

UAL Student Voices: Alex and Jerome

SPEAKERS

Victoria (Academic Support), Alex, Jerome

Victoria (Academic Support) 00:00

Well welcome Jerome and Alex, we actually met by chance in the cafe in LCF. And I was really interested to hear the reflections of two students doing fashion at the MA level, and you kindly agreed to come and talk. So, really welcome. And perhaps just tell us a little bit about yourselves.

Alex 00:25

Well, I'm Alex and I'm studying menswear, MA, menswear design and technology. We're just entering our second year. I'm originally from Newcastle. And I moved here obviously, to start the degree. I just always knew that I wanted to be in fashion, there was never really any other possibility or any other any other interest. Yeah, like when I was like 12 years old, I asked for a sewing machine for Christmas. And me my brother used to play with dolls and like make little clothes them and stuff like that. But I think I really went into menswear when I studied my undergrad. I don't know what really drew me to Menswear. I actually design non-binary, but I think the reason that I chose menswear is I'm very interested in deconstructing masculinity. And using my own experience of growing up within a working-class community, and working-class family, and the connotations of masculinity that has and putting that into my work, and kind of subverting what menswear is. So, I think that's why I'm in menswear now.

Victoria 01:38

So interesting. I hope we can discuss that a little bit further. Yeah, a bit later on. Thank you. So, Jerome...

Jerome 01:45

So hi, my name is Jerome. I'm also studying Menswear Design and Technology. I'm originally from Belgium, a small town in south of Belgium. And actually, I wasn't supposed to study fashion at all. One day, I met a girl. And she told me that she was studying fashion in my hometown. And I spent a few years studying for medical school. And there were the open days. And my mom thought that I was going to the university to visit the med school. And I lied to her. And I went to the fashion school. It wasn't what I was supposed to do. It wasn't what I was prepared for, especially with my secondary school. I was the only one who made a degree in art and design. So yeah, finally she would agree with that. And I studied fashion in my hometown luckily. And it was really more focused on sewing and very technical approach, not really into design, actually. We didn't have any course about menswear. And I feel like it's kind of fashion as well, especially nowadays because menswear is coming up. And so yeah.

Victoria 03:09

So tell us about the course and some of the developments for you and your ideas, because so much is happening outside of the course in the world. How is that influencing what you're doing and who you are?

Alex 03:23

Well, I think we can both say that we've developed a lot.

Jerome 03:27

Yeah, that's right.

Alex 03:28

When you reflect back to the time that we first met, it was actually just before the course started a pre semester brief. And just looking back to the people that we were then, like so much has changed since then, and moving to London. And the great thing about our Masters is it helps you to develop what you already have. It's not about teaching you something brand new. It's about analysing what you have, and helping you to evolve that and hone in that skill.

[04:02]

So, it's kind of like a pressure cooker really forces you to like, tease out the things that you're really interested in, and really push yourself to progress those things. There's obviously a lot of stuff that's going on in the world. And sometimes it's a kind of a dual edged sword. Sometimes it makes you want to just dive into your work and not think about anything. But at the same time, it puts a lot of things in perspective. And it's really easy to get very anxious about your work and to think that it's extremely important, which it is, but you can get so wrapped up in your work and you can get so wrapped up in what you're doing that you lose perspective. And I think with everything that's going on in the world right now, it puts things into just a bit more perspective.

Jerome 04:51

Yeah, I think we're trying to work as much as possible with sustainability. It's a mental check, I think, and even course leaders and lectures, they're pushing us also to really put sustainability in our work. Yeah, it has to be a part of the project. Definitely.

Alex 05:12

Yeah, we have to consider our impacts that are created from our decisions. It's not just about finding the most sustainable materials, or having the least amount of impact on the planet, it's being aware of your choices, and being aware of that impact, and evaluating what's the downsides. What's the upsides? How can you improve your decisions, but moreover, just being transparent about how you are thinking about your impact on this planet. So that's definitely one thing. But I think we can change a lot with fashion. I know that sounds a little bit corny. But in my, my experience, people wearing certain things is an act of revolution, like we see all the time, people, queer people stepping on the street, being their authentic selves, that is revolution, that's protest, and just wearing something that reflects who you really are, that is so powerful. And we can do that through fashion. And we can give people the tools to be able to do that. And that's what I strive for in my work. I want to represent the queer community, and give people that voice that they are here. They are important. Yeah, we can definitely cause change.

Jerome 06:38

That's why we're here. That's why we're here. We're the future of fashion.

Alex 06:41

Yeah.

Jerome 06:42

Yeah, In my case, I'm working on different techniques with the juxtaposition of different techniques from all the garments that were not supposed to be fashion, but they're gonna be fashion. The garment that I'm working on, and the gear that I'm taking my inspiration on, are not supposed to be, yeah, as I said, the fashion but they can have.

Victoria 07:08

Can you tell us what those are?

Alex 07:08

But we're taught to try and not say too much. But...

Jerome 07:18

I could give you yeah...

Victoria 07:21

Well give another example that you're not doing. Because I can't imagine materials that aren't supposed to be worn.

Alex 07:31

It's a fusing of two different categories, basically.

Jerome 07:35

Like, you can imagine, for example, how the military gear became fashion. So, I'm working in another gear, maybe it's a little bit more related to war.

Alex 07:49

That's a good example.

Jerome 07:51

That's a good example, is it? Perfect...

Victoria 07:55

And how, how will that impact us?

Jerome 08:00

Um, a lot of people around me said they don't like to wear the traditional tailoring. So, the white shirt, the tailor jacket and tailored trousers, so I'm working on changing this into something more comfortable, and to help people to feel more of themselves.

Victoria 08:22

And in thinking these things through, do you have to really examine your own motives, because it's, yeah, it's personal, isn't it?

Alex 08:31

It's so personal, it can be so scary to put your work out there when it's basically a reflection of yourself. And of you're... your brain, and the way that your mind works. And it is a very, very vulnerable thing to do. And personally, like, I've always been my worst critic, I'm constantly evaluating what I'm doing. I'm constantly analysing the outcomes of everything that I do, it can take the creativity out of it. And you can often find yourself overthinking or becoming stuck. And especially in menswear, there's a lot of codes, and there's a lot of tradition. And there's a lot of rules of what is right. And sometimes when you feel like you're breaking those, you sometimes feel like you're second guessing yourself, because you can't necessarily envisage it because it's not been done before.

[09:26]

So you've got to find that balance of evaluating what you're doing and being self-aware of your work to push yourself further but also allowing your creativity to flow and that's something that I'm working on personally at the moment. I think the lockdown, just these past couple years in general, I think probably has put a bit of a knock in my confidence. And kind of fighting those voices that say you're not good enough or what you're doing isn't good. Or you're not pushing yourself enough. They can be so debilitating and trying to overcome those voices and put the fun back into what you're doing again. We've been in such a serious world for so long now. And not everything has to be serious, we can have fun. We're allowed to have fun.

Jerome 10:20

Yeah, that's right. I think we're putting a lot of pressure on ourselves. I mean, a few years ago, I had some health problem because of stress. Because let's be honest, stress is an illness. And I lost a lot of weight. And I was in my third year of BA, because the BA college, the BA collection was such a big thing. And at the end, when we look at it, we're just like, no, it's not, it's not that big deal. But the whole year was such a nightmare. And after I graduated, I decided to completely stop studying. So I decided to work as a sales advisor. And I still had this feeling inside of me that I'm supposed to do much more than what I've done.

[11:07]

Because my school was such a small school, like, I'm the only a student from the school to do a master in another country in a big university, such as UAL. And I'm extremely proud of myself, because I've done it, I was so afraid to do the same mistake. But I think this whole year, working as a sales advisor, just having confidence in myself really helps me and now I have tips for myself, to know how to deal with stress and how to manage my stress when it happens. And I think everyone should find their own balance, and their own tips. Because if we think about it, this thing, the Master's, it's such a big deal when we think about it, but at the end, it's just clothes, it's just a piece of fabric that we're just gonna wear, and it's kind of in the wardrobe... and that's it. And each collection changes every time. It's just like a new beginning each time. So, if something doesn't work, it's okay. Because, as I said, it just clothes

Alex 12:21

And you can often learn so much from your mistake, it might take you in a completely different direction. And I think we, we feel so much pressure that we have to be the best. And that's what we're here to do. We are here to be the best, of course, we wouldn't be doing this course, if we didn't want to be the best and a bit of healthy competition is great. And it's great that we can push ourselves in this way. And we have this opportunity to really propel ourselves. But yeah, as you said, try not to take it too seriously, and have fun with it. Going back to the fun.

Jerome 12:58

We should learn from what we're saying,

Alex 12:59

Yeah we should practice what we preach.

Jerome 13:01

Exactly, yeah.

Victoria 13:05

Is there much collaboration in your course, does there need to be or... I have vision that you might all be working on your own projects?

Alex 13:13

I think as creatives we're inherently collaborative. We have to bounce ideas off each other. We're constantly absorbing new things, and learning from other people. And there's part of your work that is so special to you, or so personal that you maybe want to keep it to yourself. But in terms of our class this year, there's quite a broad range of people from different backgrounds. And it's been really interesting to learn perspectives from other people. Going back to that first presentation we ever did pre semester, seeing people's methods, and their approaches towards that singular brief. Their way of being creative was so refreshing, because you can often just become a bit isolated and think that your process is the right process. And seeing other people's views is really interesting, especially when they're from different cultural backgrounds, their new or they're from a different country, because that will inform their work, and that will inform how they make decisions in their creativity.

Jerome 14:23

Yeah, I think the culture is influenced a lot. Talking about collaboration, has you said we'll learn from each other in a class, we have to collaborate to challenge in in first year. And we learn so much from this challenge because it's fashion photography, fashion marketing, fashion women's wear, and we're all from different background, from different parts of the world, joining in the same challenge and we learn so much and even... and we can network with them. And from these people we meet other people and so on... and this is how we build a fashion network and in a fashion culture, a fashion future.

Victoria 15:12

What else should we talk about?

Alex 15:15

I would quite like to talk about coming from working class background. I've had a very fortunate life, obviously, I'm here, and very supportive parents. One thing that I would love to just encourage is that people from working class backgrounds come to spaces like this and fill spaces in institutions, where their voice can be represented. Obviously, if that's doable for them, I had to save for a year before coming here. And even still, finance is I guess... a big worry. I have to support myself and I work on the weekends. But I would like to just say that your presence in places like this is fundamental. And there is help from the universities for people with disadvantaged backgrounds or low-income families.

[16:08]

For instance, I applied for the UAL scholarship, and I got it through the academic recognition route. Basically celebrating hard work, I guess? But if I couldn't have got that scholarship, or grant, it wouldn't have been possible, really, for me to be here and to afford the collection. Because that's another big thing with fashion courses, or, I suppose a lot of creative courses as well, is the production of your collection is almost just as much as the course itself. You really have to plan, it might feel a little bit alienating at first, you might get some funny remarks about, you know, an accent, or you might feel the imposter syndrome creeping in that you don't belong. But let that drive you let that be your driving force in your work and bring it into your work, I do. I do a lot about class and gender within class. So, use it to your advantage, if you can, and let your voice be heard.

Jerome 17:18

I couldn't agree more honestly. It's funny when you said the imposter thing, because I consider myself as the biggest imposter in LCF, especially in MA, because from my BA people usually just go and work after that. But I didn't want that I wanted to work at the top, like, improve myself. And as Alex, I worked last year to save money to be here. And all the money now is just for living, and to finance the collection. I'm going back to Belgium in July and August to work again, to save money for the collection. So if you want something, just fight for it, because even if you think that you're not supposed to be at this place, if you want this, just fight for it, just work for it and just believe in yourself. You need to do this work on yourself. Yeah, if you want something, just go for it. And don't look back, just go for it.

Alex 18:20

I feel an Oscar coming on. [laughs]

Jerome 18:22

[Laughs]

Victoria 18:29

You're talking about tenacity and determination and belief in yourself. That's what's got you to work for a year to put up with the resistance to apply for a scholarship. There's something in you that thinks that I'm meant to be doing this, and I just got to get there.

Alex 18:46

Definitely, you've got to have that. I mean, it waivers, sometimes you believe in yourself more than others. One big driver for me is fear of failure, for sure. That's probably why I put a lot of pressure on myself. I think we're in such a culture where we're made to feel that you've got to be hyper productive, and you've got to do the most you've always got to be the best. But it's not about that. It's about

whatever life you choose, that's fine. I had this drive in me to just go a bit further. Yeah, and I think you've got to keep that or you've got to believe that you have the strength to get through these hard things because a master's isn't easy. And while it's amazing, it is hard work. And you've got to be willing to put in that work.

Jerome 19:34

I think when we started this semester, I think I can speak for everyone in our class. We didn't expect to be able to work as much as we're doing right now. And I think I'm going to talk about myself. I have the still flame inside of me, which like burn and burn and I know where I'm going and know what I want and I'm really sticking there. I think we all have goals in our life, we're just afraid of doing it because we think we're not allowed in some case, or we're not capable of it. But we need to take risks. And the most successful people took risks to be where they are. And, yeah, I think this is what we have to do. And this is why we are here because we had to submit an application to make an interview. So, in a way, we took risks. So in life, we need to work for what we want, and to just stake and hide to the little flame we all have inside of us, and work as much as we can to achieve this.

Alex 20:42

I feel like when applying for LCF, I think things kind of just felt right. I've just felt like everything aligned. And I just followed that feeling that gut feeling that this is where I'm supposed to be. I don't think anything can fully prepare you for a course. But it's kind of just worked out. And I feel like I'm in the right place.

Jerome 21:04

Exactly. This is the right place. We can we can say that, I think

Victoria 21:09

It's not all been handed to you on a plate. And here you are and really, really best wishes and good luck. And one question, where do you think you'll be in 10 years' time?

Alex 21:21

Such a good question.

Jerome 21:22

Oh yeah.

Alex 21:24

I can barely think beyond next week.

Jerome 21:27

Yeah!

Alex 21:30

I'm going to have my own label. I'm going to be a designer with my own company. And that's what I've always envisaged and that's what I'm going to be.

Jerome 21:44

I'm going to be creative director of a brand and building my own label on the side. I can see that for you.

Victoria 21:54

Thank you so much.

Alex 21:55

Thank you so much.

Jerome 21:56

Thank you.

Alex 21:56

It's been really good

Jerome 21:57

Yeah.