts college and everything is just unapproachable. You don't really have access to it, for me, that's what I mean, when I say it was a violent...and just a very hostile environment. And then you're there for like three, four months and you become more assertive and you know what you want to do. You have ideas and visions that you want to materialise and it's like, well I'm focused on my project, so, you know, you don't think about that anymore. But yeah, that's just my initial feelings and reaction to stepping into Central Saint Martin.

Academic Support 18:29

Do you think you've changed and developed since you've been here? Are you different?

Ayaba 18:35

Since I've been here, the way I feel I've changed... it has been gradual.. and it's still a process but I'm just ...I wouldn't say that I was narrow minded but I was definitely in a box. The artists I knew in the art world, in the film industry... I'm just surrounded by so many different people who have different experiences, that my knowledge is not Eurocentric, it's not just based in London, or Italy. I've just met people from Latin America, from countries in Africa, from countries in Asia, that have a whole different culture experience than I have. So, I'm just learning new things constantly. And I'm much more entrepreneurial. Of course, I still want to work with institutions and work in them as well. But I'm also focused on setting up something for myself, and marketing myself... and that sounds really disgusting like, marketing yourself, like we are human being, but like, honestly, that is what you're doing. If you're in the arts world, you're marketing yourself, you're creating a brand, or your branding yourself as this cultural phenomenon that you know, you want to make popular, you want people to buy into. So, yes.

Academic Support 19:55

I wish you every success.

Ayaba 19:56

Thank you.

Academic Support 19:57

And thank you so much for your contribution.