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Anita Safowaa Interview Transcript

Voice: Anita Safowaa, FLAMIN Fellowship artist 2020-2021

00:07

My artistic practice takes quite an interdisciplinary approach and its main focus is to explore under-documented cultural moments and subcultures with the purpose of preserving them, and to reimagine these moments using a range of media, including moving image, personal archives, reflective writing, and also VR (Virtual Reality).

00:36

At the moment, a lot of my work really focuses on understanding the layers that go into black British identity in order to arouse discussions and notions around Britishness, but also, my work aims to create an intimate and immersive learning environment.

01:00

Using archives in my work has been foundational since I created the first short film I did. That was part of Stop Play Record and it was very much focused on understanding the British Ghanaian identity and understanding how two cultures can be embedded into one. And the footage was all shot in the house but the sounds came from home videos that I had and conversations I had recorded in order to create the set design in the actual short film. From doing that I understood the importance of archives in my practice in terms of being a portal to memories and to evidence life in general.

01:58

So thinking about this idea, I took that element and that practice forward, when creating the VR piece I did for the BBC New Creatives. And although I had a musical score that was created, I still included archives from the first trip, when I actually went back to Ghana when I was I think about 14. So I recorded sounds of the markets and of the hustle and bustle of Kumasi, and included that in the piece as well. So it was very much about creating an element of the past but also making it relevant.

02:48

So I applied to the FLAMIN Fellowship programme with an idea of wanting to explore migration and trying to understand what that meant in the context of the UK. And through the process, I came up with A Journey To Stillness, which is a multi-screen installation that explores the migration experience, but outside of conflict and understanding what other influences there are on migration. For this project, I'll be using Ghanaian migrants who moved to London during the 1980s and 90s, as a case study to really understand why they moved from Ghana to the UK, but also understanding the nuances surrounding assimilating

within a new society and understanding what their expectations were versus the actual reality. The stories I'm hoping to bring to light through this work are very much embedded in collective memory, because I'm interviewing different Ghanaian elders and going through different archives to gather what life was like. So multi-screen installation very much lends itself to that but also gives this sense of togetherness that I really want to bring through my work.

04:20

So being on the development programme has really changed the way that I approach my artistic practice. Before it was very much 'do it when you can' - I wasn't really prioritising it as much as I am now, and finding space for my work. Being on the programme and speaking to other artists that are more mid-career or further along in their career than I am, but also speaking to artists that are on the same level as I am, there was this opportunity to knowledge share, and understand how other artists are approaching their practice and things that I can take on board. But also, it's given me the confidence to really understand my position in this world, in terms of what my practice is contributing and also having more confidence in talking about my practice. It's really given me insight in terms of how to prioritise my practice, and how I could continue pushing it forward. I think I've been one of the fortunate ones in that I was able to do this programme. It's given me a lot of time to think and develop, and actually, I guess, take the plunge and figure out what I want from life.

05:42

So I guess my top tip for applying for The FLAMIN Fellowship programme - its going to sound very basic, but it was very hard for me to do at the beginning - is to just apply. I know that sounds very basic and straightforward, but oftentimes as artists or creative practitioners, we're always questioning our work or questioning whether we're ready for certain programmes or opportunities. But essentially, you'll never know until you actually apply. So that would be my tip - just get an application in and see what happens.

06:20

So I hope that in the future, I can really extend my artistic practice to collaborate with other artistic disciplines, whether it be musicians, DJs, creatives, I really want to extend this notion of experiential storytelling that it's embedded in archives and oral histories, to really bring forth an enjoyable, different and alternative kind of art experience, and one that is more inclusive and not restrictive in terms of who can visit.