

Jessie Makinson speaking with Head of Art Histories Tom Groves about her experience as Artist in Residence 2017

TG: Why did you apply for the residency at City & Guilds Art School?

JM: Having been to the MA show the previous year, I had been very excited about the work coming out of the art school. When I saw the residency come up, I applied immediately, partly because I'd run out of money and the art school provided a free studio! I had been on residencies before, and had decided I would only apply to residencies where facilities were offered. The art school offers pretty much unlimited access to workshops and technicians. I had been wanting to branch out from painting for a while, had tried ceramics classes at places like Morley College, but got seduced by all the old ladies beautiful bowls, and totally forgot what I had wanted to make. So I was very excited about an opportunity where your studio was on site with the workshops. This meant I would be able to come back and forth from the studio and truly experiment.

TG: What have you been working on this year, and what themes or forms have you been exploring?

JM: I came to the Art School's residency with grand plans of working with all sorts of materials. But I quickly got sucked back into my painting as it had shifted slightly and things were happening that I needed to explore. It is not until now that I have installed the show, that I can see more clearly the themes that are running through this body of work. I work very intuitively, through drawing and try to let the work lead me. I have come out the other side with an installation that includes wallpaper, ceramics, drawings and paintings.

TG: Both you and Jonny Green, who is the other artist-resident this year, have painting at the core of your practice, and you both have been really productive painting in the studio. But I'm wondering if you found time to make use of the art school's technical and workshop facilities this year.

JM: Yes, definitely. I have been painting a lot, but over the residency I have also made a screen printed wallpaper, etchings, glass reliefs and ceramics. The technicians are absolutely fantastic here. I worked with Anna, Eva and Niamh who were all extremely knowledgeable. I most definitely wouldn't have managed without them. I'm not sure I would work with glass again, but during the process of making the moulds for casting I discovered that I really enjoyed making wax reliefs. Unfortunately these all had to be melted in the cast making process, and although I was disappointed with the glass result, the wax reliefs are definitely something I will work on in the future. The wallpaper and ceramics have been very successful and are something I will continue to develop within my practice. Although less advanced in their nature than my paintings, I feel very positive about the ceramics and wallpaper, in part because of the potential I see for their development, but also because they don't have the weight of the years of struggle that painting has for me.

TG: Can you tell me a bit about your experience here on the residency? What has been like to be back in an art school environment?

I normally go to the studio 6 or 7 days a week, so the lack of weekend access was a bit of an adjustment, but now I'm probably addicted to having days off. I think maybe having a few days out of the studio each week has been quite productive in terms of me focusing my time more. Being in an art school was actually quite a surprise. I didn't really do a 'proper' MA as I went to Turps Banana, where we had no facilities or younger students. It's noisy and busy at C&G Art School, but it's exciting; people making things everywhere, young students making much more exciting things than I ever will. It was great to get to know some of the students as well as the technicians and tutors. There is such a wealth of knowledge here. I really enjoyed giving tutorials to the first years too, it reminded me of how exciting it is to be searching for how to make something.

TG: If at all, how has being on the residency effected or changed your work? What do you feel about these shifts or changes?

JM: The residency has added a great deal to my practice actually, and my work has shifted while I've been here, but that's something it does naturally anyway. I had thought that to use the facilities I needed a 'plan' to know what I was going to make. But I discovered that I found things in the processes that excited me, like the wax reliefs; I realised that it's better to just try making almost anything, and then I got a million ideas. I know from experience that I learn best and change most through making. When I was working with ceramics this year, I realised that I have to find the shape as I am sculpting - not dissimilar to the way in which I create the forms and figures in my paintings. I'm very excited about the new aspects I will be incorporating in my practice, and I don't feel as scared about trying out new materials and experimenting with them now.

TG: What, for you, has been most valuable about this residency?

JM: I think all residencies are different. In some you don't make anything while you're there, because you are busy experiencing things. The City and Guilds of London Art School residency is incredibly valuable - probably the best residency in London. It's such a fantastic location, beautiful studios, great facilities and technicians. If you want to experiment with new mediums, this is perfect. You can walk into a workshop and tell the technician what you want to make, and they'll have loads of ideas and patience to help you make it.

The school is an amazing place full of incredibly generous people. There seems to be a sort of reciprocal belief between the building, students and staff. I may have missed it, but there appears to be a complete lack of cynicism that seems to pervade art school, maybe CGLAS' independence has helped this. All of the tutors and technicians are practicing artists making great work, and they all run up and down the stairs really fast!

The logo for City&Guilds of London Art School, featuring the text "City&Guilds of London Art School" in white, stacked vertically, on a red rectangular background.

City&Guilds
of London
Art School