

# #MonthlyMotivation: Aya Mousawi (class of 2006)



## I'll tell this like a story – that starts at Putney High...

i. Summer 2006. I received my results. I had missed my A in Art History by five marks. I sat there in tears with Ms Osborne and my mum. Not because it meant I didn't get into UCL (the only university I applied to do Art History and not Business) but because I had let myself down. In my eyes I had failed – at the thing I loved most. Which was hard to digest at 18. It's never easy to accept failure, let alone recognise the value in it. In hindsight I realised everything really does happen for a reason.

ii. I didn't know what I wanted to 'be when I grew up'. I just knew – quite late on – that I needed to study the thing I loved – not the thing I thought I 'should do' - and was lucky to have teachers and parents who supported that. I got accepted to [SOAS](#) through clearing, studied a dynamic and fascinating course of Art History – learnt Islamic, African, South Asian, East Asian and European at UCL. My professors were from everywhere – some were real life Indiana Jones excavating in the UAE – others had spent their lives between here and Japan, China, Africa, India.

iii. During my first year I was introduced to Stephen Stapleton who was launching a social enterprise called [Edge of Arabia](#) based on his journey driving through the Middle East. He was running cultural expeditions with young creatives between the Middle East and UK and was putting together an exhibition of Contemporary Art from Saudi Arabia. First job at 19 – call up the Minister of Culture in Saudi Arabia and introduce yourself!

iv. I still didn't know what I wanted to be but it didn't matter, I was learning. And it was fascinating. I graduated and [Edge of Arabia](#) grew. I was involved with everything, from proposal writing, exhibition production, artist liaison, marketing, communications, venue scouting, fundraising, partnerships, artwork sales, institutional acquisitions, events, dinners. We toured exhibitions; Venice, Istanbul, Berlin, London, Dubai, Jeddah. Travelled everywhere and learnt the ecosystem of the Art World. After five years, that chapter of life came to a natural close.

v. Much like most entrepreneurs, I didn't go out applying for jobs – not because I don't believe in it – but because I enjoyed creating my own opportunities, and being in charge of my own destiny. I paired up with an art world friend Simon Sakhai and set up [The Moving Museum](#). We were young and ambitious. We wanted to live and work all over the world, and so we set up a company that let us do that. It was hard. We hustled, we fundraised, and we put aside our social lives and consumed ourselves with this. Dubai, London, Istanbul, over 100 artists, artwork commissions, teams in every city. I don't think anything really prepared us for it; we embraced it, worked hard, learnt through our mistakes and eventually we grew and learnt to work smarter. We are still learning.

vi. Advice: If you want to get into the art world or creative sector – do it! Being entrepreneurial is great - intense highs and intense lows. Not a path for everyone, but certainly do integrate an entrepreneurial attitude into whatever you do. Not to be cheesy, but don't worry too much about the big long term picture about 'what you want to do, or should do' – it will change so many times, and really you'll spend much of your life asking yourself that at different stages – so do the thing you love at that moment, and let it take you somewhere, until it runs its course. Travel – not just as a backpacker or a tourist – but learn other cultures and experience how other people do it. And be ready to embrace change – because it's really difficult.

vii. *"The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight."* - I learnt that at Putney!