

## 20: Access to the UdK (EN)

### Vincent Hulme:

What and who is Common Ground? Common Ground was started by students of the UdK in 2016 as the wave of migrants came to Germany. In the beginning, Common Ground sought to create access to as many of these people who wish to study or be implicated at the UdK. But they faced many personal and structural challenges. But I wasn't part of that team in 2015, and I only joined in 2019, actually. I took over the lead of the team and the initiatives that were planned. So, I mean, essentially the mission was the same, but the methods that myself and the team developed have evolved. So we hosted workshops like how to study, organize events to bring the community together and readings. And a personal project of mine that I led was the Common Ground Studio. So I can talk a bit more about that. In 2020 and after consultation with the leadership of the foundation class, which is the sister program at the Weißensee, which is much more established and led by professional artists wishing to counter the structural racism in the academic German art school process. I met with them, and I sought to create something similar at the UdK but based around more mentorship and access. And it was in 2020. So obviously the pandemic came, and we had our pilot first year. We had in the end five of the seven participants were admitted to the arts schools and UdK inconcluded in Germany and now we're averaging about 11 people per year. So we're approaching the end of the third year and the Common Ground Studio. And after the pandemic, all the restrictions are gone. This year we were able to organise a couple of collective exhibitions and try to really enrich the spirit community between each generation and the current participants. And I really hope that, the Aufnahmeprüfung is right now, so I hope they all get in and for the next year I really want to grow and expand the focus of the Common Ground Studio so to create more opportunities for the community of participants and opportunities for exchange for the three generations of the participants and the forthcoming one.

Question 2: How did the idea of common ground come up, whether the UdK lack that you felt you the need to initiate? So I wasn't obviously at the initial founding of Common Ground, but from what was passed down to me, Common Ground was this reaction, this outpouring of care to the many new people arriving in Berlin. Some of them artists, but all who are displaced are forcibly displaced and, you know, didn't really grafts the differences between art studies in Germany and how our studies or how art schools worked in their homeland. And being a foreigner myself. And, you know, despite being having worked very long and hard to integrate myself in Germany, I still felt when I applied that the UdK had many walls that are very kind of imposing and difficult to navigate. It's just that the system isn't made for easy access. Furthermore, since the UdK an art academy and they require like certain standards to be admitted, they need to reject a high number of applicants. Which means and sometimes I think the UdK forgets that their standards of, you know, are very firmly anchored in a Western European context. And I need to be more clear eyed about that. And I think to many students who have come from abroad, it might not be so out of evidence to them that this is the standard of the UdK. And frankly, this European, Western European context might not be so relevant to their own art practices. So what we want to do, Common Ground, and especially the Common Ground Studio, is to, you know, create and foster access to UdK and promote this community within and with outside the UdK to kind of mentor and support culture and artists who wish to study UdK or wish to have a connection with the community of artists within the school.

Question number three: So what would you like universities to consider regarding questions of accessibility? So I really want I mean, at least the UdK to specifically consider its role in perpetuating these structural inequities within academic system as well of its often unrecognised and unorganised lack of focus on the issues of accessibility. You know, we've got always have

standards, but it can really question how inclusive and accessible these standards are. And I wish that the student at the UdK, which is not simply perpetuate the inequities in the art world because we all have to eventually experience this art world, which is incredibly exclusive. But kind of think about challenging their very existence and be a force for change, towards the change that so many students seem to want but failed to actualise. And I know that this is like the state admission of the UdK, but often it's the students themselves leading the change. And I really want to I really want the UdK to take serious the complaints of students, and I drown them in bureaucratic hoops or like impossible processes to navigate because it often feels like that. And maybe it will take time and generational change. But sometimes you get the impression that the structures at the UdK become so ossified that they are actually are impossible to move in the right direction. So what happens is that time and patience runs out and something new and more current takes over the focus. So issues never, ever get really resolved. They just get kind of sidetracked. So, you know and what does accessibility truly mean? I mean, for me, I know that the answer will change over time, but I think that it simply said if the student body never changes or stays the same, I don't think that anybody would be able to say that the change had manifested itself, i.e., the university had not become more accessible.