

In depth

Organic produce

“It’s always a good thing to give back to the communities you are a part of. I also think it’s important that the curators are creators”

Karen Ingram Maker of analogue and digital stuffs

Drawing inspiration from science, sociology and technology, **Karen Ingram is a modern Renaissance woman.** Numbering web design, art, illustration, graphic design and curating among the many strings to her bow, she has a unique and visually arresting art style as well as a strong community ethic that sees her contribute to a number of design sites and present, judge and curate at the world-famous SXSW Interactive Festival.

Digital Artist: Tell us about yourself and your background?

Karen Ingram: I grew up in North Carolina. I studied painting there, at UNCG. I then moved to New York in September of 2000. It was a pretty interesting time to move to New York. I had a group of friends who were all doing experimental work online. We were often introduced by our online moniker as an identifier – we knew each other by our online works first, then eventually by face. We now affectionately refer to ourselves as “The Nerd Herd”, but we were a nebulous group of folks who passed in and out of New York in the late Nineties, early 2000s. Some met through online message boards (such as Dreamless) and some met through mutual appreciation and the identification of great work broadcasting through the design portals (like Design is Kinky, K10K and Newstoday). Some met through

conferences. Things changed, of course – partly because the dot-com bubble burst, then 9/11, and companies gathering up all of the professionals in the field. Some folks left NY and a lot of people who were left no longer had time to experiment with personal work online – we were all working for our pay cheques, or looking for other revenue streams. Few things kill creativity and experimentation in the way that money does. Passion and curiosity alone are the true drivers for innovation and experimentation.

Digital Artist: How would you describe your style?

Karen Ingram: Organic? In Curt Cloninger’s *Fresher Styles for Web Designers: More Eye Candy from the Underground*, he calls it “Hand-drawn analogue” style, which I think in the context of the web, makes sense. I guess I have a tough time describing my own style without getting into my process. I just do what I do.

Digital Artist: When did you first start creating artwork?

Karen Ingram: I guess I’ve always drawn and painted. Like most kids I drew when I was very young. My family was very encouraging to me and I just kept doing it.

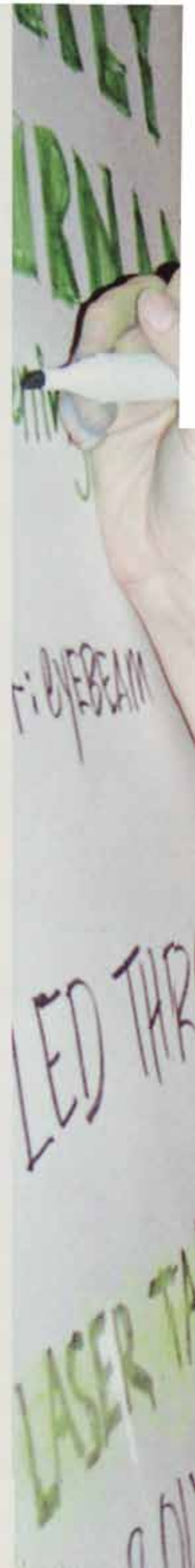
Digital Artist: And when did you first start work in the art industry?

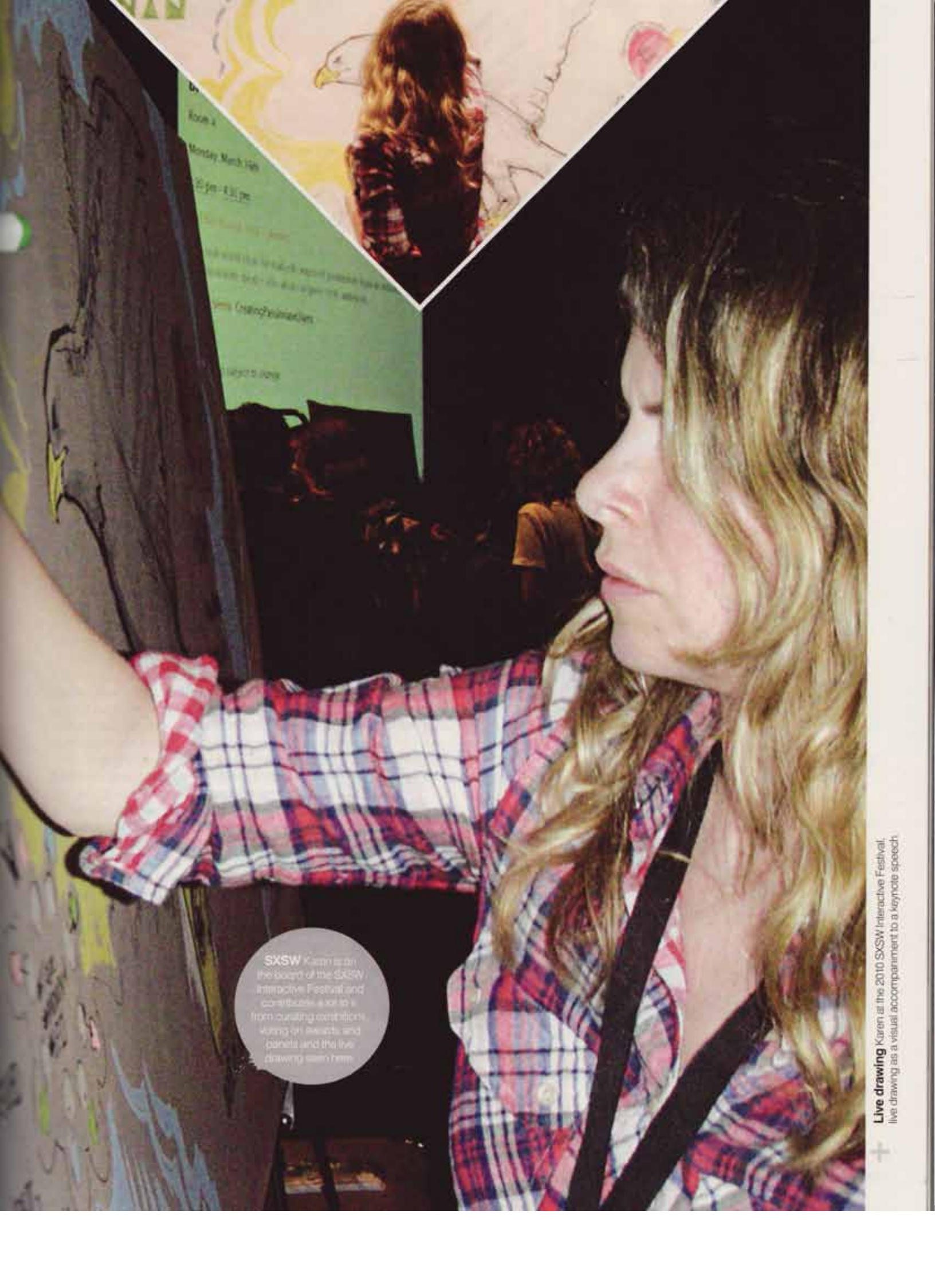
Karen Ingram

Job title Maker of analogue and digital stuffs
Personal portfolio www.kareningram.com
Location USA

Software used Photoshop and Illustrator, coloured pencils and magic markers, occasionally masking tape...

Project credits CNBC, Verizon, Nike, Midori, HP, Absolut Vodka, Heavy, MTV, MTV International, Spike, UNICEF, SXSW





SXSW Karen is on the board of the SXSW Interactive Festival and contributes a lot to it from curating content, voting on awards and panels and the live drawing seen here.

Live drawing Karen at the 2010 SXSW Interactive Festival, live drawing as a visual accompaniment to a keynote speech.





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Karen Ingram: While I was a painting student in North Carolina, Cone Mills (a textile mill) was looking for students to do the graveyard shift in their CAD department. Luckily for me, they wanted someone with artistic sensibilities rather than a trained CAD designer. They went to some of the art department's professors, Marc Gottsegen and Robert Gerhart, and asked for student recommendations.

In order to qualify for the job, I had to go in and take a colour matching test. It was essentially a colour vision test where I had to pair up an array of colour chips in pairs according to which chips were the closest matches. Apparently, I did well because I got the job. The job started off as a very simple array of tasks – four hours a night, a lot of it consisting of looking at fabric swatches and pairing them up with close colour matches in the Munsell colour book, writing them down for the designer to place into layouts the next day. The colours were utilised in patterns that Cone would produce for their clients (including Woolrich, Carters, and Levis). From there, I learned more about making design and art on computers, started creating patterns for textiles on CAD systems and began my career. Sounds strange now to imagine not knowing how to use a computer to make art, but that's how it happened.

Digital Artist: What or who are the primary influences for your work?

Karen Ingram: Science and sociology influence me – my own experiences... People include Temple Grandin, Dan Ariely, David Quammen, Robert Trivers, the list goes on... You can follow me on Twitter (@krening) to see!

Digital Artist: What inspires you?

Karen Ingram: People and botanicals have always been main sources of inspiration. Also animal behaviour, technology... I'm really grateful for the wealth of scientific information that's available online, like SeverPopTech, TED Talks... People who inspire me are my friends and their work, in all its forms, whether its writing, art, music, or changing lives through the great work that they do. My family is also a great inspiration to me. I enjoy creating allegories and metaphors out of factual encounters. I am not sure if it always comes across as more than a pretty picture to everyone who sees it, but perhaps to some it may resonate as more than a portrait of a bird. I see influences and inspiration as being really closely intertwined, if not the same.

Digital Artist: You and a friend created a book called *Pictures of Bacon for Karen: Where on Earth did the inspiration for that come from?*

Karen Ingram: Ha! That's a good story. I was

1. Bluebirds One of a range of limited edition postcards. 500 copies of the Bluebirds design were printed and sent free to anyone who requested them online.



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working on a gigantic project with my good friend Andrew Kessler, which involved an event, a TV show and an online experience. I guess one day we were a bit punch-drunk from too much brainstorming and we decided that it would be a "good idea" to lure people into engaging with the campaign with bacon – that bacon would be the mascot of the campaign. Of course, that wasn't really feasible but it did become our own personal inside joke. We had these gruelling two hour long status meetings – sometimes every day – during which Andrew would craft some version of a bacon-coloured world, from a date he went on, to a status meeting gone wrong. Every drawing he made went on the wall of my cubicle. During my tenure on the project he had to go to Arizona for an amazing new personal project – he was covering the scientists in charge on the Phoenix Mission – Peter Smith and his crew. He took all of the drawings he had made from my wall, and surprised me by compiling them into his first book, *Pictures of Bacon for Karen*. If you'd like a free copy, you can ask him at www.picturesofbaconforkaren.com.

To read his book about the Phoenix mission, look for *Marian Summer: Robot Arms, Cowboy Spacemen, and My 90 Days with the Phoenix Mars Mission*. It's available 15th April 2011 from Norton, Amazon and other online stores.

Digital Artist: Your first appearance on the web was with your krening.com site – can you tell us more about how that came into being?

Karen Ingram: Sure. I started noodling with HTML code and made a website for my mom who had a

“ Art is the best way of studying an object – of knowing it and telling a story with it ”

catering company. I saw how cool the web was – the beauty of self-publication – and I began to think of ideas for putting my own work up there.

I was tickled by the dual nature of Flash – that I could animate my work as well as publish it, so I set to work building krening.com. Krening, because it's a mash-up of my name: Karen Ingram = Krening. I enlisted the help of a few friends who were writers and musicians and made a few editions of the site that included my animations and stories and sounds by these friends.

Digital Artist: You combine art, design and animation in your skill set – do you have a favourite discipline out of these?

Karen Ingram: I think I like art the best – it sounds corny, but it's a way of studying an object – of knowing it and of telling a story with it.

Digital Artist: What are your favourite digital and traditional mediums or software to work in, and why?

Karen Ingram: I enjoy drawing using coloured pencils and markers, scanning those drawings in and composing them in Photoshop and Illustrator.

Digital Artist: Do you combine traditional and digital media in your work?

Karen Ingram: I do. I do this because I enjoy arranging narratives in Photoshop. It allows me to compose my works with a lot of flexibility, lets me



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2. Monk Parakeets 1 At first it's a delicately drawn picture of two pretty birds amid Victorian patterns and green swirls. Then you see what they're perching on...

3. Self Portrait I use this on my site. It showcases a lot of the art styles I'm fascinated with and like to juxtapose.



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evolve them in a way that drawing on paper doesn't. I also like mixing clean graphic elements from Illustrator and Photoshop with hand drawn elements

Digital Artist: Are there any digital programs or traditional techniques you'd like to learn more about?

Karen Ingram: I think I would like to delve into code again. Do some more interactive things.

Digital Artist: Do you have a set workflow for every project? What is it?

Karen Ingram: Yeah – it starts, of course, with inspiration. From there, research; whether it's via Google, referencing my anatomy books, collecting objects to create from or just reading more about the

scenarios I'd like to depict. I then begin to draw the components with coloured pencil and markers. After I scan them in, I'll isolate the components and assemble them in Photoshop. I'll assess the composition, change colours, add a background image or pattern, add some vector elements...

Digital Artist: Tell us about the postcard project you run on your website – you send a limited edition postcard to anyone who asks, is that right? Where did this idea come from and what's on the cards?

Karen Ingram: Yeah, that's right! So far I've created 11 postcards over the past few years. They are really limited editions of art, in that there's no original. They aren't replicas of a larger piece. I print them in

4. Running Foot Image created for Nikelab.com It's essentially an anatomical drawing combined with something more inspirational, delicate and springlike.

“ It all starts with inspiration; researching imagery or scenarios I'd like to depict ”

editions of 500. Anyone can send me an email and request one. The first postcard was Paddy and the Red Carpet. Sort of a wish of vengeance on the mice who were infesting my first Brooklyn apartment. It's an image of my parents' cat wreaking havoc and enforcing mass carnage on the mouse population in my apartment. Cutely, of course, because she was a kitten. My friends liked the cards, requested them, so I made more. I decided to let people request them online and it's just grown from there.

Digital Artist: You're heavily involved with the digital art and design community -- you contribute to Kaliber 10000, Design is Kinky and many more. Do you think this kind of community participation is important for an artist?

Karen Ingram: I do think it's important. It's always a good thing to give back to the communities you are a part of. I also think it's important that the curators are creators. There's a natural awareness of technique for those who are digital artists themselves.

Digital Artist: You're on the board of the SXSW Interactive Festival; how did that come about and what can you tell us about the experience of being involved with SXSW?

Karen Ingram: Shawn O'Keefe asked me if I'd like to judge the web awards in 2001 and I've been involved every year since. My duties have expanded from voting on the web awards (which I still do) to voting on panels, live drawing to accompany keynote presentations and this year I'll be the live drawing curator... so anyone who thinks they'd like to do it should drop me a line!

Digital Artist: Would you say that you aim to raise awareness of digital art as a medium?

Karen Ingram: Yes, absolutely -- or rather, the accessible and shareable nature of digital media. I think galleries are a little precious -- if people like a piece of art, they should be able to enjoy it. That's why I got involved in making animated pieces online, and that's why I do the postcard project. I get my cards printed at 4by6.com and it's affordable and high quality. The cool thing about digital output is that it allows us to create more flexible, scalable art.

Digital Artist: You've been involved in so many different mediums and projects; from gallery shows to books to clothing and accessories. Is there any



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way of showcasing your work that you haven't done yet and would like to have a go at?

Karen Ingram: More of everything! This summer I did an interactive art piece with some friends Stacey and Paul for my friends Robin and Sam's wedding and that was a lot of fun. I'd like to do more things of that nature.

Digital Artist: What are your plans for the future?

Karen Ingram: I'd like to make a book out of my postcards at some point. I don't like to count my chickens before they are hatched, but I am sure I will be doing more live drawing, more postcards, maybe some other special stuff. Keep an eye on my Twitter, I'll tweet when it happens!



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5. Bouquet xAgain with the juxtaposition. The flower captures the eye but the splatters and the mouse silhouettes raise some uncomfortable questions in the viewer's mind.

6. Blue Ginni product line These are patterns created for the Blue Ginni product line produced by Nook Art, Australia