

Post—Grad Community └─ Podcast Open Studios ┘

**Episode 1, Will @ After Art
Hosted by Bobby Dowler**

Podcast Transcript

Okay..... three two one and we're on okay!!

Hi there and welcome to episode one of Post-Grad Community Open Studios

I'm your host Bobby Dowler and i'll be interviewing current or recently graduated postgraduate students of the University of the Arts London.

I'm currently in my first year of studying MA Fine Art Digital at Central Saint Martins and I am also a Post-Grad Community Ambassador at UAL.

I came up with the idea of doing this project with the support and guidance of my manager Rachael Lakhan.

Each episode of Post-Grad Community Open Studios will seek to highlight and morally support fellow postgraduate student cross-disciplinary studio practices whilst they are working from home.

I hope to provide a snapshot of our interviewees working environment, their artwork and show how they currently work today.

I will be interviewing a recently graduated artist who goes by the name of Will @ After Art.

Will studied MA Fine Art Digital in the years 2018 to 2020 when the course was still officially based at Camberwell College of Arts.

His graduation piece, which I am a huge fan of, entitled 'In these times' is a browser artwork that was recently acquired by UAL and is now part of their official art collection.

If you look for a link in this in the description of this video or if you want to pause this video and go right now to [www.word association dot gallery](http://www.wordassociationdotgallery.com), that is word association dot gallery. You can see five of Will's browser works and if you click on in these times, you can watch it now and get a better understanding of this interview.

Congratulations to you Will and thank you, for joining me today would you to tell me a bit about yourself your background your interest in art and what a piece of browser art is please?

Yeah so, my background is not necessarily in art I did my actual BA in music and sound technology a long time ago.

But in the intervening years I worked in media and magazines publishing that kind of thing and I guess a lot of what I did was very adjacent to art and particularly internet art and post internet art.

A lot of a lot of the kind of culture i covered in my writing and press stuff was very much looking at sort of late noughties early tens kind of internet aesthetics and how they kind of connected with fashion and increasingly different parts of popular culture.

Through that, I did make some links for parts of the art world and specifically parts of the art world that worked with internet-based art and one of those was this magazine which in the somewhat early to mid-tens was a very prominent platform for post internet art.

I know they still exist now in a different format but they really rather pioneered a lot of conflation of fashion popular culture, internet imagery and I did contribute stuff to them.

I contributed at the time what I guess you would call photo essays. Where you'd pick a particular theme that in some way seemed resonant with the idea with internet art or post internet art and which was basically what that involved.

I was collecting photographs or doing photographic research around a particular theme and then they just published the images as a blog post.

Those were reasonably successful and i'd say that was my first direct engagement with art. So at the time i was working with it was still kind of a hybrid of journalism and art.

If you were looking from an art perspective, it was kind of rooted in appropriation. I was hey *I am telling a story with stuff I have found or images I have found.*

I wanted to explore that a little more. So then, I sort of did a few similar things. I was asked to do similar things for a few art journals whereas essays of YouTube screen grabs around a particular theme and things that and kind of yeah at that time it was definitely still very much a hybrid of the the journalism and the art stuff.

After that my work changed, I got a lot more into photography and art direction. Perhaps more involved in a more hands-on creative capacity in my kind of commercial work and yeah that kind of eventually converged with the two things.

I got kind of worn out of doing just client work or working to other people's briefs and I kind of wanted to build up the interest I had in this kind of art 'ish practice. Of the kind of appropriate images and the kind of hands-on making role i was taking in commercial work and i was interested in exploring that a little more deeply which is why i joined the course at Camberwell.

So that stuff that you mentioned about the magazine work, could you just give us a little timeline about that and then when you decided to go back to university?

Yes I think the timeline was working magazines. I literally just started because my background was music I started writing music reviews as how i got into it and that was probably 2007 – 2008.

I then was asked to write features for a magazine 2009, got us to edit the magazine 2010 and then got more into that sort of art direction stuff and the disc magazine stuff about 2011.

Work kind of commercial did a that ongoing but worked sort of commercially in an art direction capacity to about 2015 and or maybe 2016 and I think that's when I was kind of starting to feel the burnout from not really leaning enough into what I wanted to do.

Just doing working to brief so I think 2016, I remember coming to the open day at Camberwell and the idea of the course seemed really interesting, but I wasn't able to join the next intake for some reason, I can't remember maybe I was still trying to make sure I was stable enough financially to be able to do it.

So yeah 2016 I kind of was in my head, yeah I want to do this and then 2018 I joined the course.

Okay, so with your actual artwork, is it important that your current works are exhibited online as a web browser?

Yeah I did not answer, I just realized I didn't answer the question of the browser.

But yeah, getting to the internet and browser kind of idea was a long sort of journey in itself in a way. Doing the course at Camberwell was almost two years of sort of therapy.

In a way when i didn't have a kind of run-up to the course of x amount of years of making my own work which i was kind of saying this is my artwork it was a lot of kind of yeah tons of self-reflection and tons of exploring your instincts, to create to get to that point, so definitely wasn't an immediate thing I actually started sort of doing what I was doing before.

Collections of images. I made these little books out of them and stuff but I think eventually I found it difficult in the sense. I was making my relationship with the work, I was very much as an outsider or curated.

I mean I was picking stuff it was almost a sort of art and design hybrid and i think i definitely realized as the course went on i was getting a bit frustrated with that way of working.

I wanted to be more intimately kind of connected with the actual architecture of the work I was making.

The common thread through all of it was an interest in the internet.

When it was images, I was kind of looking at images online being part of this vast mass thing and kind of curating that. i mean everything still very much had a relationship with the internet.

Eventually the frustration of feeling too external to the work led me to want to actually code websites, make pages, and stuff that. That is when what we call in browser or just internet art came into play.

It was also a way another part of the kind of personal investigation in the course was working with other people's work and working with appropriate media. How do you kind of define your relationship with that and how do you kind of acknowledge that without necessarily claiming ownership of it.

I think i kind of managed to get to a good place with that with the final works and the works you're talking about there. Which was where it was kind of you said the kind of readings of text i found online and stuff on the word association site.

I was able to reference them. I would do in a dissertation or an essay or something you can you credit the source. However, you can still read the works and you can manipulate the expression without sort of changing the source material.

That became the basis of that body of work.

Basically okay so your so your text pieces including *in these times* are pretty much all rooted in this idea of reading passages of text which you've encountered while browsing the internet?

Right. Yeah

There is also a work you made which i noticed references YouTube star Logan Paul's statement after his after his first globally known controversy a few years ago now.

What was it that made you want to use that statement in particular ?

I think a lot of stuff that I've worked on is looking at a fear of being deleted from the internet.

Before that I'd done one which was based on someone's statement when the geocities website was deleted in I think it's 2009.

I'd also done ones where it's kind of those copy and paste things you see when people are oh your Facebook things are going to be made public today make sure you copy and paste this message and or Facebook can use all your pictures.

Which they can obviously do anyway but people with this sort of more limited internet experience don't seem to often know that and kind of fall for these hoaxes!

So it was just this of sense of anxiety about people's presence on the internet and the Logan Paul one was part of that.

I think it definitely became a weird. Those apology notes became a weird artefact of the recent internet history.

Where you see celebrities or people that have written a kind of apology on their notes app on their phone and it's kind of they're kind of begging for their lives!

To be honest they make a case of how sorry they are and why they're sorry and obviously they're kind of just tokens in the whole gamified internet social space.

They're not necessarily always sincere, there's so many layers to it we can't even tell.

But as artefacts I thought there was some interest in documenting. A very well-known one or reading a very well-known one and definitely how it intersected with the sort of the anxiety which some of the other works I've done.

In a similar vein feed into definitely and I think I was just watching something about Logan Paul. He has this this show on YouTube. I can't remember what it's called, or something impulsive, it's kind of bad but I was watching it kind of in relation to. I was reminded about him because of your work and it was quite interesting to see his anxiety now as well when he was sort of asked a question on this on that on that particular podcast. Because they asked him a question, I think it was something about sexuality, and he said *oh uh i can't say that because...* and it was just a weird moment because he's obviously there is so many he's such a uh a famous person now. One of the most famous people on earth arguably and obviously he has a lot of people which are giving him advice. Whereas before when that controversy happened, he had so much freedom it was really exploring the freedom and the limits of the internet. But then of course, it sort of all came down and yeah i think that's one of the crazy things about the idea of internet celebrity today. There is no real audit to any of it, people can get famous you don't necessarily know what they did two years ago you don't know what they're going to say tomorrow. These are people that are just amateur people that have just had this really intense visibility, it's very volatile. You can't necessarily

anticipate how these people are going to act. Whereas obviously they're and it's definitely not say the previous system is better but obviously before figures you'd see in media or popular culture there was sort of some kind of system or process. Almost a vetting process or training that they've gone through to inhabit those kind of roles. Now that's kind of we're in a really extreme opposite of that and there's good and bad to both.

I think Logan Paul and that statement, was a really good example of this kind of lawless really chaotic kind of new presence, that people occupy online. Just going back to your work in these times, again upon experiencing that work, I was reminded of those emails, especially during the first lockdown that contained those clichéd remarks which you clearly read. You read and reused.

With the intersected classical music used you managed to somehow heighten the melancholy of the memory of that time for me anyway.

With those words where so many people experienced and expressed grief, fear, sadness etc. It's interesting how people fall back onto these repeated phrases of words almost. In pop songs as well, they don't know what else to say and so just end up using these somewhat automated responses and emails. It's almost google or artificial intelligence has generated for them. Is that something that you sort of noticed and were interested in or how did that come about?

I'm definitely interested in the lyrical quality of displaced text and i did a whole collection of images where it would be sort of t-shirts that have a slogan on or signs on a shop which are kind of intended to be innocent to taken at face value. With five degrees of displacement they sort of seem vaguely unsettling. It's definitely something I've always been very interested in yeah! That that kind of displacement of a single line or whatever and they can take on a sort of a presence, which is sort of somewhere between poetic and quite clichéd. I've always been interested in the way Jenny Holzer and people who have those kind of work is really kind of displaced one-liners or her most well-known works anyway. True truisms is kind of things she summarized from books and all these different sources and that's really interesting to me. But i always really struggled to work out how to kind of present that kind of text without it seeing kind of quite clichéd and sloganeering itself. Something you'd see on a mug or something do what i mean but i think with those though that set of one-liners it kind of it had a kind of contemporary resonance, it wasn't clichés but the newness of the cliché was kind of what was interesting about them.

I think if they were a bit more a historic or not the time wasn't so clear, they would probably seem quite clichéd but yeah those again those grew from participating online and being online.

I didn't just collect those myself there was a board on this site called Arena and i think a lot of users were really noticing these new clichés that were suddenly emerging as people sort of tried to grapple with the kind of unexpected kind of fear of what was to come in in early covid. There was so much uncertainty and kind of needed to maintain the a vague sense of 'business as usual' and they all really feed into that. So i collected a few but lots of people collected them and there's a there's a link to the board in the piece where you can see all the ones people are finding and they're still sort of dropping them on there now. But i think those first few months were where you had the real peak of activity and emergence of some of these phrases definitely.

On the subject of uh of Jenny Holzer, correct me if I'm wrong, but don't you have a series of works which are, i don't know if you if you even call it a series, but isn't there a group of works on another site? What site is that? and can you talk to us a bit about those works? The ones where you deal with different artists?

Yeah so that's on the site called after art dot gallery which is probably to be honest what I'm I'm working on at the moment, or what I'm most focused on at the moment, and that's kind of exploring the relationship between art and the internet in a real kind of a one-liner way. A very blunt simplistic way, but it was kind of a way for me to almost teach myself to code while sort of making a body of work. Because I couldn't code before the course, I'm self-taught. Everything I've made, I've kind of made pretty much over the last 18 months and learning as I go. But the loose idea of the after art project was I said in the sort of early to mid-tens.

There was this real explosion of what is called post internet art, where you would see elements from the internet kind of appearing in physical works. The idea obviously of post is a weird term, people mean in response to the internet kind of thing rather than after because it's still going on! But you'd see art with I don't know scroll bars in or jpers with the netscape logo on or things that semi-kitsch things that have emerged on the internet. Either in a sort of literal google logo way or a visual language that has emerged on the internet coming into a physical space and the idea of after art was kind of inverting that and looking at things. From exploring how we could express things from the art world on the internet and i remember when i was younger, there was this thing where things would sort of scroll horizontally along the screen and it'd be hey the new millenni is coming in 90 days and it'd be a countdown time . You go on the site the next day I'd be new millenni's going 89 days or whatever and the scrolling text on the internet which is called a marquee it just reminded me of the truisms and the leds how they scrolled by. So I wanted to make one of those which kind of continuously randomly selected something from a truism series and put it in one of those scrolling marquee tags and i kind of styled it to look kind of a bit like an led, in a very simplistic way. So that's the whole part of that project is using kind of built-in visual things that are in the on the internet or in in the browser and kind of looking at how you can kind of filter existing artworks through that kind of lens basically.

I's really interesting will so just for our audience as well, I mean they might be wondering a bit about how this is open studios. Usually artist's studio visits, people are sometimes used to you showing them around a workshop or something. Sounds a bit old-fashioned to me but how exactly would you describe your process. Is the computer an extension of your kind of brain I mean? Where do you come up with your ideas?

Literally just, on my sofa, I mean that is the studio in a certain way! It will really end but then obviously that's not always the point of inspiration, there's not always a case of hey just sit down and do that and I've definitely tried to actually modify the process a bit of course. Everything I do takes place at the computer, either where i am now in my room or on the sofa pretty much!

I think one thing is that I have wanted to look at is how I actually get the source materially the inspiration for the work. Therefore, the word association pieces where it is browser stuff read from the internet basically, that involves obviously a lot of web browsing. So you're on the internet for a long time and it's not a deliberate process. I've got to find something to make an artwork out of, you're just more browsing in an abstract way, when something comes up you're like oh that's a cool thing. But that's very internet intensive and i think as i've gone to the after art one I've wanted to actually go to galleries and read books and kind of actually get out of being so in front of the computer!

In a weird way, I am making art based on art in that series, you can kind of get a bit more fresh air in a way! You can go out and look at some stuff or see how things exist physically and kind of try to imagine how you are then going to interpret it digitally, and get inspiration in a way where you are not necessarily just chained to the computer.

How long have you actually been making work on the computer for now? I mean, is it art-based stuff?

Yeah it's difficult to answer that in a way because I kind of feel I've have had a conceptual thing where it's not this, but if it was just pictures of white t-shirts I've had those kind of really sort of conceptual social network accounts and things. I've probably done them eight years or so years i guess, they annoy but I sort of feel in terms of actually deliberately coding and rather than relying on platforms to show the work and kind of having it a bit kind of ambiguous as to whether it's art or a blog or what it actually is.

I think in terms of being quite deliberate, I think yeah the last 18 months it was just really through doing the course and the kind of self-reflection you're encouraged to do, I was really trying to solve the problem of how can I work with appropriate material in a way that's satisfying.

I think I said before being plugged into the architecture having a blank canvas, that you then build on and not necessarily using a photo, it rather feels a bit different using even text in a way. It is not quite as complete as a photograph, you can still change the font the colour and so many things, adjust the expression. Obviously, in the pieces it is the tempo and the phrasing and all that kind of stuff I've manipulated. But yeah in terms of actually consciously making stuff that I would present as artworks, that sort of feel yeah the last really last year to 18 months.

Okay and what do you think about students working online now? Do you think it's good to have a kind of a dual practice or is it a case of just kind of making do with what you've got? And what would you say to students that are studying right now trying to make work? Do you think they should all go through online or it is an interesting question?

I think it all depends on what your kind of perception of online is or how that really connects to your work because, there is to some people being online, will just be post work on Instagram or something. I wouldn't want to say to anyone because i know it's kind of can be packaged in a semi-naïve way where it's kind of *oh it's a world of new opportunity even better you can't go to the studio* and i think for a lot of people that's not the case.

A lot of people could be quite frustrated by the limitations they've had to endure over the last year and hopefully that's getting better now.

I do think the internet as a presentation platform is still interesting in itself and i think if you can code and do stuff that definitely opens up a bit more. Although i'm not necessarily an advocate of everyone must learn to code, but i do think you said there are potentialities.

I started putting some of my old photos on the internet and then experimenting with fit not Instagram filters but code feel I could code them. It made everything look monochrome a zine and made this kind of scene out of this black and pink fake print kind of web page and I think stuff can be fun.

I don't think it's as simple as *hey now you put all your stuff on a blog now you put all your stuff on Instagram* because that kind of stuff can feel quite arbitrary at times and even though it's encouraged, in a very vague way.

People are rarely able to articulate reasoning why you do not want to do stuff just because someone said it, or that is the thing it is good to consciously explore. Is there an opportunity to develop your work online or can you add something more immersive to your work by using/engaging with the internet? If there is potential for that then great and that is something maybe to lean into even if it's video. I see a lot of people that have worked in a

sculptural context who are making videos around their work and that's an interesting way of approaching it.

The main thing is not buying into that kind of full sense of *oh it's a great opportunity* off the cuff because you don't necessarily know that it might not connect with your work, but if there is a way you can connect it with your work and if there is something you can explore that actually enriches your work great! It's good to also avoid doing it for the sake of it and putting loads of labour into building an Instagram account or something without necessarily knowing why because I think that can be kind of frustrating at times and can actually sort of potentially detract from your motivation to do it in the first place

Just to even make work, if you feel that it's become too reductive, it's *oh this has to be out to exist in this context or it's not valid*, i think that can have a negative effect on your kind of motivation to make stuff! If it's just being reduced to that.

Yes i wholeheartedly agree Will and I think that as well! Students, artists, they need to go where they're finding energy as well. So obviously research helps, but once you start discovering something, whether it's online or offline you've kind of got to go with where your own kind of curiosity takes you.

Thanks for joining us everyone today and Will would you like to tell us any social links we can add those we will add those to the description?

Yeah I've actually resisted, I do have different sort of conceptual ones but generally, because my work isn't photographic, kind of for the reasons we've discussed, I haven't actually got any social accounts. I want to kind of keep them as websites, so I'm trying to work out since i finished the course really how to network, that in a in a way which isn't completely reductive. So the best links is after art dot gallery and wordassociation.gallery to see the works and maybe I'll see you on Instagram one day. But I don't know!

Check out those links please everyone and thanks so much Will for joining us.

If you like this episode then please subscribe to UAL Post-Grad Community Instagram and seek out the next episode of post grad community open studios.

I hope you enjoy this gem of work if you follow on to Will's works

Okay bye for now