

Santa: I was quite, not uncomfortable, but quite difficult to get into a course here. It's super open and a lot of people in the course are really curious about everything so you don't know what to choose when you're doing the projects sometimes and you can get lost in the first year especially, I guess, so that's kind of like a really positive part and it could be frustrating at the same time.

Yulin: Yeah, like too much freedom, there's too many things you can do.

S: Yeah, a lot.

Y: Hello, hello. Hello. Welcome to the PG Tips podcast. I'm your host Yulin and I'm currently studying at MA fine art here at Central Saint Martins. And this is going to be an open and safe space for current post-grad students here at UAL 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.

Welcome back to episode five of the PG Tips podcast. I'm your host Yulin. And I'm very excited to be with Santa Ramaherison, who is doing his MA in Material Futures at Central Saint Martins here at Kings Cross. So welcome. How are you?

S: I'm fine. and you?

Y: I'm good. So I actually met you in Central Saint Martins, during your work in progress?

S: Yeah. Work in progress show. It was just before April. No, actually, it was in March, like the end of March.

Y: Time just goes by so quickly. Yeah. So were you in the middle of your course? How long have you..?

S: It's my final year and this show I just kind of, post-graduate so that we can show another deadline at the same time, before we were in the 'final final' part of our projects,

Y: So how long is the course?

S: Two years.

Y: So you've already been through the first year. And now you're almost graduating?

S: Almost!

Y: Oh, that's same as me. I'm almost graduating too. I know that feeling. Yeah, have you been over the stressful part now or?

S: Yeah, kinda because for me it was- well, maybe I'm just not feeling the stress right now.

Y: The calm before the storm.

S: Yeah. The most stressful part for me it was actually the beginning of the year because that was the part where I was the most lost in my project. And we're supposed to, at this point in the year to kind of know what we're doing so I'm a bit less stressed than at the beginning of the year.

Y: That's good. That means you've made growth and progress. Yeah. So did you come from an environment where you were already doing things to do with this course or completely different?

S: So Material Futures is quite- there's no really similar courses except I guess, jewellery, textiles and things like that. But I was in industrial design before. This does actually have similarities. Just like for example, innovation parts and things. I guess, Material Futures, which was much more

about materials before and now so much open that we don't really need to be specifically in industrial design or textile design to get in. You can be an engineer- in Material Futures.

Y: So do you think this course is kind of like a hybrid of everything?

S: Yeah, well- yeah, yeah, yeah.

Y: Science, technology and design?

S: But we should not forget it's still design because there's also different courses where they mix art and science. For example, bio design is a bit more specific in nature.

Y: So how would you describe MA Material Futures for somebody who doesn't know what it is?

S: Material Futures is a course where we go across the boundaries of design through merging it with science technology and I guess social, political, and contextual aspects of projects.

Y: Wow.

S: But yeah, we are mostly- I guess what's really important in this course, is that we don't stay in the same traditional design project. We usually say it's- we're trying to basically cross boundaries between all these different disciplines.

Y: That's crazy. So you're in kind of like, yeah, going beyond boundaries and looking towards the future but also kind of analysing the present.

S: Yeah.

Y: So are you enjoying the course so far?

S: Yeah, I mean, it was quite difficult. I like the course and what we're doing in terms of projects, for example, but it was quite difficult to, as an industrial designer, for example, who just came from the BA and then starting in May, I was quite, not uncomfortable but, quite difficult to get into a course where it's super open. And a lot of people in the course are really curious about everything so you don't know what to choose and when you're doing a project, you can get lost in the first year especially. I guess that sort of- that's kind of like a really positive part and it could be frustrating at the same time.

Y: Yeah. Like too much freedom. There's too many things you can do.

S: A lot of things. But you can find boundaries I think, and that's kind of how, well, I tried to manage my projects to get across like to, merge these different disciplines and not stay too much in my comfort zone, but at the same time trying to find the boundaries for me. And I guess for a lot of people, that's why a lot of people do in the course as well.

Y: Sounds like the course is offering a lot of freedom and flexibility.

S: In every project, yeah. Well, sometimes you have like really, really specific things on projects.

Y: Are they briefs, do you want to give a little bit of an overview what kind of- how they teach you or what do they do on the course?

S: There was one for example, there was one brief last year where we had to do non-human centred design. And it was basically looking at, instead of doing the really traditional product design or whatever, process to design things for humans, we had to look at non-human animals and all the species basically, plants. And for this, for example, I made a translator for plants to have this in your home. And so that people could understand the plant's stresses and- yeah, plant stresses. If it's like, there's danger or if it needs water or whatever.

Y: How did you do that?

S: It was collaboration with scientists basically, I had to ask scientists, I had to do a lot of research. As a designer, my part was mainly designing the concepts. It's like, all the things I put into the concept was synthesis of everything I found, every knowledge,

Y: And using your resources, and you had to like learn how to network and things like that. Was that a difficult part?

S: That was a difficult part. Because you usually made people-

Y: Yeah, I think I would get quite intimidated. Especially if it's an industry professional.

S: Yeah. And sometimes you can be like, oh, my project is not relevant for them or they don't want talk about it sometimes.

Y: So how'd you overcome it? Did you just have to do it?

S: I was just like, let's just do it.

Y: How did you go about that, exactly, did you just Google?

S: Uh, I just Googled. Sometimes I was just reading papers, to be more efficient I'm just going to email the person instead of reading the whole paper, because I don't- I don't have time and it's not my job to completely invent a new thing. For me, that's my part as a designer, to communicate this knowledge instead of totally doing like scientific research.

Y: So would your projects be kind of like, almost proposals? Or are they always realised in the course?

S: During the course, most of my projects were proposals. If it's a client project, for example, we were with *inaudible* we had to- it was a proposal, but it had to be functional in the end, even if they told us that you can be quite free with the project. If you don't want to be functional, you can be speculative or what you like to do, but for the clients, it has to be functional. But, like for my diploma project, I'm trying to, to do something which actually works in the end because I also have more time to test.

Y: What is it?

S: It's a project around ocean acidification and I was looking at basically the roots of ocean acidification which is first co2 emissions- and where does the co2 emissions come from, it's the industry. And before the industry, there's the people like the consumers. I started looking at all these different links to ocean acidification, and I realised that as a diploma project or designer's project, I could tackle consumer's behavior and ocean acidification at the same time. So it's mostly- so I'm basically making a sustainable packaging of regenerative materials, which are oyster shells, etc.

Y: So that project was what I saw in the work in progress, right?

S: Yeah.

Y: Was that the beginning of it all?

S: That was not really the beginning. There was a different work in progress show before this one. That was the beginning of the project, and now, it was kind of halfway in the project. And like the first part of the project was mostly trying to understand the problem. Finding the experts to interact with in terms of knowledge and everything and then finding the material. And after finding the material, finding what I'm doing with it.

Y: It must be hard to have like the practical matters and trying to make them come true with your concepts.

S: Also, because like sometimes when you don't have the material, for example, it seems so far. You don't really know what can happen and what you can do.

Y: Yeah, I'm trying to wrap my head around like trying to design something without knowing your materials. Yeah, so you would need to know your materials quite well, before starting?

S: Yeah, before starting. But to do that we try- I mean, I'm trying to take materials which are at least available for me, and then juggling between research and experimentation, which is quite difficult during the two years of Material Futures.

Y: Was it very difficult to adjust from your background to the course?

S: Yeah, I found it difficult.

Y: Just because it was so open and free, you think?

S: But not just that, it was also the part where we have to mostly- like in product design you usually have a brief which is almost specific sometimes. For example, you have to design... a new screwdriver, for example, when you have this kind of brief and then you just have to find the problems and then the solutions. Well, I'm really simplifying it, but that's basically it, whereas in Material Futures, the briefs are really open. When we ask the students to do non-human centred design, it's really, really broad. Now you have to think about all the different non-humans around you kind of see in the future what's gonna happen with the project.

Y: Predict the future a little bit. Yeah.

S: And then the other difficult part for me was the process because we have to make something physical usually. And trying to juggle between experiments with materials or models, or physical things and research, like actual research, which is a lot of us- take scientific research in the projects, and we're not scientists. This is like a quite interesting part but, quite difficult.

Y: Wow, you really have to do everything.

S: Kind of, what our tutors usually they say also is to collaborate with people because we can't be every part of the project. If we're not used to programming then it's better to have a specialist in this work with us instead of like doing the entire project.

Y: Yeah, what about the- your peers in the course, do you collaborate with them sometimes?

S: Yeah, I mean, yeah. I collaborate with them. I mean, it's mostly if we need help on something really specific, which, which is cool because a lot of us are from different courses. And if we have something- for example, I'm not comfortable with moulding sometimes. So I need to ask someone who had a lot of experience in moulding, if someone is more comfortable in sound design, for example, I'd ask this person. We also have sometimes collaborative projects.

Y: Do you get tutorials with your tutors?

S: Yeah, almost every week.

Y: Almost every week? Okay, I have them, maybe every few- every month.

S: Really? Oh my god.

Y: Yeah. Yeah, I guess because in fine art you have to take time to develop your practice and stuff. But every week. I guess that makes sense because you have to have progress.

S: Yeah, I think a good part of this process is I think the tutors, the course team also listens to us, the tutorials every week was not like this. For the previous years they were not having tutorials every week for example. They could have maybe, every two weeks. I mean it's still not a month.

But yeah for us it's every week because we have to show the project progress every week. I think it's also good to have this every week, we don't get too lost on our projects.

Y: Do you feel like you're much more prepared for like graduating and getting into the "real world"?

S: I'm not quite sure. I mean, I guess yes compared to where I was at the beginning of the course because I guess now I kind of know a bit more where I want to go and what I want to do after.

Y: What you want to do after?

S: I would say sustainable innovation.

Y: Oh, great, yeah.

S: Or well, I'm interested in policy design, but yeah mostly sustainable innovation which is linked to what I am doing in my project right now, and what I've been doing also during the first year of Material Futures.

Y: Wow. So you feel like you've definitely gained skills in talking to people as well as communicating to industry professionals, and also people around you?

S: Oh yeah. I think this skill I've definitely learnt is how to network, like how to collaboration, experience and how to get people to give me that knowledge I need for my projects.

Y: Yeah, because I guess designing for the future is collabing isn't it? You have to collab with people to-

S: As designers, we're not specialists in this type of projects.

Y: Why not use all the resources around you?

S: Yeah, I mean, we have to be kind of the directors of our projects, if we're like trying to manage projects all by ourselves. We could be lost or-

Y: Overwhelmed.

S: Yeah, overwhelmed.

Y: Do you think London is a great hub for sustainable Innovation design?

S: Yeah, I think so, in terms of like, compared to- I'm from Paris, for example. And compared to paris or even every part of France, to be honest, London is definitely better for sustainable Innovation design.

Y: Do you think you're gonna stay here?

S: Probably.

Y: Okay. Exciting.

S: And then I'm gonna figure out where I'm gonna go next.

Y: Sounds great. Yeah, sounds like you gained a lot of things from this course.

S: Yeah. I guess.

Y: Okay that sounded a little bit forced. I get it though, like when you're in your last year it's like, it's all coming very fast.

S: Really really fast.

Y: And yeah time feels like it just went by so fast as well.

S: Yeah. When you see there's only one month left, it seems like one week sometimes.

Y: Exactly. Exactly. But now you got a lot of things to show for your future, skills and your CV and everything. Yeah, that's great. Okay, well, I hope everything goes well, in your future. Designing your future. Yeah, that is so exciting. Okay well, thank you so much for being with me here today.

S: You're welcome.

Y: And I loved learning about MA Material Futures. Yeah. It's such an important course, especially now.

S: Especially, yeah, I mean, sustainability is really important, just thinking about the future. I mean, it was there for a long time, but it's getting more recognition.

Y: And you're gonna be at the forefront of that.

S: Maybe.

Y: Yeah, for sure. Okay. Thank you so much.

S: Thank you.

Y: I hope you have a nice day.

S: Thank you, you too.

Y: Hope you guys enjoyed my conversation with Santa, it was certainly fascinating to gain more insight into the MA material futures course at Central Saint Martins, especially with the focus of how design research and sustainable innovation can fuel positive change in the future.

Do visit the Post grad community stories page where you can find Santa's contacts, and the article attached to this episode - and yea hope you have a great rest of the week. Bye!