

Auslands-Studienaufenthalt an der

Universität: Karel De Grote University College / Sint Lucas School of Arts

Stadt/Land: Antwerpen, Belgium

besuchte Studienrichtung an der Gastuniversität: BA Visual Arts (Beeldende Kunsten)

Aufenthaltssemester / -jahr: WS17-SS18

Studienrichtung an der KUNI: BA Textile.Art.Design

### Meine Erfahrungen

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First off, it is important to note that finding an accommodation was perhaps the hardest part in all the preparations. Although I started researching reasonably early, most of the shared living offers had already been taken so within a few weeks of my arrival I had to settle with a dorm which was rather upper price range (the monthly rent in Antwerp for students is estimated at 300-350 €; I was at 420 €). I did ask the university in Belgium for their help on my search but they couldn't do much more than advise me to check out Kotweb – the trusted search engine for accommodation. I moved to a different house in the second semester; rather by chance (posted on the exchange students' Facebook page) to switch things up a bit, pay a bit less rent and live more central. I would like to note that it is advisable to have some savings before going to Belgium because I received about 250€ Erasmus grant per month; which is amazing by itself, but was not enough to just cover my rent – and the living costs do exceed Austrian standards.

The communication with the international office in Belgium was really rather good, except for the fact that they were not informed about a lot of procedures for an extended stay. Other than that, the KdG Welcome Days were an absolute delight and really made one feel very welcome and important indeed – possibly due to them being very largely organised for the Business for Exchange course. Art students are often the minority of Erasmus folks. We were a little group in the first semester; in the second it was only me. Consequently, a lot of the teachers were thinking I'd finish my studies at their university and caused a lot of confusion & implemented very high standards for me to meet.

The courses were pretty great; mainly in the first semester and mainly the theory course about Cultural Criticism and Art Theory. I was also able to participate in their Spring School/Residency in Brussels with that course which was absolutely phenomenal. Additionally, we also had free access to the International Design Congress 'Integrated' which was co-organised by the university and honestly an amazing opportunity to take part in.

The local student organisation is also a very lively bunch & their headquarters – Gate15, simply fantastic. They are responsible for StuDay, a festival for students with lots of music, fun and freebies & offer Study360, which allows students to study in gorgeous public spaces like theatres, museums and design offices for the duration of the exam period.

Generally, I was able to do a lot of independent research in libraries and hang out at the campus of the University of Antwerp and the Royal Academy of Arts. Partly because my friends attended various Colleges there and partly as an escapism from Sint Lucas, which was often really challenging and hard to study at.

My reality during this exchange year was that I was able to have a lot of fantastic experiences – culturally, travel-wise, with collaborations, residencies and exhibitions. At university though, I struggled a lot – even as a very hard working and ambitious student. I do believe that you are easier off as somebody who is well settled and falls within the mainstream; broadly speaking, because being queer and talking back contributed a lot to me not just making peace with the professors. I did experience instances of unfair behaviour by people with very rigid ideas of gender norms & this also resulted in a down-marking of an otherwise well thought out concept. So my advice is to have a good support system around you, should things like this happen to you.

Language wise, things were really advantageous for me. If you speak German; understanding Flemish will likely be easy for you. Apart from that, most people speak English pretty well & I'd also definitely like to shout-out the professors who were really on top of their game with making sure they translate things if ever you didn't understand anything.

All in all, I must say, that my exchange experience brought me heaps of skills outside of university, that made me understand art and life much better. Albeit my hard work did not get recognised fully, I was able to make great friends, partake in enriching collaborations, travel a good bunch and realise that there's so much life beyond education.

Go to Antwerp if you'd like the full experience of student exchange – if you're up for a challenge and have a strong character. It's so worth it and despite what you might think – that town is brimming with life and awesome stuff to do – you can cycle everywhere and it rarely ever gets boring.

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