

Bobby

Hi, Esmeralda. Hi, Laura.

Esmeralda

Hello

Bobby

Just to say that we met because we're all on the same course, which is MA Fine Art Digital, which we started around November 2020. And this is the first time this course existed. But it's also been quite interesting, because so many courses had to go online. And when I was, you know, after I'd enrolled, I was looking on the UAL website. And, first of all, I found this job, I was looking for a job and I was thinking, okay, well, this is an online job quite interesting, because, you know, I can do most of this job online. Because I'm a digital student, we're all kind of distance learning. At the moment I'm in France, where are you, Laura?

Laura

I'm in Barcelona at the moment.

Bobby

And, and your nationality is?

Laura

I'm Spanish. I'm from Barcelona. I'm from here. But normally, I live in Bristol. I'm studying the course online as well. But from Bristol, now I'm here visiting my family and friends.

Bobby

That's really nice. And, Esmeralda, what nationality are you?

Esmeralda

I'm Greek and I'm living in Athens and doing the course from here, or from other places around Greece.

Bobby

Okay, and, and yeah, when I found my job online, at the same time I also remember seeing about this, the UAL Language Project and that's that's mainly what we're going to be talking about today. Because I'm interested in finding out, you know, what Laura and Esmerelda did, and what they discovered through doing that. So first of all, how did you come across the Language Project? Do you want to go first, Esmeralda?

Esmeralda

I think actually, Laura should go first, because I found out about it through Laura. She mentioned it in one of our Tuesday meetings, which is when we meet every week for the course. And I was actually interested in language at the time. And then Laura mentioned that she was taking part in this and how interesting it was and that we should check it out. And that's how I got on it.

Laura

I found out about it in the newsletter from UAL, which arrives in my email, and I always open and go through it and check all the opportunities available. And yeah, you realise this was about to happen. This language project, which is a collaborative process for all the students and postgraduate students in UAL. And so it was very interesting. And yeah, I just went to the first meeting. And thought wow, I mean I just shared it in the class thinking maybe somebody wants to join as well.

Bobby

And so, could you tell us a little bit about the Language Project? Did you say you had an online meeting with other UAL students? How many students were there?

Laura

So, I think I don't know the exact number of students that were there, but maybe 20 or 30, or something like that. At first, it was quite informal, and we were just chatting about the project and knowing what it was gonna be like, more or less and showing us some, some former student's collaborations.

Bobby

Okay, so for example, Laura, you were in Bristol, and Esmeralda was in Athens, and the other students normally they would have all been in London, I presume, because, you know, their courses were, you know, at the university, but because of times of COVID, because of the confinements, a lot of people were actually not there and actually one of my friends, my fellow postgraduate and Ambassador Yulin was probably communicating in that meeting with you guys from Taiwan at the time. Can you remember some of the places that people were?

Esmeralda

Yeah, my collaborator, one of them is Italian and she was in Italy at the beginning of the project and then I think UAL opened again, and she was back in London towards the end. And then another one was also supposed to be London, she's doing the MA Fine Arts course, the live one. She was staying in Oxford, I think with her family. With the times, it was interesting, because, you know, you would see everybody's apartment and their studios being there, like temporary studios being their apartments, or anywhere that they could find, really. And I was in Greece, and I was actually moving. Also, I wasn't in Athens, because of COVID, I kind of left for the countryside for a while. So then we had all of these different locations that we were communicating from.

Bobby

And then we separated into four groups or something like that?

Laura

Well, Karen shared a word doc, where we could write down our names, our contacts, and what we were interested in working on. And I remember just reading through it, and I found a student, Eva. But she was from Iceland. And she was interested in something that I'm interested: in dreams and the subconscious and all this kind of ephemeral landscape. And yeah, I just thought it would be really interesting to work with her. So I just contacted her. And we collaborated together. But apart from that, I think they were breaking up the room into different groups. And we were talking with each other to get to know each other a bit.

Bobby

Was that all done on Teams or Zoom?

Laura

In Teams.

Bobby

Okay. And Esmeralda, how was it for you?

Esmeralda

I actually missed the first meeting, because it took place before I got to find out about the project. And then in the second one, I think there were a couple more of us who were kind of new. And then one of my collaborators, Marine, started talking about her ideas and the project, which I found really interesting. And then a couple of other people thought so too. So yeah, I went on that word document that Laura talked about before and I found her contact details and reached out. She'd been in touch also with the two other collaborators that we had on the project, and yeah, we created, I think, a group. And then we started talking on Skype every now and then. And it was four of us, but in the end we were three because one of us was really busy with other projects. And we were considering whether we had to split and work in a smaller group because four people to work online was not easy in the beginning. But I think it worked fine. We found our formula.

Bobby

What language were you communicating in?

Esmeralda

English, even though none of our first languages was English.

Bobby

I was thinking that if I joined that kind of particular group, then I probably would have been an anomaly. Because, you know, it's my mother tongue. But I guess I was like one of the few UAL students who was kind of not actually in London at the time, I was outside my own country, as well. So yeah, just to give people some context as well. I mean, right now, we're recording this on the 8th of July 2021. And you had these meetings in February?

Laura

Yeah, it started around then.

Bobby

And so that was like a heightened kind of confinement period in the UK, and so UAL was pretty much shut down at that time. I mean, the physical spaces. We had a Zoom meeting for our course for MA Fine Art Digital, and one day just at the beginning, you guys were showing your films. And I was like, wow, these like, they look like very poetic and personal kind of films. But of course, I mean, they weren't completely personal because they were collaborations. Was that probably around April or May when you finished? So how did you present the final films?

Laura

So they created an online exhibition. And they put up all the films and all the projects on that. There was some virtual reality, some photography, some poetry, we both collaborated doing films and sound pieces, while mine was more a sound piece more than a film because I created the static digital image to go with the film, but it was not moving. It was just like a record if you met to kind of illustrate what we were talking about. But the main piece was just a sound piece.

Esmeralda

I think also, we kind of resulted into film, we had no idea what we were going to be doing initially. And then I think each one of us was in charge of a different component. I was also coincidentally, more in charge of the sounds in our piece. Towards the end, I mean, the practical kind of aspect of the film, and then we uploaded it on the online exhibition space.

Bobby

So, it started in February, and it was finished by April?

Laura

Yeah, and through all this time we had to organise ourselves to meet every now and then. Me and Eva, we were meeting every two weeks on Zoom and we would chat about the new ideas we had for the project, what we could be about. So we decided to work on different things separately, and then bring it together in the Zoom meetings and decide what the next steps would be and we saw the projects coming together.

Bobby

There's only five students in our course. Because it's our first year, and unfortunately, a few people had to leave. But there's going to be much more next year. But in a way, I mean, like this was an opportunity for you to and also for other people to like to meet with more people. I mean, we were having quite regular meetings on our course anyway including our course leader, and someone else that works with him. There's only six or seven of us in all so for this language project, you got to interact with some other students, were the other students at Central Saint Martins like us, or were they from other other UAL institutions?

Laura

They were from across the whole of UAL from other colleges as well

Esmeralda

I had a student from Saint Martins doing fine art. The other one was doing science and art masters and then another one was at the London College of Communication. She was doing graphic design. It was from all over.

Laura

And also some of them were doing their BA and some of them were at Masters level. Yeah, it was a really nice mix. So it was quite interesting.

Esmeralda

I felt it was interesting to collaborate with people who I don't know, creating something. Because the outcome was more kind of unexpected and out of your own control. And I think

this was interesting. As a process, especially seeing as we're, you know, studying online, it was something different.

Bobby

I have two questions. One is about language. What is the difference between when you're speaking with native English speakers, for example, like on our course, you know, obviously, I'm British. English is my first language and our course leader is English. His first language is English. So you know, our entire course is in English. When you made the language project, the leader of that course, what country were they from? Was English their first language?

Esmeralda

Yeah, I think so. Yeah, Karen is English.

Laura

I think she speaks other languages as well. I can't remember at the moment.

Bobby

How is it for you? Even just, you know, amongst you two? Do you feel kind of connected in a way? Because, you know, you're, you're speaking to each other in like, a language, which is not native to both? Is it easier to understand each other or less? Because when you speak English, you don't you don't use nuance, I guess.

Laura

I've seen it, it depends on the level of English that you have, or English or any language that you learn that is not your native language. I think when you get to the point, when you're fluent at it, it doesn't matter if you're speaking with a native speaker, or a foreigner that also is fluent in this language at the end. I mean, of course, you can notice the accent, but about the understanding, or the communicating side I think they're the same.

Esmeralda

For me also, well, we both have in common that we lived in the UK. And I think I would probably feel more familiar with you because you're from Spain, and you're kind of like a neighbouring country, rather than someone speaking a very different language we have. Latin is the root for both languages, we have a similar culture. So I think that immediately, for me at least, it makes me feel closer to you. Even if it was someone else, European from a northern country, I think it would be a bit different because there's codes that are not exactly language that are more similar. And I think that makes a small difference.

Bobby

Pretty interesting. Was everyone from a different country? Or were there a few Spanish people? We've established that there was someone from Iceland, some from Taiwan. Obviously Greece, Spain.

Laura

Yeah, there were more people from Japan, China, and Iceland as well. Um, yeah, I think somebody Polish as well. Yeah from everywhere.

Bobby

Did you have some nice feelings from doing that project? A nice experience?

Laura

Yeah, it was lovely. Yeah, I really enjoyed it. It's what Esmeralda said, because it was a collaboration and you didn't really know the other person and we just met online and you're creating something together, that the end when you create something, it's quite personal. I also had this feeling that it was everything quite spontaneous and quite unknown what the outcome would be. It was like just experimenting and seeing what would happen and just having these conversations and suddenly great, they came in the middle of a Zoom call. I was like, Whoa, I don't know. I really enjoyed it.

Bobby

And for you as well, could you tell us a little bit about the final film, how it came together?

Esmeralda

Well, we started with this idea of choosing a poem in our mother tongues, and then translating that to English. Then each of us was translated into their own language and then back to English using Google Translate. So it was a mix between our own translations from English to our own language, and then back to English from Google Translate in like four cycles. So then we use this text as a basis and kind of through that process, discovering, you know, the misunderstandings in a way, and the film kind of emerged through the ideas that we then the concepts that we discussed, from this process, and the language, the image that we used, and the sound that we use, and the graphics that we used, were informed by the ongoing translation, and how it kind of distorts the meaning of the language and how language influences meaning, and how meaning defines language in a way. And then we brought ideas to the table. There was a meeting where each of us was supposed to bring something to the table, video or sound or something, and then we chose the components that worked best. So then someone did the editing, another did the sound on top of that, and then somebody else added the graphics. So it was a very, in the end, it turned out into a very structured way of working. I think that was also the deadline, kind of you know, as Laura said that it had to be kind of quick and spontaneous. So it was all pieced together quite quickly in the end.

Bobby

Okay, thank you Esmeralda for that eloquent description. Laura, would you like to say anything about the final piece that your group made?

Laura

When I read the description about what she was interested in, it was about the subconscious and about these kinds of unethical worlds. So we were both really interested in the mind, and subconscious, and all these, all these landscapes. And so we started talking about it. And she was also interested in meditation and how meditation stops or separates you from your conscious mind and gives you a break kind of thing and puts you in another plane. I also meditate every day. So we decided that we would try to meditate and then straight away after meditation, do some automatic writing. Just let it flow and see what comes to our mind when it's more relaxed. And these boundaries between the conscious and the subconscious are loose. So yeah, we just did this writing. And we came to the next Zoom session with our writings. And they were really beautiful and soft and colourful, I don't know, it was really nice.

So we decided that we would record ourselves saying this text. But then our idea was to piece them together in a sound piece to kind of recreate our two minds thinking together, or our two minds kind of coexisting together in this sound piece in this state after meditation. But then we realised that in our minds, I mean, sometimes we think in English, I mean, now I'm thinking in English, but normally, in our minds, the English language and our native languages. So we wanted to represent our mind landscapes. We would need to add our native language as well, at least in the background, so I am Spanish native speaker and Catalan, because I'm from Catalonia from Barcelona. So Eva is from Iceland. So we needed to record our texts in English and in our native languages, so I translated my texts in Catalan, Spanish, and I recorded them as well. And she did the same with Icelandic. And at the end we just talked about how it could be the sound piece, like, kind of, in a space where it was ethereal. And sometimes you can hear more of the English, sometimes you can hear more of the Spanish or the Catalan or sometimes you can hear more than Icelandic. So we decided our piece would be called Mindscapes. Mixing the mind and landscapes. And yeah, a beautiful piece, we were really happy.

Bobby

Thank you for sharing that, Laura. That was a really wonderful description too. And thank you both for sharing with us today about your experience doing the Language Project. It sounds like there's really interesting peer support elements in the whole project. It sounds like a lot of people came together and had a shared project and some really amazing artworks came out of it. It'll be really interesting to look back historically at those films to see how different they are to what has been made previously. I will just say that the Language Project started in 2019, so there has been some other stuff in the past. It will be interesting to see how your group was affected by this crazy difficult year for everyone. On that note, I'm gonna end this podcast. I just want to say that there's going to be a Vimeo link to Laura's film and a YouTube link to the film that Esmerelda was a part of and if anyone is just listening to this via the podcast stream, then you can go and have a look at the Postgraduate story, which I will be writing and will be uploaded. And then you can find the links to Laura's Instagram, Esmeralda's Instagram or website and the films. And we really hope that you go and click on those links and watch those films. And I can guarantee that you won't be disappointed because I've seen them and I really loved them.