

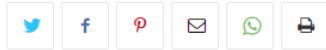


# THE BUGLE IS BACK

## BUSINESS

### A hub, a base, mentors and connections ...

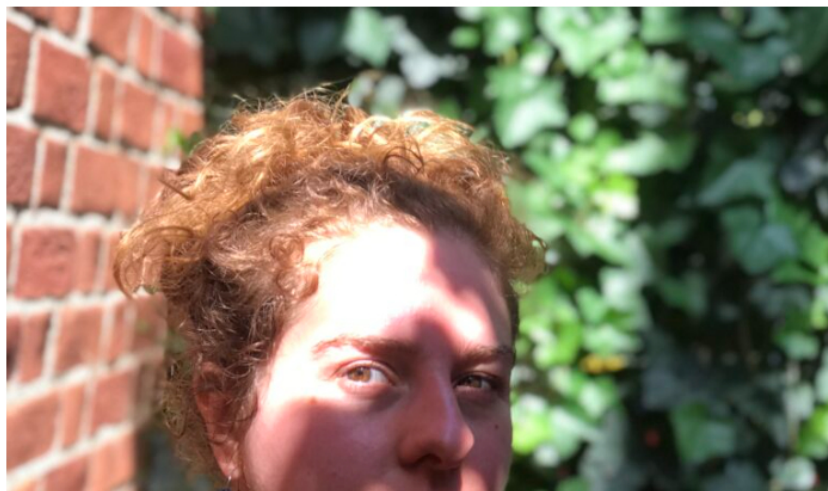
By Poppy Woods - 2 August, 2022



Last year, **Poppy Woods** spoke to the first two successful applicants for residencies at what was then a new shared working space- the Department Store's Studios- which include extensive business advice, aid and mentoring. With applications now open for the next residences (and extended until the 19th of August), she found out how it had been for them.



Coco Cripps, who was awarded a place at the Department Store Studios in Squire and Partners' new building fronting Bellefields Road to develop her textile business, has spent the year (among her other many jobs) developing her range of knitted cycle-wear. She has finally been able to get hold of her own second-hand industrial knitting machine, which is currently housed in a shed down the road from her parents' house and the Department Store. Now Coco is getting ready for a show of her first clothing line which will be held Downstairs at Squires' Department Store headquarters on Ferndale Road in September.



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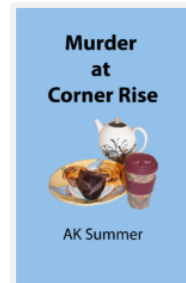
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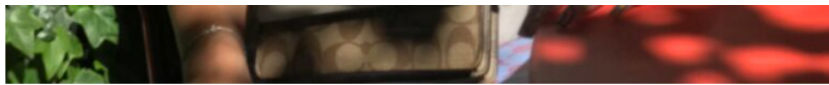
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Coco Cripps

Over the last year, Gaby Lafor, whose production company Limelight saw her awarded the residency, has hired three employees. She brokered her first licensing deal at the start of the year for a factual entertainment show called Top Producer to find Britain's best beat maker and give a platform to both untapped and up and coming producers. She has also secured a new position working with Big Smoke Corp, a hub headed by grime star Skepta for exporting music, fashion, art and now, with Gaby's help as head of production, also documentaries, dramas, films and digital content. I asked Gaby and Coco what had been the best part of the residency programme.





Gaby Lafor

Gaby: "Being here at the studios this year is what really gave us a hub and a base to build my team... we use the screening room to share and showcase productions."

Coco: "Having the mentors and the connections has been really useful, particularly if you are someone who feels like you are quite isolated and you want to be in a space with more people." For Coco it was the invaluable advice of the mentors that really benefited her development as a creator and business owner. "The mentors have been particularly useful, and they even gave me the opportunity to speak to a fashion lawyer so I could get some knowledge on those things, as well as mentors from business, finance and design. "The different perspectives of people with a lot more experience, which is good, particularly when you're younger, and you don't have experience of how to put certain things in practice."

For Gaby, in addition to the office space, which allowed her to expand her production company and the video screening theatre downstairs, the location was a big factor. "This is where everything started for me. I was born here I lived here, my family still live up the road ... so it makes sense for me to return to Brixton, with everything I've got here. And also the people, the creative community around here, this is such a source of inspiration."

I asked both of these Brixton natives about their hopes for the future. Coco says she hopes to find workshop space in Brixton and continue expanding her business from there. She is also planning to spend time working more generally on her creative practice and is excited to start exploring more of the performative elements to her creations with links between dance and texture. Gaby says she is "largely aiming to be recognised as number one distributor of Black British stories and stories from across the diaspora and exporting those stories internationally, not just through domestic markets."

With new offices in Soho and access to an increasingly fancy side of life, she admits that she definitely has developed a taste for the finer things, but she is certain she will bring it all back to where it started. As she chats to me I am already picturing her sat, in the heart of Brixton, behind a huge desk, perfect nails stretched out in front of her and her own swanky empire behind. She explains, more eloquently than I ever could, why Brixton has a creative potential deeper and more beautiful than could ever be found in the city:

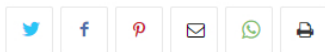
“ *“Even through the gentrification of these ends, there's always a heartbeat that you could never fake. You could never lose that authenticity; because it's there. It's like when people say – nature always wins. Like, even if there is something that has been blown to nothing, it will be a couple of months and you'll see your first little shoot of a leaf popping out through the cracked pavement. And it's very much like that; that's what it's like for me.”* ”

With the application deadline now extended, this could be your chance at a transformative year, apply here: <https://thedeartmentstorestudios.com/workspaces>

See our original interviews:

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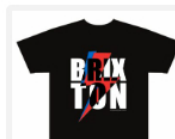
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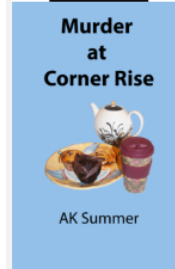
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