

Suzannah

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Yulin

Hello, hello, hello, welcome to the PG tips podcast. I'm your host, Yulin. And I'm currently studying ma fine art here at Central Saint Martin's. And this is going to be an open and safe space for current post grad students here at URL to come on here and have a chat about what they're doing on their course, which I'm sure we're all very curious about. And maybe if they have any tips or advice for the rest of us, oh, and of course, to be an open platform for us to find people to connect and network with, and you'll be able to find contact details attached to each episode. So yeah, let's get right into it.

Yulin

Welcome back to Episode Three of the PG tips podcast. I'm here with a wonderful Suzannah Gabriel from MA Fashion Photography, which is on the LCF campus, which is London College of Fashion. So welcome, Suzannah, and I hope you have a wonderful time chatting with me today.

Suzannah

Yeah, nice, safe, happy to be here. Yeah.

Yulin

Oh, for those who don't know, you do want to give a little intro of who you are and what you're doing in London?

Yulin

Yeah, so I'm Suzannah. I am also a course representative on the MA Fashion Photography course. And I have been working with embroidery on my photography, which is a bit different. But super therapeutic. I focus mainly on women, and social media, self esteem and body issues within my practice, I also conduct research. So I reached out to the women with a street casting or social media, have an interview with them. And then we do a photo shoot. And that whole process is super rewarding. And gives me in depth knowledge, but also allows me to exercise my empathy skills. So that's great. So yeah, that's a little bit about me and my practice. Yeah.

Yulin

My God, that sounds amazing. I can't wait to like dig into more about that. But do you want to give a little bit of an overview of what the fashion photography course is like?

Yulin

Yeah, absolutely. So it's been a little bit, we're during COVID. But essentially, we have done three projects explained in the final major project. So we started off with indifferent spaces, which allowed us to rework our old photography before the course. So there will be a word that we did before starting the course. And so that was super exciting. But as a nice way to introduce ourselves and the work we've done. We then move on to interplays, which, for me, I did fragmented, which I'll talk about in more detail, but essentially, fragmented consisted of

self portraits, and then portraits that are for people. And that was the first body of work where I incorporated embroidery. And so that was super exciting. I didn't know what the reaction would be. And but it was then published on F-Stop Magazine. And then I wrote a little write up for UAL Post-Grads. And I love doing that, because it allows other people who are sort of curious to know what the course is about, and know what sort of work you can produce on the course. This is the standard sort of thing.

Yulin

You are the standard Suzannah.

Suzannah

Yeah, but no, it's super nice for them to gain insight into the course because I know when I was applying, there wasn't much for me to go off. It was very much, you know, the graduate showcase or the images on the website. So it's nice to then have that work up there with the artists writing about it as well. So that's nice. And then the last project I did was for the everyday epic. And that was called one on one. And that's where I worked only with women, creatives of different backgrounds and ethnicities, different body sizes, etc., and I conducted interviews and dealt mainly around their body image, but also their self esteem around their skill set, which I think it's super important. And because as a photographer myself, I know I go through phases where I feel like I'm not good enough, while I'm constantly in that sort of self doubt comparison stage. And yeah, it's not good for your self esteem or mental health. So I thought it would be really interesting to ask and discuss that with other creatives who are in the same sort of fields or different fields. But all in all the similarities that we share are that we're women, and we're creative so it was really nice to have those conversations. And the final projects were me photographing them and then embroidery. So sewing on quotes that they said which all went hand in hand. And I also did a write up for UAL Post-Grads on that. But the project was also featured in KALTBLUT Magazine. They love the project and I was super happy that they did. And they published that. So that was great.

Yulin

Amazing sentiment, do you think it fed back into your work like empowered you to feel less or more confident in what you're doing?

Suzannah

Absolutely. Honestly, when I first started embroidery in photography, I thought, gosh, is anyone going to like this? I mean, I love doing it. And the process is super therapeutic, honestly, even though I was ripping up images. Sewing them back together, it was very therapeutic. So it was nice that publications really were drawn to it. And literally when I sent it they were all like 'I love it. I'm publishing it' - like yes. I love it. Yeah. And all the women involved are super happy as well. Like, it felt like we were a family, even though the process felt quite quick. And honestly, I told them that I would love to work with them again, because they're just amazing people. And I'm planning my final project. So yeah, I'd love to have them on board with this pass.

Yulin

I hope that happens. That sounds amazing. You're like building a network and a family. But you're all also woman creatives. That's so amazing. Yeah. My gosh. Well, do you want to go into more detail about your fragmented project?

Suzannah

Yes. So there'll be images to go alongside it, I promise, you won't just hear my voice. But what I did was I took self portraits. And essentially, the project was mainly about what body issues at the hands of social media. It's not to say that social media is the only platform or thing to blame, of course there's external factors. But for me, I wanted to focus on social media because it is so on the present. As women, we spend a lot of time browsing. Double tapping images, going into that phase of self comparison, especially with influencers. So I wanted to draw upon suicide rates from that. Self harm, and then just the dark side of it. So then mental health, the depression, the anxiety, the end thing. And that's why I ripped up the images of myself, which is a little different. And I sewed it together. And I think by using myself, as opposed to somebody else, that was sort of like me protecting them. And it's weird, because, I mean, these are things that I've experienced, hence why I use myself, and I couldn't use anyone else. But I think there's also that thing of, if I use somebody else, how would they feel about that? And I know some people can be quite self conscious. So that's why I wanted to use myself as somebody who had experienced it. And then I can just defend that, you know, it is not you. Don't worry about it. But it's not to say that no one else goes through it, of course, other people do. And that's why I then decided to include other images of people last minute because I thought this is such a global phenomenon, I'm not the only person going through it. Let's include other women. And again, that doesn't say that men don't go through it. Of course they do. But my practice focuses on the women. That's what I love doing. Those are the people I love working with. So yeah, and you know, the images it's weird, because some were really well received so there'll be an image of an upside down world, The Outer Image was flipped upside down, I believe. Yeah. And then I sewed the face on and all of those will be shown. And I also didn't support it on my hand. And I stitched 'Red Thread' to show there's blood on our hands, but the threads really does show veins. I remember, I showed it to somebody and they said, is that self harm? And actually, when I created it, I didn't think of that. But that goes really well, actually. So yeah, self harm as well. And, you know, I haven't self harmed in the past but I know as a result of comparison, and you know, self doubt, self harm, unfortunately, comes into that equation. So yeah, all dark stuff.

Yulin

I think it's wonderful that you're tackling all these darker issues through the medium of fashion photography, but why do you think that is your medium of choice? Why do you think you went into fashion photography?

Suzannah

You know what, the work I create - that was another thing because I just thought, okay, I'm sewing on images I'm doing collages is this really fashion photography Suzannah, like wake up. I don't know if it fits. But I then thought I want to do something that's different I want to - and this was just something that I was experimenting with. And I could do that. Because when I first started my lecturer Paul Bevan was like, you know, this is the time to just experiment. And I thought, okay, I just, I don't want to be the same as everyone else. And I've never fit in in that sense, So I thought ok let's do something different. Let's work with paper and materials. And let's just sew on paper, just see how it goes. And when I did that, for the first assignment, it did quite well in terms of reception. And there was a lot of curiosity because it just didn't look right. As in, you know, having thread on paper, you don't really see

it as much. And so yeah, I think that's what's just drove me to continue just working like that. It takes a lot of time and I've had a lot of backaches, for sure. But yeah, no, I just, I just loved working in that way. And I think it's way that I'll continue to work, because I just love the whole process. Yeah.

Yulin

Yeah, it's really cool to see how the hand is in the photography medium. But it's like a very fragile process like you said, I think that ties in perfectly into what you were saying about the projects. Yeah. Were you sewing into paper? Like, even now?

Suzannah

So this was all hand sewn with no sewing machine, literally my hands, and thread. So actually, when I first started, I didn't really know about scanning, I've always shot digitally. So early, when I had a portfolio review, they were like, oh, maybe just scan them. I was like, maybe I should. Because I never really used it. And I know people that work with film. Of course, they work with scanners. But I used to have my phone and take the photo. And then it was only when I was showing her doing a portfolio review she was like maybe scan it because the lights and you know all the stuff and I was like I, good idea.

Yulin

So when you're looking for, you know, people to photograph or you're always thinking about your ideas in mind, how do you go through that?

Suzannah

So that's a good question. I mean, so for 'One of One' I just put a call out on The Dots. and I just asked for woman creatives. And I literally went with the people that volunteered essentially, of course, there was a bit of filtering out people that weren't relevant. But I went on to people that reached out to us, and they were all amazing people, I just felt like, it would be wrong of me to not pick the people that reached out because I mean, I was asking for creatives, and they took time to reach out to me, etc, etc. And they all had amazing stories. And one of the things I wanted to do was make the project diverse. So I only reached out to one person. And that was a Muslim photographer who is super amazing. And yeah, I wanted her to be involved because I wanted to create that diversity in terms of ethnicity, body sizes, religion, age, etc. And all the women involved had amazing stories to tell. I was just so happy that they enlisted me with that trust. Yeah, yeah, it's amazing. And I guess from that I have so much empathy towards them, because there are things that they said that I have experienced. So I guess going back to your question, when I do go to select the people they'll work with, of course, I have to have in the back of their mind, what it is that I'm working with them on? And if they fit that bill, or they fit that task, then of course, let's work together. If not, then I'll always reach out if there's something that fits or aligns with their interest. Likewise, I presumed that models wouldn't just come at me because I'm a photographer, it will be because of the things I'm taking pictures of or their interests, etc. So I think it goes both ways. But that's how I typically work. And I always try to work with women, especially because I just love to empower them. And I love that there's that. I don't know, there's an energy that comes from working with women that you don't get with men, which is interesting but yeah, there's definitely energies that I just love and always welcome. So yeah.

Yulin

Yeah, it's like you're always building a genuine and real connection with people you work with and hopefully they'll be like a continuous thing throughout your career.

Suzannah

Absolutely. Hopefully. Fingers crossed anyway.

Yulin

So you were posting that call out on The Dots, which is a platform.

Suzannah

If anyone is a creative, be on The Dots. It's an amazing platform. And, you know, I've been on there for quite some time. But it was only when I started the course where I will utilise doing call outs on their, posting my own projects. When I did the call out for the creative women, they actually featured my profile three or four times. And I have this badge next to my name, which is super fancy. So yeah, no, definitely be on The Dots, because you can also find opportunity. I mean, I found a lot of photography assistant roles there. That's helped bump up my portfolio. And so yeah, if you are a creative, or a model, a graphic designer, literally anything creative, then it should definitely go on the dots.

Yulin

Thank you for that bit of advice. Because I think for people who are interested in maybe fashion photography, or modelling or anything, this is a new area for them, I guess it would be hard for them to know how to have their way in. But how, how are you putting your stuff out there for publication?

Suzannah

So the whole publication thing is new. And I only started when I was on the course. I mean, before then, even when I started, like the first few months, I didn't really know about submitting all that to publications, it wasn't something that you're told, as such, you have to kind of, and that's nothing, you have to be quite proactive on a Master's Course, in general. You know, you can't rely on anyone. But I mean, when I saw people on my course, submitting to publications, I thought, okay, that's a good idea, actually. But my only thing was because my work is artistic, it was finding the right people to submit to. A lot of the publications want fashion photography, glossy, highly retouched all these things. And these are things that I wasn't doing. So I thought, okay, who can submit to? I started looking for art publications, those type of things that I found, you know, F Stock Magazine, show so much love, KALTBLUT Magazine. But you know, they have a whole arts departments or submission thing, and I thought ok that's great. I'll give it a go see what they say. But of course, that's not the only thing, I do do portraits and things like that. So I can also submit those as well, which I have done and two publications have agreed to publish those which is super exciting. So that'll be out soon. But what I will say as a piece of advice is really do your research, make sure you know who your audience is. And I feel that I'm still trying to find that and decide that and sort of solidify that. And it is a process you probably won't get in the first few weeks or months. Maybe you will, but also just believe in your own abilities, I think because even when I started doing a first presentation, I saw everyone else's work and I was like 'oop' am I in the right place?

Yulin

Imposter syndrome

Suzannah

Yeah exactly. And I thought, I don't know about this. But it was only when I started to have sort of a tunnel vision. And I think there's also practice as well. Practising sewing on paper, which is not an easy thing to do. But through practice, I feel like I'm still perfecting it in a way. Yeah, I feel like just really honing in your skills. You have to be your biggest fan. But also know when you're not doing something right. I feel like I'm, alongside my mum, I'm probably like my biggest critique. So I can then take a step back and be like, okay, this doesn't look right, or this does, and then go from there. And I feel like you have to have that trait because everything you produce is not going to be amazing. And you have to know and understand. And I see that really so yeah.

Yulin

Thank you. That was super helpful. And yeah, especially as someone who is not always competent in what they're doing, I think that was really inspiring to hear how you saw a little bit 'Oop am I?'. Yeah, but like honing in your skills and now you're here and in publications and everything. Yeah, thank you for spending time with me here today. This was super inspiring to hear about and people can dm you if they ever want to collab or have a question about something.

Suzannah

Yeah, feel free. Honestly, my DMS are open. So my Instagram is @suzzyparalaa

Yulin

We definitely know your username now. Thank you so much, Suzannah, I hope you have a good day. See you. Thank you. Bye.

Suzannah

Bye.

Yulin

Hope you guys enjoyed my chat with Suzannah. It was super eye opening to gain an insight into her projects in the fashion photography course. And it warms my heart to hearing about how she has built and will continue to build genuine connections with amazing woman creatives who reached out to her. Remember to, as Suzannah said, continue to hone in your skills and be creative. Do your research and most importantly, believe in your own abilities. Right. I wish you guys a very fulfilling rest of the week. Bye