



Living

Coco John Baptiste

Authentically
*Being a successful creative in
North Kensington*

Introduction

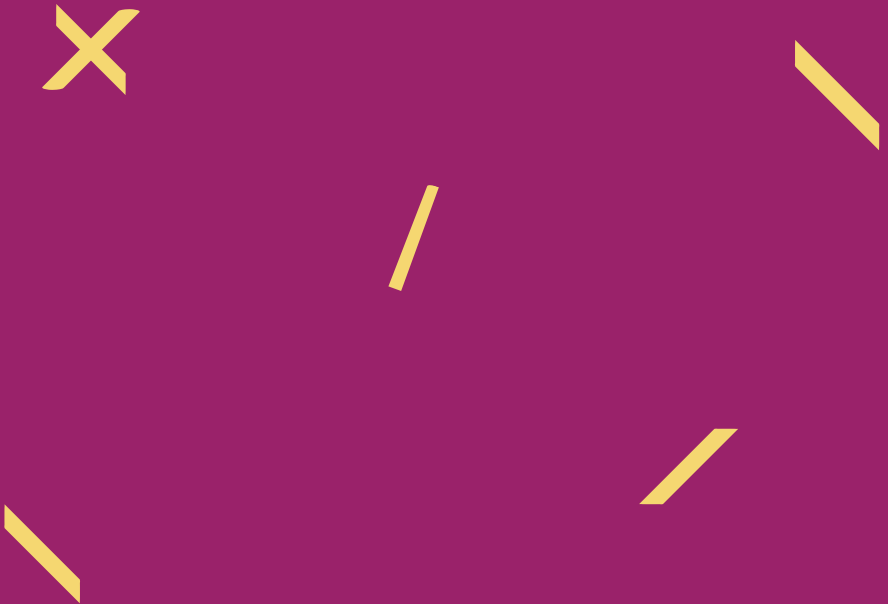
The title of my piece is called Living Authentically. Living in a time of 9-5s and doing mundane activities, I still had a deep craving to live authentically as a creative person as for me the good life is through freedom of expression and being able to create things. Living and existing through creativity is how I view the good life. The topic of this project is North Kensington's creatives, exploring the success of creative individuals living within the community. My research aim was to find out what it means to be a successful person in the Arts, how people become successful in the Arts and what a good life means to someone that has achieved success. I also explored both the opportunities and challenges that these creatives have faced or have witnessed within the community.

My research methods were walking ethnographies and interviews. I had a range of different interviewees, including: a Westway Trust employee, a gallery owner, an artist, and a writer. Through speaking to these people, I learned that the good life is a subjective term, some saw it through a lens of years, feeling that only after the 10-15 years that have just passed, that now they are living the good life. For some it's being able to still play a part in other people's creativity. But the common denominator seemed to be just doing what they loved.



What I did

I spoke about the creative spaces, studios and opportunities that North Ken provided. Through talking to a range of different people I discovered some places within the area that I hadn't even heard of. Then on my walking ethnography I went to some of the spaces, visiting every local gallery to find out whose art they sold and learned how little locals' art gets showcased in these spaces. According to my interviewees, this was down to local artists not taking the initiative and getting their work out there.



Hidden space



When I started my research, I Googled creative spaces: galleries, bookstores, studios and more. I went on a walk through the neighbourhood, and realised that I had passed these spaces almost every day, but not noticed them before. There, but hidden, disengaged from my life.



It is possible to live the good life in North Ken as a creative. There are spaces for creatives to use, although some aren't known, closed down, or are expensive for an up-and-coming artist. Arts spaces around North Ken are not obvious to a passerby. Yes, there are opportunities provided in the area, but they are not necessarily easy to access.



I found out that a lot of the galleries along Portobello/Notting Hill don't showcase local artist's art. A local graphic designer, AI image artist, illustrator and comic colourist, said that "it's about wanting it and putting yourself out there". People do sometimes approach galleries, but then they might have to find funding for themselves.



***“it’s about
wanting it and
putting yourself
out there”***



GRAFFIK GALLERY



Putting yourself out there

My interviewees were able to name more challenges than opportunities, such as finding funding and not being 'networked'. A Westway Trust employee named a few opportunities provided for people in North Ken, two being for young creatives, such as 'Avenues'. For older creatives who want to pursue their passions, there's fewer opportunities available. However, there is the Kensington and Chelsea Arts Grant scheme, where the council can help you pursue your creative platform. The challenge is being willing and able to network, to look for opportunities and to showcase yourself.



Taking over public spaces

My walking ethnography showed that although the galleries in North Ken might be difficult to find and to access for local artists, there are a lot of examples of artists making their work on the streets of North Ken. On my walks, I noticed that graffiti artists had taken over entire walls with their work, and had invited members of the public to add their ideas and artwork. There is a wall dedicated to showing art in public in the Portobello Market, which exhibits local artists. Creatives also used floors, vans and other things in public space to show their work. This shows us how creatives still find opportunities to express themselves, even in the face of high costs and limited opportunities.







The **Good Life in North Kensington** brings together a team of residents to explore what a 'good life' means for people in North Kensington, London, and what some of the barriers are to achieving it. In 2023, seven local residents became 'citizen social scientists' and carried out their own research projects, investigating issues which matter to them and their communities.

They have been trained and supported by UCL's Citizen Science Academy, based at the Institute for Global Prosperity, in collaboration with the University of Manchester and the Westway Trust. They have since been awarded the Citizen Science Certificate by the UCL Office for Open Science and are now working with local organisations to help ensure citizen voices are part of decision-making processes.

The Good Life North Kensington is part of a larger project on rethinking neighbourhood change and urban futures in the aftermath of housing tragedies. The project is led by Dr Constance Smith (University of Manchester) as part of a UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship. For more information see www.highriselandscapes.org



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