



# Interview with

Sophie Rees, founder of Designers / Makers

interview by Karolina Barnes

Can you tell us more about Designers / Makers?

Designers / Makers is an agency for contemporary design, offering members business advice, selling events, PR and opportunities to develop their brand. I have always focused primarily on events and collaborating with other cultural organisations in order to benefit our members and make connections to the wider design and craft community. After several years at Old Spitalfields, we changed direction and began a collaboration with Truman Brewery on Brick Lane in 2015 that acts as a cross between a market and trade show.

Featured designer-makers from top right: Linear or Not | Corinne Alexander | Camilla Webb Carter | Elisha Francis | Pottery Post Co | Ballonet Socks | Vis Viva

The London Artisan is a curated marketplace in the heart of East London. Taking place on a quarterly basis, we bring 50 contemporary designer makers for a two-day design event like no other. The London Artisan offers a diverse, quality, shopping experience that celebrates independent makers working within jewellery, ceramics, fashion, furniture, homeware to candles and beauty products.

**What is the mission of TLA?**

There is a lack of curated markets in London; most markets have some incredibly talented designer-makers setup next to imported T-shirts and second-hand records which isn't necessarily a problem but it isn't the best way to highlight the time, skill and effort that goes into handmade products. With The London Artisan I wanted to offer an affordable platform for designer-makers to sell their work, build a client base and benefit from the extra promotion we carry out that they will not get through other markets; we create a profile on the TLA website for all designers taking part, have a large social media following where we highlight all the designers and promote products being sold online through the TLA shop; a new feature to the website in 2018 which helps customers buy work before and after each event.



**What did you find most challenging when setting up TLA?**

When we first started TLA we made it a small weekly market taking place every Sunday, we were constantly chasing our tails trying to curate 20 people each week whilst trying to promote the event and grow its awareness. After one year of this we realised it needed to alter and so we decided to make it quarterly but over an entire weekend with 50 designers instead of 20.

We took on a bigger space, created bigger signage and worked with media partners such as London Design Festival and Crafts Magazine to help build awareness. The quarterly schedule has worked really well and allows designers the time they need to create more stock for the events and allows us more time to promote the designers and gain exposure in the press.

**You also run Designer/Makers agency. What do you see as a common mistake designer/makers make?**

In terms of taking part in an event like The London Artisan, walking around at the start of a day I can see straight away who will be successful and who won't. The products and display are crucial to this but the third important element is attitude - smiling and interacting with customers goes a very long way and many forget this or just feel uncomfortable doing it (take your mum - she is often the best PR you can get!). Before each event I send a PDF document to every maker taking part which details how to plan for the event - before and during - which many find helpful. In terms of day to day practice, spend time figuring out a strong brand and product photos - that would be the number one piece of advice I would give.

**What are your plans for the near future?**

Designers / Makers is focusing on developing The London Artisan in 2018 and planning new exciting collaborative projects with Hepworth Gallery, Wakefield and Oxo Tower on London's Southbank. I am currently writing my first book 'Artisan Bristol' which profiles 25 designer-makers and is due to be published in 2019.